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The European Multilevel Party System: Moving Towards Unity or Diversity?

Arjan H. Schakel
Maastricht University

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About the author

Arjan H. Schakel is Assistant Professor in Research Methods in Maastricht University.

Email: a.schakel@maastrichtuniversity.nl

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Abstract

A proliferation of electoral institutions at the European and regional levels has coincided with a trend of decentralization of authority away from national government to supra- and substate government. In this way, the European Union has developed into a truly multilevel party system whereby citizens have multiple opportunities to voice their preferences about policy and to elect their representatives who can decide upon important policies. In this paper I explore the extent to which these trends have changed the “political borders” of party systems by studying the level of vertical integration in the European multilevel party system. Vertical integration involves the degree to which party vote shares are similar across elections held at various territorial levels. Vertical integration is explored through a incongruence index which tracks the differences in the level of party support between European, national, and regional elections held in 217 regions in eleven EU member states since 1979. To get more traction on the causes for diverging voting behaviour I also look at the vote shares for parties that compete in one type of election only. I find strong empirical evidence for increasing dissimilarity between regional, national, and European elections which suggests that the European multilevel party system is disintegrating.

Keywords: European elections, national elections, regional elections, European multilevel party system.

The European Multilevel Party System: Moving Towards Unity or Diversity?

1. Introduction

The dominant form of political unit in Europe has been the nation-state and, with the extension of political rights, a system of representative institutions was built on it (Keating 2017, 1). With European integration, important competencies such as agriculture, external trade, fiscal and monetary union, and the internal market have been shifted upwards to the institutions of the European Union. Decentralization was matched by a “democratization” trend and, in 1979, the first elections to the European Parliament (EP) were held in the then nine member states. Following the different enlargement rounds, the territorial scope of European elections was gradually expanded and the latest European election of 2014 were held in no less than 28 member states.

The story of a widening and deepening Europe is probably familiar to most scholars but less well known is that a similar rise in electoral democracy has taken place at the regional level.¹ Today, 19 out of 28 EU member states hold regional elections, including every member state with a population greater than eight million (Dandoy and Schakel 2013; Schakel 2017). No less than fifteen of these states have introduced regional elections since 1970. The establishment of regional electoral institutions also included a significant reallocation of authority downwards from national to regional government. Many regions can tax corporate and personal income, can borrow freely on the financial market, and have competencies in key areas such as integration, education, culture, and welfare (Hooghe et al. 2016).

The European Union has developed into a truly multilevel party system whereby citizens have multiple opportunities to voice their preferences about policy and to elect their representatives. State building has led to the development of the nation-state with national parliaments and governments making the important decisions. An open question remains whether decentralisation and the proliferation of representative institutions above and below the state has led to different party systems at the European and

¹ Regional government is defined as a tier between local and national government with an average population of at least 150,000 citizens (Hooghe et al. 2016). This population threshold is similar to the lower boundary of the NUTS-3 classification (*Nomenclature des unités territoriales statistiques*) which are defined as regions with an average population size between 150,000 and 800,000 citizens.

regional levels. (Keating 2017, 2-3) In this paper, I assess the extent to which electoral politics is rescaling by exploring differences in regional vote shares between European, national, and regional elections.

In the next section, I trace the downward decentralisation trend from national to regional government and I show that this included a significant proliferation of regional electoral institutions. In the third section, I discuss the literature on nationalisation which traces a significant trend of territorial homogenization in national electoral outcomes concurrent to the development of the nation-state. In section four, I introduce the dimensions of horizontal and vertical integration of multilevel party systems and I argue that scholars, by focusing on national elections, have not yet systematically studied vertical integration across three types of elections: European, national, and regional elections. In section five, I explore the extent to which the European multilevel party system is vertically integrated by comparing regional vote shares for European, national, and regional elections held since 1979 in 217 regions in eleven western European Union member states. I find that the European multilevel party system is increasingly disintegrating in its vertical dimension and in the final section I discuss the implications of this finding.

2. The proliferation of regional electoral institutions

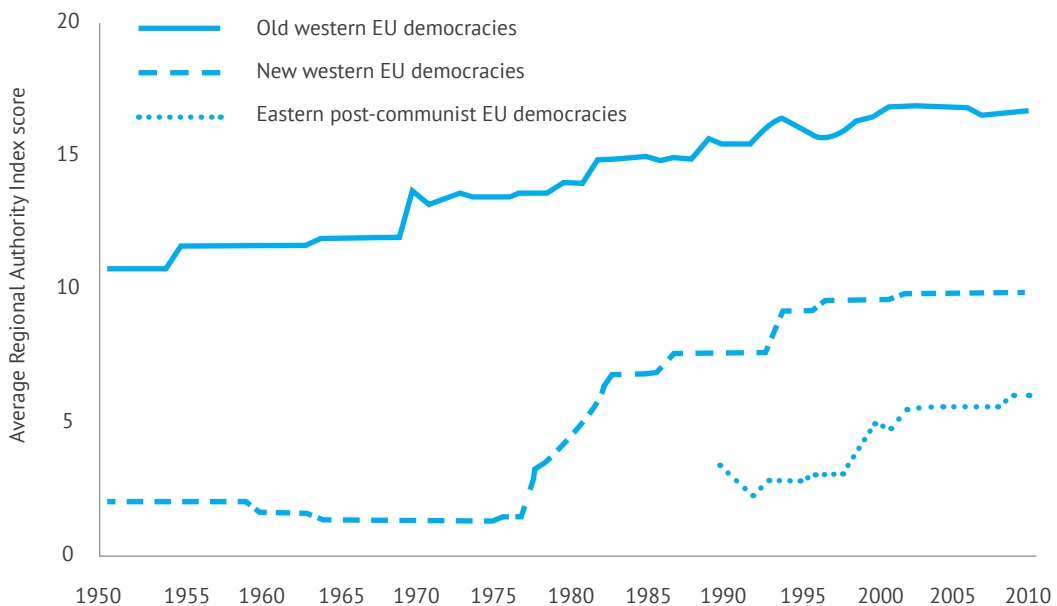
A detailed measurement for the authority exercised by regional government is provided by the regional authority index (Hooghe et al. 2016). This fine-grained measurement traces decentralisation in the 28 EU member states on an annual basis from 1950 to 2010 along two dimensions. Self-rule is the authority that a subnational government exercises in its own territory. Shared rule is the authority that a subnational government exercises in the country as a whole.² Scores range from zero (no regional government)

² Both self-rule and shared rule consist of five subdimensions. Self-rule measures the extent of independence of a regional government from national government (*institutional depth*), the range of a regional government's authority over policy in its jurisdiction (*policy scope*), the authority a regional government has over taxation within its own jurisdiction (*fiscal autonomy*), the authority of a regional government to borrow on financial markets (*borrowing autonomy*), and whether a regional government is endowed with representative institutions (*representation*). Shared rule measures the extent to which a regional government codetermines national policy-making (*law-making*), the extent to which a regional government codetermines national executive policy in intergovernmental fora (*executive control*), the extent to which a regional government codetermines how national tax revenues are distributed (*fiscal control*), the extent to which a regional government codetermines the restrictions placed on borrowing (*borrowing control*), and the extent to which regional government can initiate or constrain constitutional reform (*constitutional reform*).

to a maximum score of 30 (full authority). Figure 1 displays average scores for old and new western European democracies and for eastern European post-communist states.³ Although starting in different time periods and with different initial levels for the groups of countries, the trend in regional authority is similar across Europe: regional government authority is increasing.

The incidence of reform has been especially notable regarding representative institutions. In 1950, only nine out of 28 EU member states held regional elections, five state-wide⁴ and four in specific territories.⁵ Between 1970, when Italy introduced elections for the *regioni a statuto ordinare*, and 2001, when Slovakia held the first elections to the assemblies for *samosprávne kraje*, 22 reforms have been implemented. This means that during this period, regional representative institutions have been introduced every one and a half years. None of these reforms have been reversed nor have the original nine countries disestablished electoral institutions for their regions.⁶

Figure 1: Development in regional authority since 1950.



Source: Hooghe et al. (2016).

³ *Old western EU democracies:* Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. *New western EU democracies:* Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Portugal, and Spain. *Eastern post-communist EU democracies:* Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

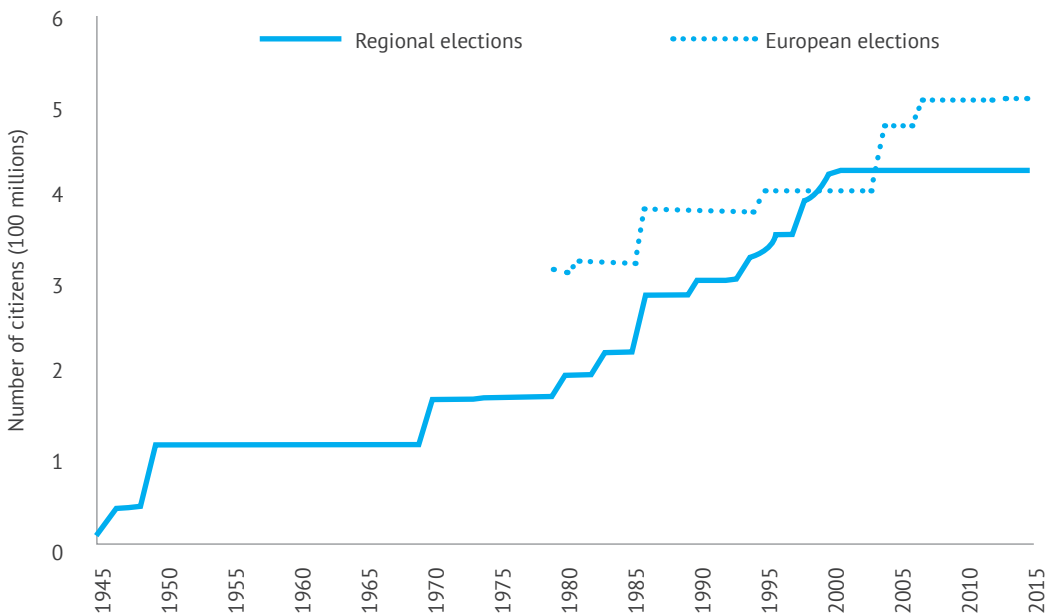
⁴ Austria (*Länder*), Belgium (*provincies*), (West-)Germany (*Länder*), Netherlands (*provincies*), Sweden (*län*).

⁵ Denmark (*Føroyar*), Finland (*Åland*), Italy (*regioni a statuto speciale*), United Kingdom (Northern Ireland).

⁶ Elections in Northern Ireland were suspended between 1977-1999 and 2002-2007 and a pilot program in Finland which introduced elections to the provincial assembly of *Kainuu* in 2005 was suspended in 2012.

The tremendous growth in the scope of regional elections becomes apparent in figure 2 which depicts the number of citizens (in 100 millions) which are ruled by elected representatives in regional and European elections held in the 28 EU member states. Between 1950 and 1970, directly elected representatives ruled over 110 million European Union citizens. From 1970 onwards, there has been a gradual increase in the scope of regional elections and in 2017 regionally elected representatives rule over 420 million EU citizens. The dramatic growth in scope of both regional and European elections may reflect the strength of the liberal democratic norm that those who exercise authority in general-purpose jurisdictions—below or above the nation state—should compete for elections (Rittberger 2005; Sharpe 1993).

Figure 2: *The development in scope of regional and European elections since 1950.*



Notes: Population data comes from Statoids (2011) and census data refer to the period 2000 to 2011.

3. Europeanisation, nationalisation, or regionalisation of electoral politics?

The upshot of processes of regionalisation and Europeanisation is that Europe has developed into a multilevel party system in which elections and important policy competences are dispersed over three tiers of governance. An open question is whether electoral politics differ at the European, national, and regional levels. Interestingly, very few scholars have explored whether decentralisation upwards and downwards from the

national level has resulted in an Europeanisation or regionalisation of electoral politics in an analogous way to the process of nationalisation.

Nationalisation processes “represent a broad historical evolution toward the formation of national electorates and party systems whereby peripheral and regional specificities disappear” (Caramani 2004, 1). The establishment of universal suffrage and direct elections for national parliaments at the end of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century has induced a process of nationalisation of party systems and electorates in Western Europe. During the process of political system-building, the territorial dimension of cleavages becomes less significant and the functional dimension—e.g., economic left-right competition—becomes more important. Territorial cleavages are wiped out by the “massification” of political life (extension of suffrage), social mobilisation through industrialisation and urbanisation, and development of mass educational systems (Caramani 2004, 31). Nationalisation has been crucial for the development of nation-states by creating a national community. At the heart of nationalisation lies political mobilization which refers, in the first place, to the electoral mobilisation of the peripheries in terms of electoral participation, party membership, and candidate recruitment. Rokkan (1970, 227) specifically refers to the process of “politicisation” which consists fundamentally of “the breakdown of the traditional systems of local rule through the entry of national organized parties.” Indeed, political parties have been key to the development of national party systems because they aggregate peripheral interests when they mobilise the vote and recruit candidates to govern at the centre (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Rose and Urwin 1975).

Empirically, the nationalisation of politics can be traced by observing the process of convergence in the levels of partisan support, that is, a process of territorial homogenization of support for political parties. Increasing homogeneity in the levels of party support means that differences between areas in voting behaviour disappear and regions become similar and national parties receive similar vote shares statewide. Nationalisation has become the dominant viewpoint in election research after seminal studies by Caramani (2004) and Chibber and Kollman (2004) who observe massive increases in homogeneity in party support when the nation-state developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These authors also identify territories where nationalisation has been less successful but these regions are treated as incidences that signifies the overall trend of nationalisation.

Recently, the nationalisation thesis has been criticized by Jeffery and Wincott (2010) who summarize their criticism under the label of “methodological nationalism.” The main critique is that election scholars presume that social and political life is naturally encompassed by nation-states (see also Keating 2017, 2-3). This leads them to study

processes of *nationalisation* for *national* elections, to develop theories of the *nationalisation* of electoral politics which are tested against *nationally* aggregated election data. The problem is that that theory drives data collection which in turn drives the development of theories. Ultimately, this vicious circle leads to a situation whereby trans- and sub-state political life are “defined out of existence” or, at least, are “hidden from view” (cf. Keating 1998 ix). This is not to say that Caramani’s (2004) and Chibber and Kollmann’s (2004) conclusions are not valid, but rather that their findings are valid in their own terms, that is, for elections to statewide parliaments. The issue at stake is “the possibility that elections to sub- [and supra-]state parliaments might be, or have become, an arena for patterns of voting behaviour that diverge from the ‘nationalized’ patterns of statewide elections” (Jeffery and Wincott 2010, 179). However, this question is not picked up by elections scholars because their focus remains on the national electoral arena.

The predominant approach to study sub- and supra-state elections is the second-order election model (Reif and Schmitt 1980). A second-order election is conceived of as less important by voters and parties because there is “less at stake.” Important decisions on foreign policy, the economy, taxes, and so forth are taken by national and not regional or European governments. As a result, voters do not bother to show up at the ballot box to cast a vote and those voters who do, use their vote to voice their opinion about national rather than regional or European governments. And given that discontented voters are more likely to turn out than satisfied voters, parties in national government will lose vote share whereas opposition, small, and new parties will win vote share in regional and European elections when compared to previously held national elections. Scholars have found second-order election effects for all European elections until 2014 (Hix and Marsh 2007 and 2011). Regional election scholars discovered significant variation in second-order elections effects regions and regional elections (Hough and Jeffery 2006; Pallarés and Keating 2001), however, theoretical innovation by this scholarship has mostly been limited to refining the second-order election model for regional elections (Schakel 2015).

The critique of “methodological nationalism” also applies to the second-order election model. By applying this model, scholars compare sub- and supra-state election results to the election outcomes of previously held national elections. They assume that national politics spills over into second-order elections and they neglect the possibility that similar or other unique electoral dynamics may arise because of particularities of the second-order electoral arena. This is not to say that sub- and supra-state elections are not second-order—in fact, second-order effects may be found in many of them (Dandoy and Schakel 2013; Hix and Marsh 2007 and 2011; Schakel 2017)—rather potential territorial effects are not on the “radar” of election scholars. Moving beyond methodological nationalism requires addressing two challenges (Jeffery and Wincott 2010,

176-177). The first theoretical challenge is to acquire a more sensitive understanding of territorial differentiation of electoral politics. The second empirical challenge is that a proper understanding requires appropriate, and new, data sources and analytical methods. These two challenges are discussed in the next section.

4. A multilevel party system perspective on the European party system

A multilevel party system perspective allows for a more sensitive understanding of the territorial differentiation of electoral politics. Swenden and Maddens (2009, 6) provide a useful definition for a multilevel party system which “brings together a statewide party system which emerges from statewide elections and a set of regional party systems reflecting the outcome for regional elections.” They also point out (*ibid.*) that this conceptualization induces us to consider the integration of the party system: “The integration of a multilevel party system depends on the extent to which the same parties are represented at the various levels of the system and how evenly balanced their support is across the levels and regions of the state.”⁷ This definition includes a vertical and horizontal dimension of integration which are graphically displayed in figure 3A. Horizontal integration concerns the extent to which party vote shares and party systems are similar across regions and nations. Vertical integration involves the degree to which party vote shares are similar across elections held at various territorial levels: regional, national, and European elections.

Figure 3B shows how the vote can be (dis)aggregated to study horizontal and vertical integration in the European multilevel party system. Parties can compete in three types of elections—European, national, and regional—and their vote shares can be (dis)aggregated to the European, national, and regional levels, yielding nine types of vote

⁷ Swenden and Maddens (2009, 6) indicate that *interactions* between electoral arenas within the multilevel party system is also a focal point for election scholars. An example of horizontal spill-over is the widening support for autonomist parties in Spain during the 1980s and early 1990s (Swenden and Maddens 2009, 8-9). Pallarés and Keating (2003) show that this was mainly a consequence of the rapid growth of these parties in non-historic communities (such as the Canary Islands or Aragon) rather than further electoral growth of autonomist parties in the historic communities (Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia) (i.e., a snowball-effect). The second-order election model is an example of vertical top-down interaction and an example of vertical bottom-up (and horizontal) interaction are the Greens in Austria and Germany (*Die Grünen–Die Grüne Alternative* and *Bündnis 90–Die Grünen* respectively). These parties first achieved electoral success and governmental representation in one or few *Länder*, then they gained representation in other *Länder*, paving the way for statewide electoral success and a role in federal government at a later stage.

shares. By comparing two types of vote shares, one can explore the extent to which the European party system is horizontally or vertically integrated. For example, horizontal integration can be explored by comparing the regional vote share for a national election (RN) to the vote share for the same national election but aggregated at the statewide level (NN). This comparison informs one about the degree to which a regional party system is different from the statewide party system. Vertical integration can be studied by comparing, for example, a regional vote share won in a national election (RN) to a vote share obtained in a regional election held in the same region (RR). This comparison provides insight into the extent of dual voting, that is, vote switching between types of election.

With nine types of vote shares, there are 36 possible comparisons. However, not all comparisons are equally interesting or theoretically informative. Scholars interested in the horizontal integration of a party system should keep the type of election constant and then compare vote shares (dis)aggregated at various territorial levels of aggregation. That is, a comparison within one type of election (figure 3B). In contrast, vertical integration of a party system requires a comparison within one level of aggregation (figure 3B). In that way, the level of territorial aggregation is kept constant and one explores the extent to which the voter tends to switch votes between types of election. One can also examine the outcome of both horizontal and vertical integration by comparing across types of elections and between territorial levels of aggregation. For example, differences between regional and national party systems can be explored by comparing the national vote aggregated at the national level (NN) to the regional vote in a particular region (RR).

Figure 3A: Horizontal and vertical integration in the European multilevel party system.

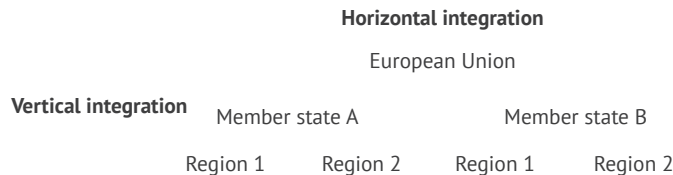


Figure 3B: Disaggregating the vote in the European multilevel party system.

		Horizontal integration: territorial scope		
		Regional	National	European
Vertical integration: type of election	European	RE	NE	EE
	National	RN	NN	EN
	Regional	RR	NR	ER

Notes: The first letter refers to the territorial scope and the second letter refers to the type of election. This paper will explore vertical congruence between European, national, and regional elections within regions, i.e., the area within the dotted lines.

Figures 3A and 3B reveal how methodological nationalism has hampered election scholars to comprehensively study horizontal and vertical integration in multilevel party systems. Scholars studying the nationalisation of electoral politics first and foremost looked only at national elections and studied the extent of horizontal integration and not the degree of vertical integration within a party system. For example, Caramani (2004) compares party vote shares won in constituencies to the aggregated vote share at the national level which boils down to a RN-NN comparison. Although Caramani's (2004) analysis generates many useful insights, it leaves out the extent of horizontal integration across territories within regional or European elections and the level of vertical integration between types of election. Second-order election scholars compare the outcome of a European or regional election to the results of a previously held national election (Hix and Marsh 2007 and 2011; Jeffery and Schakel 2013) which reflects, respectively, a NE-NN and a RN-RR comparison. These comparisons keep the territorial level of aggregation constant but vary the type of election to be able to study dual voting or vote switching by national or regional electorates. Second-order election scholars are less concerned with the extent of horizontal integration and rather deal with the question of why second-order election effects vary in magnitude across territories or electorates. More recently, regional election scholars have explored the differences between regional and national party systems (Hough and Jeffery 2006; Schakel 2013a) by which the vote in a region is contrasted with the statewide vote which is a RR-NN comparison. These scholars rarely disentangle horizontal from vertical integration (but see Schakel 2013b).

A caveat in the aforementioned literature is that certain aspects of horizontal and vertical integration of the European multilevel electoral system have yet not been studied. Most importantly, the extent of vertical integration across three types of elections—i.e., European, national, and regional—has not been systematically studied. In this paper, I will explore the extent to which the European multilevel party system is vertically integrated and I will compare the outcomes of European, national, and regional elections within regions. In other words, I will study the comparisons RE-RN, RE-RR, and RN-RR (the area surrounded in dashes in figure 3B). The empirical analysis will focus on regional party vote shares for European, national, and regional elections held in 217 regions in eleven western EU-member states⁸ since 1979 or when the first time a European election was held in a country (table 1).⁹

⁸ The dataset is part of an ongoing large data collection project on regional, national, and European election results at the regional level for all 28 EU-member states for elections held since 1979 or the first time a European election was held in a country. This paper will focus on eleven western EU-member states which hold regional, national, and European elections.

⁹ The analysis presented below excludes European elections which are held for the first time in one country only and the 1981, 1987, 1995, and 1996 European elections held in, respectively, Greece, Spain, Sweden, and Austria are excluded.

Table 1: *Included countries, number of regions, number of parties, European, national, and regional elections.*

Country		Regions	European		National		Regional	
			First	Last	First	Last	First	Last
Austria	9	Länder	1999	2014	1999	2013	1995	2013
Belgium	4	Gemeenschappen	1979	1989	1978	1987	-	-
			1994	2014	1991	2014	1989	2014
Denmark	15	Amter	1979	2004	1979	2001	1978	2001
	5	Regions	2009	2014	2007	2011	2009	2013
France	22	Régions	1979	1984	1978	1981	-	-
			1989	2014	1988	2012	1986	2010
Germany	10	Länder (West)	1979	2014	1978	2013	1976	2013
	6	Länder (East)	1994	2014	1990	2009	1990	2013
Greece	48	Nomoi	1984	1994	1981	1993	-	-
			1999	2009	1996	2007	1998	2006
			2014	2014	2012	2012	2014	2014
Italy	13	Peripheria	2014	2014	2012	2012	2014	2014
	15	Regioni a statuto ordinare	1979	2014	1979	2013	1975	2013
	4	Regioni a statuto speciale	1979	2014	1979	2013	1976	2014
Netherlands	2	Autonomous province	1979	2014	1979	2013	1978	2013
	12	Provincies	1979	2014	1978	2007	1977	2012
Spain	14	Comunidades autónomas	1989	2014	1986	2011	1987	2011
	3	Comunidades (historic)	1989	2014	1986	2011	1985	2012
	2	Ciudad autónomas	1989	2014	1986	2011	1987	2011
Sweden	21	Landstinge	1999	2014	1998	2010	1998	2010
United Kingdom	8	Regions	1979	2014	1979	2010	-	-
	4	Devolved entities	1979	2014	1979	2010	1998	2012

5. Vertical integration in the European multilevel party system

Parties can have different effects on the level of vertical integration in the European multilevel electoral system. With three types of elections, parties have seven options: they can compete in all three types of election (European, national, and regional); in two types of election (European and national, European and regional, or national and regional); or only in one type of election (European, national, or regional). Parties that compete in two or more elections integrate territories into the European party systems but parties that compete in only one type of election disintegrate the party system in its vertical dimension. A disintegrated party system signals that European and regional electoral dynamics differ from those observed in national elections. In contrast, an inte-

grated party system indicates that electoral politics do not differ across levels and that voters and parties behave in similar ways no matter the type of election. Table 2 displays the number of parties that fall into the seven categories of electoral participation for each of the eleven western European member states. A party enters into the dataset when it has won at least one percent of the vote in region in a European or national election or at least five percent of the vote in a regional election (table 1). The electoral participation of parties is assessed for the whole time period and when a party participates only in European elections it means that the party has only ever participated in European elections.

The patterns in table 2 are quite revealing. The number of parties within a party system varies greatly across countries but most parties compete in European, national, and regional elections. Interestingly, a significant number of parties compete in only one type of election whereas only a few parties compete in two types of election. This result may suggest that European, national, and regional elections have their own kind of electoral dynamics which each attract different kinds of parties. The number of parties for each category of electoral participation varies greatly and country-specific factors can account for this. For example, the number of parties competing in European and national elections (E-N)—and not in regional elections—is relatively higher in France, Greece, and the United Kingdom. These are also countries which introduced regional elections later, after the first European election was held (see table 1). Therefore, parties in these countries could not compete in regional elections until the 1980s or 1990s. Greece and the United Kingdom and, to lesser extent, France also have relatively a high percentage of parties which compete solely in European elections. This can be explained by an electoral system that is more open for EU elections (proportional rule) than for national elections (majoritarian rule) in these countries.

The electoral participation of parties across European, national, and regional elections affect levels of horizontal and vertical integration in different ways. An illustration is provided by table 3 which depicts a similar breakdown of electoral participation as in table 2 but now only for regional parties, that is, parties that compete in elections in one region only. Regional parties are interesting because they contribute directly to horizontal disintegration of the party system. When regional parties compete in only one region then they receive no vote shares in other territories. Not surprisingly, most regional parties can be found in Belgium, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, regional parties can be found in every country except for France and Greece.¹⁰

¹⁰ Political parties are forbidden to compete in regional elections in Greece but candidates are openly supported by statewide parties. Candidates who are not supported by a statewide party are administered as independent candidates. Regional parties compete in France but the electoral data administered by the Ministry of Interior lumps them together under a general region label (*régionalistes*).

In Austria, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden, regional parties only compete in regional elections and these parties contribute to both horizontal and vertical disintegration from both the European and national party systems. In contrast, many regional parties in Belgium, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom vertically integrate the multilevel party system by participating in two or three types of election. Tables 2 and 3 reveal that parties can contribute to vertical (and horizontal) integration in different ways but the number of parties does not take into account the size of party vote shares. Most parties that compete in European, national, and regional elections, including regional parties, tend to be the larger ones. To include the impact of party size on the vertical integration of the European multilevel party system one needs a more sophisticated measurement than the number of parties.

The extent of vertical integration can be assessed through an incongruence index which subtracts regional vote shares between two types of elections, takes the absolute values, adds up the total over the parties, and divides the total by two.¹¹ This generates a score which varies between zero percent (complete similarity and congruence) and 100 percent (complete dissimilarity and incongruence). An alternative way to interpret this measure is to conceive of the scores as the extent of dual voting (or vote switching) between two elections. Three incongruence measures are constructed based on three types of regional vote shares (figure 3B; area within dashes): European to national elections (RE-RN), European to regional elections (RE-RR), and national to regional elections (RN-RR). The level of territorial integration is kept constant (R, i.e., the region) and the derived incongruence scores informs us about the extent of vote-switching between European and national, between European and regional, and between national and regional elections. Each European election is compared to the first previously held regional election and to the first previously held national election. A party enters the calculations once it wins at least one percent regional vote share in a European or national election or five percent in a regional election.

¹¹ The formula is given by:

$$\text{Incongruence} = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n |X_{ijn} - X_{ikm}|$$

whereby X_{ijn} is the percentage of the vote won by party i in election j with the vote share (dis)aggregated to territorial level n and X_{ikm} is the percentage of the vote won by party i in election k with the vote share (dis)aggregated to territorial level m . Absolute values are added together and divided by two to avoid double counting. Scores may vary from complete congruence/similarity (0%) to complete incongruence/dissimilarity (100%). In this paper, both the territorial level n and m are set at the regional level (table 1).

Table 2: Electoral participation of parties in three types of election.

	Total	E-N-R		E-N		E-R		N-R		E		N		R	
	N	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Austria	25	9	36.0					5	20.0	6	24.0	1	4.0	4	16.0
Belgium	46	25	54.3	2	4.3			5	10.9	7	15.2	5	10.9	2	4.3
Denmark	20	12	60.0					3	15.0	2	10.0	2	10.0	1	5.0
France	44	22	50.0	3	6.8	2	4.5	3	6.8	8	18.2	5	11.4	1	2.3
Germany	30	20	66.7	1	3.3	2	6.7	1	3.3	4	13.3			2	6.7
Greece	44	11	25.0	13	29.5					18	40.9	1	2.3	1	2.3
Italy	154	52	33.8	7	4.5	6	3.9	11	7.1	6	3.9	27	17.5	45	29.2
Netherlands	42	21	50.0	3	7.1	1	2.4	5	11.9	3	7.1	5	11.9	4	9.5
Spain	97	46	47.4	1	1.0	6	6.2	11	11.3	13	13.4	5	5.2	15	15.5
Sweden	24	10	41.7	1	4.2			5	20.8	5	20.8	1	4.2	2	8.3
United Kingdom	60	25	41.7	8	13.3	2	3.3	1	1.7	17	28.3	7	11.7		
Total	586	253	43.2	39	6.7	19	3.2	50	8.5	89	15.2	59	10.1	77	13.1

Notes: Shown are the numbers of parties that compete in European (E), national (N), or regional (R) elections or any combination thereof. A party is included when it receives one percent of a regional vote share in a European or national elections or five percent vote share in a regional election. Table 1 provides an overview of included European, national, and regional elections.

Table 3: Electoral participation of regional parties.

	Total	Regional		E-N-R		E-N		E-R		N-R		E		N		R	
	N	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Austria	25	4	16.0													4	100.0
Belgium	46	13	28.3	8	61.5			1	7.7			1	7.7	1	7.7	2	15.4
Denmark	20	1	5.0													1	100.0
France	44	0	0.0														
Germany	30	1	3.3													1	100.0
Greece	44	0	0.0														
Italy	154	90	58.4	11	12.2	5	5.6	2	2.2	6	6.7	1	1.1	21	23.3	44	48.9
Netherlands	42	4	9.5													4	100.0
Spain	97	68	70.1	33	48.5			4	5.9	10	14.7	1	1.5	5	7.4	15	22.1
Sweden	24	3	12.5							1	33.3					2	66.7
United Kingdom	60	27	45.0	11	40.7	5	18.5	1	3.7			6	22.2	4	14.8		
Total	586	211	36.0	63	29.9	10	4.7	8	3.8	17	8.1	9	4.3	31	14.7	73	34.6

Notes: Shown are the numbers of regional parties that compete in European (E), national (N) or regional (R) elections or any combination thereof. A regional party is defined as a party that competes in elections in one region only. A regional party is included when it receives one percent of a regional vote share in a European or national elections or five percent vote share in a regional election. Table 1 provides an overview of included European, national, and regional elections and regions.

Figure 4 displays global averages (i.e., a mean across countries and regions) for each European election for the three vertical incongruence measures. Three observations are noteworthy. Incongruence is clearly rising and dual voting is almost twice as large in 2014 as it was in 1979. Second, incongruence is also quite large and fifteen to almost 30 percent of the vote is cast differently between the three types of election. Third, vote switching is most notable when European elections are compared to regional elections and domestic party systems tend to be more congruent but still about fifteen percent of the vote is cast differently when national elections are compared to regional elections.

The total degree of incongruence does not provide us with a complete picture on the extent to which electoral arenas are vertically disconnected. Incongruence may arise because of statewide parties winning dissimilar vote shares in the different elections or it may be caused by parties which compete in one type of election but not in the other. To gain more insight into the “nature” of vertical incongruence, I construct six “new party” measures. A new party participates in one but not in the other election. In other words, the party receives a positive vote share in one election but no (or zero) vote share in another election. These parties contribute directly to vertical incongruence between electoral arenas. Three types of election enable three comparisons whereby the positive (and zero) vote share may be won in either of the elections. A total of six types of new party can be identified: European (positive vote share) to national (no vote share) and national (positive vote share) to European (no vote share), European to regional and regional to European, and national to regional and regional to national. Note that this operationalization differs substantially from the electoral participation categories of tables 2 and 3. Most importantly, the new party categories are assessed per region and per election comparison.

Figure 4: Average election incongruence scores between European, national, and regional elections (see table 1 for included countries, region, and elections).

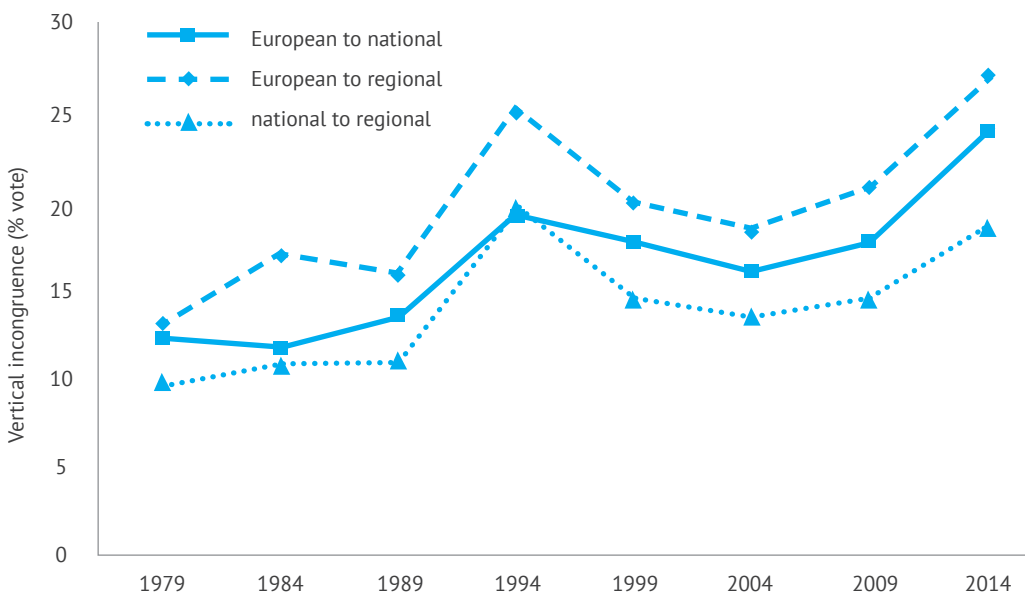
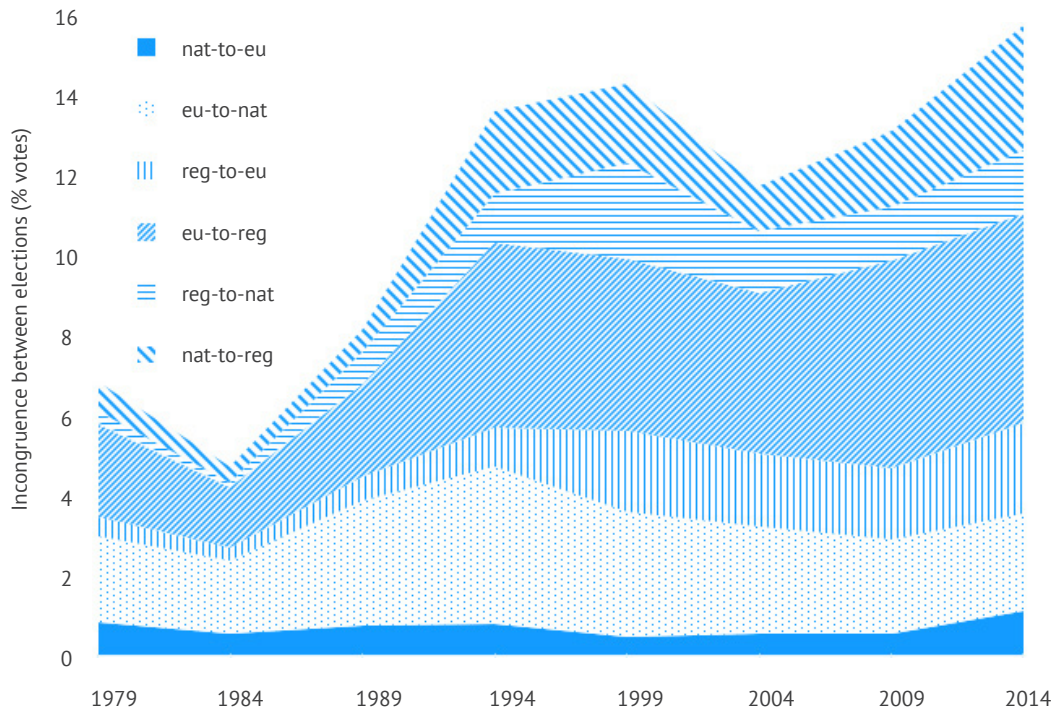


Figure 5 displays trends over time for the six types of new parties. Interestingly, the cumulative pattern over time is similar as for the incongruence measures shown in figure 4 and average vote share for new parties is increasing over time. At first glance, this may seem inevitable given that new parties directly contribute to vertical disintegration but increasing dissimilarity can also arise from dual voting between statewide parties which participate in all three types of election. A closer look reveals that average vote share for national-to-European and European-to-national new parties did not substantially increase between 1979 and 2014. It appears that new parties are predominantly established in the European and national electoral arenas. European-to-regional and national-to-regional new parties increased their average regional vote share with 2.9 and 2.4 percentage points respectively between 1979 and 2014. However, new parties also arise in the regional electoral arena and average vote share for regional-to-European and regional-to-national new parties increased with 1.8 and 1.3 percentage points respectively between 1979 and 2014.

Another interesting finding from figure 5 is that election-specific parties can be found in each types of election and this suggests that regional electoral arenas are not the sole or the most important “birthplace” of new parties and that, actually, many parties compete in European elections first before they enter regional electoral arenas. Indeed,

Figure 5. Average vote share for six types of new parties for European, national, and regional elections (see table 1 for included countries, regions, and elections).



the largest vote shares for new parties can be found for the European-to-regional and regional-to-European comparisons. This is an interesting finding because it suggests not only that dual voting is increasing (figure 4) but also that voters increasingly cast their vote for election-specific parties. In other words, electoral volatility is rising and as a result party systems tend to disintegrate.

The causes for increasing vote shares for election-specific parties are manifold and they cannot be empirically assessed in this paper. It is important to mention, however, the most important factors impacting the electoral scores for election-specific parties. First and foremost, electoral systems are likely important drivers for vertical (dis)integration of multilevel party systems. Electoral rules translating votes into seats determine the “openness” of party systems and new parties can more easily arise when elections are held under proportional instead of majoritarian rule and when electoral thresholds are low. Also, electoral timing matters, as second-order election research has shown. New parties tend to win most vote share when a European or regional election is held mid-way through the national electoral cycle. Second, European and regional authority could matter. When European and regional government (co-)decide on important policies then voters and parties may seek to influence those decisions through European and regional elections and governments instead of, or alongside, national elections and governments. At the European level new parties may emerge to defend national interests whereas at the regional level new region-specific parties may appear to propagate regional interests. Third, intervening factors may increase the rate at which new parties appear at the European and regional levels to defend national and regional interests. For example, new parties may be more likely to arise or may be electorally stronger in relatively poor or economically disadvantaged regions and countries where they may win votes on a manifesto to attract more European and national subsidies or to impact welfare state policy which is formed by European and national governments.

6. Discussion: implications of vertical (dis)integration in multilevel party systems

In this paper, I explored whether decentralisation and the proliferation of representative institutions above and below the state has led to a reterritorialisation of national party systems. More specifically, I looked at the extent to which parties integrate European, national, and regional party systems to assess whether the proliferation of elections at the European and regional levels has broken the mould of the nation-state (Keating 2017, 2-3). However, in order to do so, I needed to adopt a multilevel party system perspective while scholarship on elections suffers from methodological nationalism which leads scholars to focus on national elections (nationalisation scholars) or to place

the national election centre stage (second-order election scholars). Vertical integration across European, national, and regional elections has received hardly any attention and in this paper I took up the research objective to assess the extent to which the European multilevel party system is vertically integrated.

The rescaling of decision-making powers and representative institutions below and above the state (Keating 2017, 2-3) clearly leads to a diverging Europe with disconnected European, national, and regional electoral arenas. Increasing vote shares for new and election specific parties contribute to the increasing vertical disintegration of the European multilevel party system. However, they contribute 30 percent at most to the total difference in party vote shares between the types of elections. For example, average incongruence between European and regional party systems was 26.9 percent in 2014 (figure 4) and 7.5 percent was caused by parties participating in only European or solely regional elections. In other words, a large part of the increasing vertical disintegration of the European multilevel party system is caused by parties that compete in multiple types of elections which tend to receive increasingly different vote shares across types of election.

Dual voting is increasing with Europeanisation and regionalisation and this may have important consequences for the governability of political systems. Party systems diverge at various territorial scales especially when voters switch from statewide to region- and election-specific parties leading to horizontal and vertical disintegration, respectively. This dual voting trend coincides with a significant decentralisation of authority up- and downwards from national to European and regional governments which creates ample of opportunities for regional and European executives to deviate from national policy. In addition, with the establishment of a European and multiple regional electoral arenas, political parties also have more opportunities to galvanize the voter on the basis of European, national, or regional issues. It is likely that the movement towards more disintegration in the European multilevel party system will continue.

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info@euborders.com
www.euborders.com