

REGIONAL ELECTIONS IN MULTI-LEVEL SYSTEMS



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Abstract

This article sets out to find ways of analysing the relationship of regional and statewide electoral processes in multi-level systems. First, we analyse a number of 'top down' approaches with the aim of assessing how and when statewide issues are perceived as shaping regional election outcomes. Second, we discuss a 'bottom up' approach in which the importance of territorial politics can be measured. Both of these approaches, although not originally developed for use in this particular context, provide at least initial techniques for mapping out the dynamics of multi-level voting. They test for the subordination of regional elections to the electoral rhythms of statewide politics as well as

exploring how different patterns of voting behaviour compare from region to region and from election to election. Finally, we move on to apply these two basic models to the cases of Germany, Canada and Spain, illustrating that in contexts which lack deep territorial cleavages, regional and statewide election results are broadly similar. However, in territorially heterogeneous environments, this pattern of subordination of regional elections is broken up by territorially specific influences.

KEY WORDS ★ multi-level voting ★ territorial politics ★ voting behaviour

This article analyses the dynamics of voting behaviour and party competition in states where elections to regional legislatures take place alongside elections to national parliaments. In such 'multi-level systems' voters cast votes for different bodies that each have significant law-making powers. Voters may well use different criteria in coming to their voting judgements in the two different electoral arenas, even though the parties that compete for their votes may well be exactly the same. Whether they do so, or whether instead they follow the same cues in regional elections that underlie their party choices in statewide elections is a moot point and it is unclear how voters behave in such multi-level contexts. What is, for example, the relationship between voting behaviour in federal and *Land* elections in Germany (or between statewide elections and regional elections in Spain, or Austria or the post-devolution UK)? Is there a regular and predictable relationship between election results at different levels? Can the results of regional elections

be explained by a simple transfer of the terms of analysis used for statewide elections? Or how far do territorial specificities pull voting behaviour at the regional level away from the national 'norm'?

Oddly, European political science has not addressed these questions in any sort of depth. As a result we lack analytical tools focused on understanding the interplay of regional and statewide elections. This article attempts to remedy the deficit. It draws on literature developed to analyse other aspects of voting behaviour to shed at least some light on the interplay of regional and statewide elections in multi-level systems, on how far voters make different types of judgement for different elections.

The article develops perspectives as it were 'from above' and 'from below'. In the first half of the article we explore how far the statewide political environment, focused in and on national parliaments, shapes regional electoral outcomes. In the second half we explore whether territory-

specific issues at the regional level imbue regional elections with dynamics that are uncoupled from the statewide arena. In each case we first review how the existing literature can help us address these questions before then presenting empirical data from Germany and Spain (and in the second half also Canada) about the relationship between statewide and regional election results. The aim is to enable comparative, cross-country and inter-regional analysis of multi-level voting.

For reasons of simplicity we take some short cuts. We work throughout with aggregate-level data and do not seek to contextualize the election results that we analyse. We do not, therefore, take into account the 'hard' structural variables (see Johnston, 1980: 131–2) which help shape election results such as electoral systems or the constitutional status of particular regions. We also do not take into account other contingent factors – issues, personalities – that naturally affect the outcomes of all elections. What we do attempt to do is locate some starting points for the comparative analysis of electoral dynamics in multi-level systems.

The view 'from above': regional elections as second-order elections

An obvious starting point in exploring the view 'from above' – whether statewide issues shape regional election outcomes – is to look at the literature on 'second-order' elections. This was a terminology coined after the first direct elections to the European Parliament (EP) in 1979. The 1979 EP results revealed a pattern in which, broadly speaking, parties currently in national government underperformed 'in Europe'. Writing in the immediate aftermath, Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt (1980) proposed that the 1979 EP elections should be viewed not as *European* elections, but rather as 'second-order' *national* elections. In other words, they presented voters with little extra stimulus than that with which they were already confronted in the 'first order' of national elections, those through which national governments are elected and seats in the national legislature are at stake. For Reif and Schmitt all other elections, including 'by-elections, municipal elections, various sorts of regional elections, those to a second

chamber and the like' (Reif and Schmitt, 1980: 8), have 'less at stake' and have to be regarded as 'second-order'.

The basic premise of Reif and Schmitt is therefore that outcomes of second-order elections are determined by the political situation in the first-order, i.e. statewide, political arena (Van der Eijk et al., 1996). Reif made the point more forcefully after the next set of EP elections in 1984: 'What is important is the political situation of the first-order arena at the moment when the second-order election is being held' (Reif, 1985: 8).

Reif and Schmitt (1980: 9–10) set out the following key propositions about second-order elections:

- With less at stake than in first-order elections turnout will be lower
- Where less is at stake, voters may 'experiment' with smaller or new parties close to their preferences, but for which votes would be 'wasted' in the first-order arena
- Crucially, the government parties in the first-order arena are likely to lose support at mid-term, and opposition parties to gain support
- But while voters in these ways may 'punish' incumbent parties of national government, they do so in the knowledge that they can return to it 'when it really matters', i.e. at the next first-order election.

The notion of first/second-order elections is now firmly established in the analysis of European election results. What is a little surprising is how few applications of the first/second-order framework have been made to the other kinds of second-order election Reif and Schmitt set out. One exception is a series of articles comparing British local government and EP elections during the 1990s. These both confirm the general thrust of Reif and Schmitt's propositions, but also differentiate the 'rank order' of local and EP elections. 'Some second order elections are more second order than others', as McLean et al. (1996: 4) put it in comparing 1994 local and EP elections. Heath et al. (1999: 391) were more precise five years later: 'If the elections to the European Parliament are to be regarded as second-order, then we might think of elections to local councils as "one and three quarters order"'. These differences had to do with the *amount* at stake,

which was felt to be higher (or at least more directly appreciable) in local than EP elections, and was reflected in higher turnout, a higher degree of concern about who won, and a lesser likelihood to vote in accordance with national/first-order issues (McLean et al., 1996: 18; Heath et al., 1999: 406).

There is an immediate 'read-across' from these analyses of British local elections into the relationship between regional and statewide elections. Just how 'second-order' are regional elections? What is the relationship between the regional and statewide electoral arenas in terms of turnout, small parties and national government popularity? Is there a regular pattern in which regional elections routinely act as vehicles for the 'punishment' of national government parties?

Regional elections in the German mid-term

A little-rehearsed method for investigating such questions was developed in 1977 by the German political scientist Rainer Dinkel (1977). Dinkel aimed to test the hypothesis that the parties in government at the federal level inevitably suffer drops in popular support in German regional (Land) elections. He developed a simple test based on the notion of 'expected vote share' at Land elections. This was a simple average of party vote shares in that Land at two successive federal elections. If the federal government parties scored, say, 50 percent in a Land in one federal election and 46 percent in the next, then their 'expected vote' for any Land election in the intervening period in that Land would be 48 percent. Dinkel found as an almost invariable rule that the federal government parties did less well than 'expected' in any Land election than they had done in that Land in the preceding or succeeding federal elections. The regularity of this phenomenon was understood as the 'punishment' of federal-level incumbency. 'Land elections have long since become arenas where citizens give their verdict on the performance of the coalition parties at the federal level.' Land elections were (in anticipation of the later terminology of Reif and Schmitt) 'subordinate elections [...] systematically influenced by the

superordinate constellation in the Bundestag' (Dinkel, 1977: 348).

Drawing on work on the 'electoral cycle' of presidential vis-a-vis congressional elections in the US, Dinkel also tested for cyclical variations in the underperformance relative to 'expected' vote share over time between two federal elections (cf. Jeffery and Hough, 2001; Hough and Jeffery, 2003a; 2003b: 82). The further away that a Land election took place from a federal election, the worse the federal government parties performed: the best chances for federal government parties to maximize their vote share was if the election took place either at the beginning or the end of the federal electoral cycle (Dinkel, 1977: 351). In other words, federal government parties did not just underperform in Land elections, they underperformed most at mid-term.

Dinkel's was not a complex model. It (consciously¹) had just one main explanatory variable – distance in time from the nearest federal election – and focused just on the performance of those parties which happened to be in federal government during a particular legislative period (in other words, treating coalitions led by different parties in different periods in an undifferentiated way). It also lacks predictive capability. The result of the federal election *after* any round of Land elections is needed in order to calculate the trend in support for the parties. While this is logical in terms of seeking cyclical effects, Dinkel can as a result offer only a retrospective evaluation of party performance across tiers of government: Land election results since the last federal election cannot be evaluated for their cyclical characteristics until the next federal election has taken place. Despite these qualifications his model has a genuine heuristic value. It is to our knowledge the only attempt systematically to model the relationship between national and regional elections. And the fairly unambiguous empirical data which generated it match closely the expectations of related work in the first/second-order literature on 'punishment effects' and the subordinate status of regional elections to the first-order electoral arena.² We therefore use it in the next section to revisit the data on Germany, but also to compare it with equivalent data from Spain.

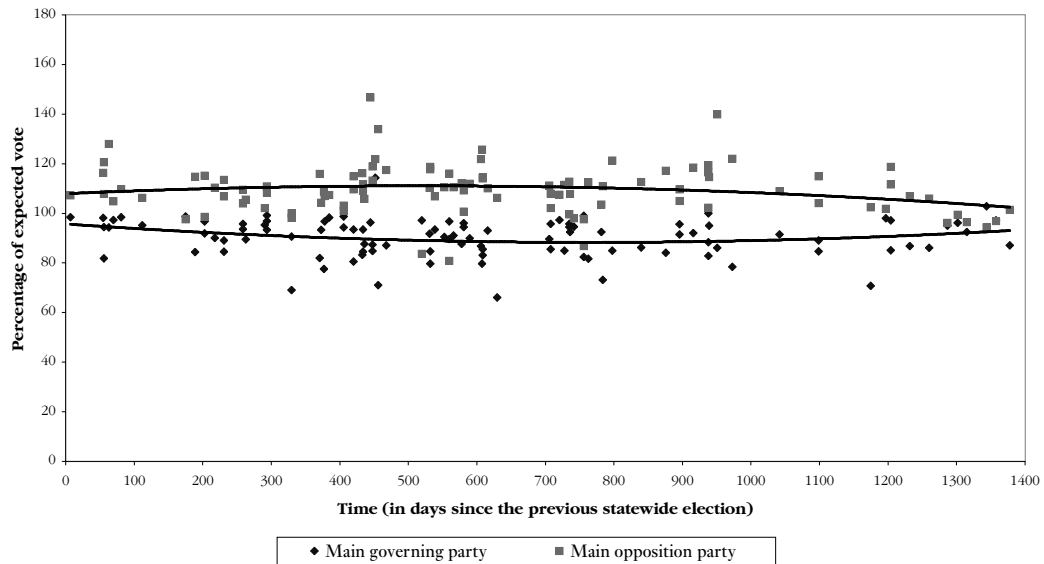


Figure 1 The results of the governing and main opposition parties at the statewide level in regional elections in Germany, 1949–90

Comparing Germany and Spain

Applying Dinkel's method to Land election results in the Federal Republic of Germany from 1949 to 1990 reveals a mild but distinctive cyclical pattern (see Figure 1). The governing parties at the federal level perform better in regional elections at the beginning and at the end of the national legislative cycle, whereas in 'mid-term' they perform less well. Only very rarely do they manage to poll more than their expected vote share and on average governing parties polled 88.4 percent of the vote share that they should, using Dinkel's method, have 'expected'. Similar calculations can, of course, be done for the main opposition party just as it can for smaller parties (although Dinkel did not choose to do this). According to the logic of the second-order thesis, both these groups of parties should perform better than 'expected' in Land elections. Figure 1 shows that the main opposition party at the federal level does indeed perform better in the middle of the electoral cycle, but as the next election approaches the proportion of the expected vote that it polls sinks again. On average, the main opposition party registers 109.49 percent of its expected vote and the curve that opposition party performance in Land elections generates is a neat mirror image of

that for the federal governing parties.

Figure 2, which covers the period 1960–90,³ shows that the smaller parties – with whom voters should theoretically be more willing to experiment in regional elections – also perform much better in the middle of the electoral cycle and, to some extent, maintain their performance to the end of the cycle when the next national election approaches. This is due in part to the typically lower turnout in Land elections as compared to federal elections, which tends to magnify the impact of smaller-party protest. On average the smaller parties poll 126.53 percent of their 'expected vote' and rarely dip under the level of 100 percent. In the German case (up to 1990 at least; the post-1990 period is covered below) there appears therefore to be solid evidence that regional elections are indeed second-order, subordinate to a cyclical rhythm whose scale and tempo is set by statewide factors.

The situation in Spain is rather different. The data in Figures 3 and 4 below are from a sample of Spanish autonomous communities, Castilla-La-Mancha, Catalonia, Galicia and Extremadura. They show the 'wrong' cyclical pattern of results. The main party of government in Madrid achieves on average some 87.05 percent of its 'expected' vote share – less than in the German case. *But*, its best

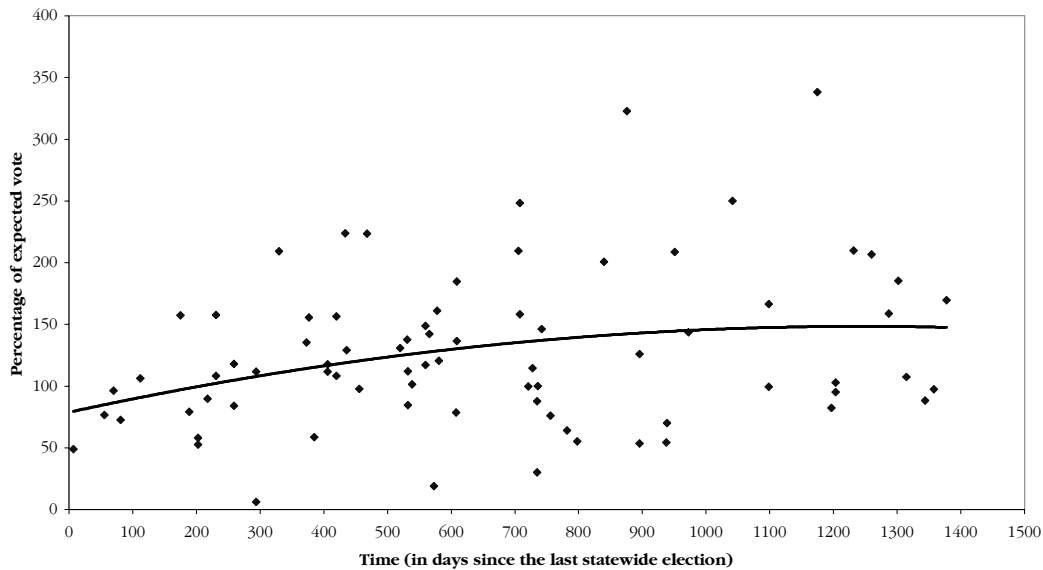


Figure 2 Small party performance in Land elections in Germany, 1960–90

results are precisely when they should not be: at the middle of the statewide electoral cycle. The performance in regional elections of the main opposition party in Madrid also does not conform to the expectations of the second-order model. It

achieves on average just 90.77 percent of its expected vote, barely more than the main government party. And again the cyclical pattern is ‘wrong’: it does worst at mid-term, when it should be hitting peak performance. If we do the equivalent

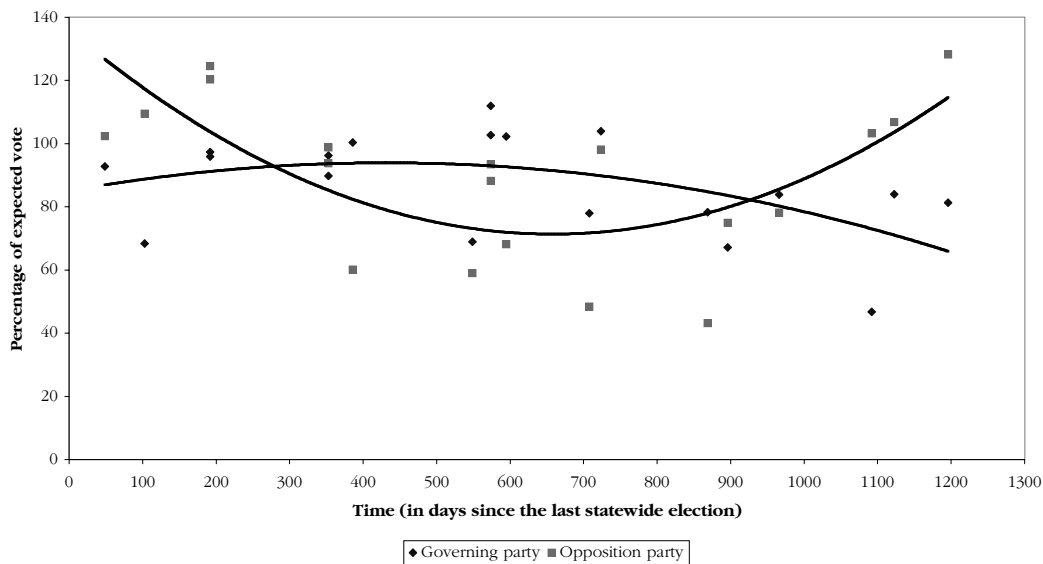


Figure 3 The results of the main governing and the main opposition parties at the statewide level in regional elections in Extremadura, Castilla-La-Mancha, Catalonia and Galicia, 1977–99

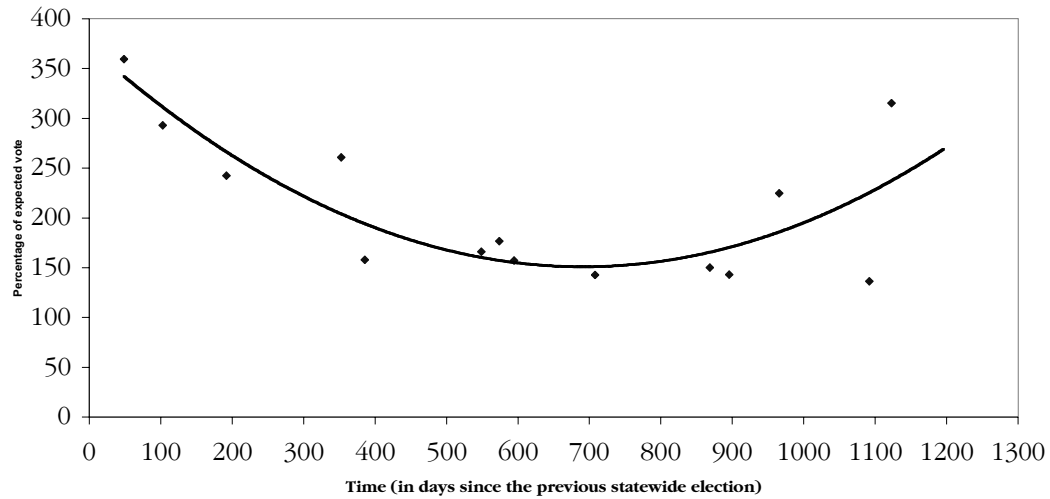


Figure 4 The performance of significant regional parties in regional elections in Extremadura, Castilla-La-Mancha, Catalonia and Galicia, 1977–99

calculations for regionalist parties, which one might expect in Spain to be the beneficiaries at the statewide mid-term, we also get the ‘wrong’ curve. It does need to be stressed that on no occasion did regionalist parties in the four autonomous communities get less than 100 percent of their ‘expected’ vote, and often scored twice or three times as well as ‘expected’. Regionalist parties do score very well in regional elections, but do best close to and not at the mid-point between statewide elections. Regional elections do not seem to be subordinate to statewide elections; there seems to be a countervailing dynamic which reverses the expectations of the second-order thesis.

Our explanation for these differences lies in the territorial heterogeneity of the Spanish state, which combines a Castilian core with a number of ‘historic nationalities’ around the periphery. Ideas about statewide electoral cycles and regional elections as second-order statewide elections would seem to be less relevant in these circumstances than in territorially more homogeneous states such as Germany. Homogeneity manifests itself, as a rule, in ‘congruence’ of party systems at the statewide and regional levels. In (pre-1990) Germany, with the partial exception of the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU),⁴ all the major parties had a statewide ‘reach’, not least because they originated as the political expressions of non-territorial, statewide

social cleavages: class, religious belief and (in the more recent case of the Greens) ‘materialism’ vs ‘post-materialism’. In these circumstances it was unlikely that the terms of political debate would be significantly differentiated by territory; voters made decisions on Land elections in line with an essentially undifferentiated, statewide political debate. Regional elections were in that sense second-order, as the ‘Dinkel curves’ suggest. In states like Spain, where there is greater territorial heterogeneity and where the cleavages underlying the party system have a territorial dimension alongside the ‘classic’ statewide cleavages of class and religion, the subordination of regional elections to statewide terms of debate is less likely to occur. The failure of the Spanish ‘Dinkel curves’ to conform to the expectations of Reif, Schmitt and Dinkel confirms this line of thinking. Territorial heterogeneity works against subordination to the statewide arena; regional elections are not second-order and may have a status in voters’ minds equivalent to, perhaps even higher than, statewide elections.

These propositions receive partial support if we look at the relationship between regional and statewide elections in Germany since German unification in 1990, when eastern Germany was incorporated into the Federal Republic. After unification Germany became a territorially much

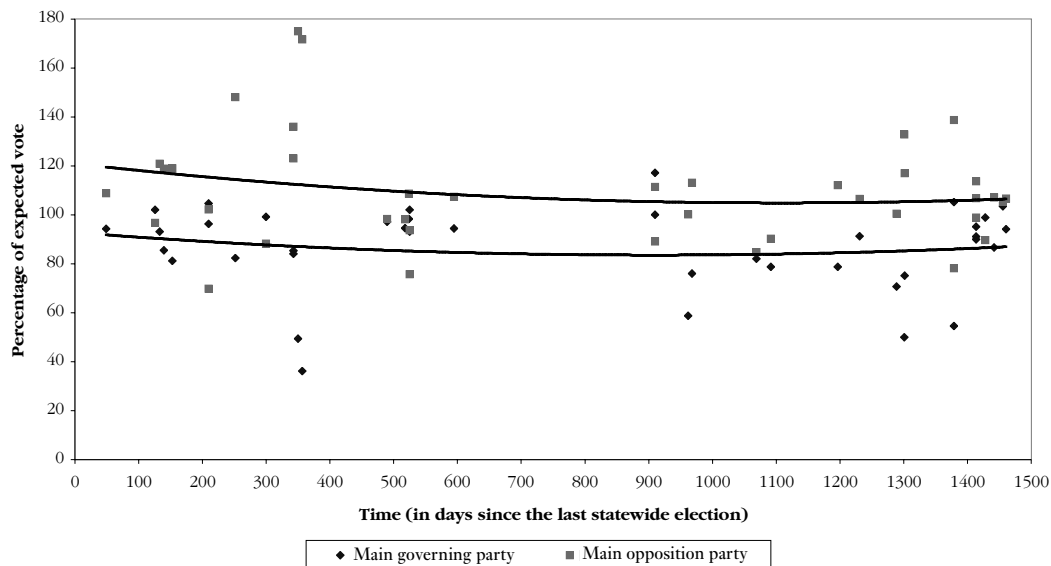


Figure 5 The results of the main governing and the main opposition party at the statewide level in regional elections in Germany, 1990–2002

more diverse society. Eastern Germans brought with them different patterns of socialization and a starkly different set of economic problems and interests into the ‘new’ Germany, opening up a new east–west cleavage. This cleavage has found expression in the German party system. There remain only two genuine statewide parties – the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Both the Free Democrats (FDP) and the Greens are principally western German parties, while the former communist Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) is almost exclusively a party of the eastern Länder.

In these changed circumstances, the ‘expected’ vote-share graphs for governing, opposition and small parties from 1990 to 2002 are substantially different to those of the pre-unification period (see Figures 5 and 6). In the case of the governing parties at the federal level, the situation remains more or less the same as before 1990. The main governing party performs worse than ‘expected’ in the middle of the electoral cycle and better towards the beginning and end. So does the main opposition party, which now seems not to get the benefit of voters ‘punishing’ the federal government incumbents. The smaller parties, however, have

polled unusually good results in Land elections. The reason for this would appear to reflect the inability of the main parties, SPD and CDU/CSU – regardless of whether they are in the federal government or opposition – to generate a convincing set of messages for all voters, east and west. Smaller parties have tapped this failure of statewide integration by focusing protest largely around region-specific issues. This applies to the PDS as a defender of eastern interests; it applies to ‘flash’ parties of protest against the ‘establishment’ in Bremen and Hamburg; and it arguably applies to the periodic successes of far-Right parties in some Länder in mobilizing senses of alienation from mainstream politics. We see, in other words, a territorially more differentiated set of political debates, not always structured by the same parties from one Land to the next, or indeed in the *same* Land when comparing statewide and regional elections.

In sum, the proposition that regional elections are ‘second-order’ finds, at best, only partial confirmation in the data analysed here. An approach that attempts to explain the relationship between the national and regional electoral arenas in terms of the political climate at the national level seems insufficient, especially in cases where territorial

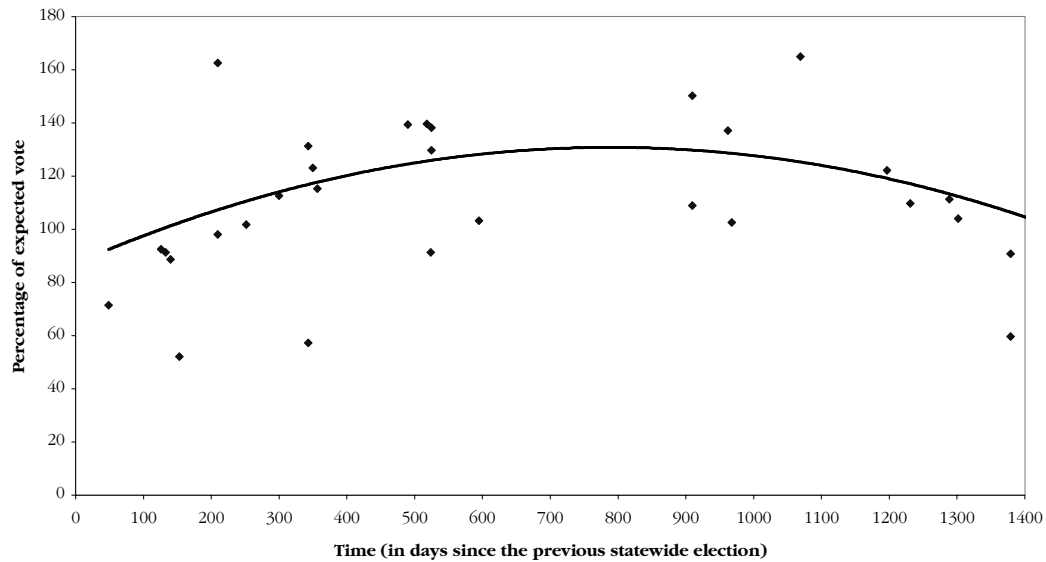


Figure 6 Small party performance in regional elections in Germany, 1990–2002

cleavages are strong. In the next section we therefore focus on this territorial dynamic, as it were reversing the perspective on the relation of regional to statewide elections to one taken from the ‘bottom up’.

Multi-level voting and territorial politics

Over the last 30 years regional parties and the institutions of regional governance have become important components of the Western European political landscape. But just as in the analysis of ‘orders’ of elections, the literature on territorial politics has only rarely analysed the effects of territorial cleavage on voting behaviour and party competition at – and particularly between – different levels of government. We therefore need to re-adapt existing literatures to throw useful light on the question of multi-level voting.

An important starting point are the cleavage structures underlying Western European party systems identified by Stein Rokkan, Seymour Martin Lipset and colleagues from the late 1960s (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Rokkan and Urwin, 1982; 1983; Flora et al., 1999). Among these

cleavages were conflicts of centre and periphery. This cleavage emerged where the project of national state building clashed uneasily with the particularism of individual territories and peoples, producing territorial forms of political mobilization. This cleavage epitomized the ‘typical reactions of peripheral regions, linguistic minorities and culturally threatened peoples towards the uniform and rationalising tendencies of the centralising nation state’ (Flora et al., 1999: 282). Territorial politics in this sense was seen as ‘bastions of primordial local culture’, offering opposition and resistance to the processes of national modernization. These ‘bastions’, however, ‘rarely survived the broadening of the electoral franchise’ (Flora et al., 1999: 283, 284). Conflicts based on the centre–periphery divide were subsequently seen as the residual grumblings of the losers of modernization, as deeply parochial and as essentially insignificant for the wider political process. As and when territorial movements were able to mobilize against the centre they were seen up until the 1960s as atavistic movements disturbing the normally peaceful flow of Western politics and as ‘irritating anachronisms’ (Rokkan and Urwin, 1982: 1).

This understanding – even dismissal – of

territorial politics was only seriously challenged in the 1980s after a whole troupe of regional parties had (re-)gained prominence across Western Europe. Given their renewed vitality these parties could no longer be written off as anachronistic phenomena with little contemporary relevance. The analysis of the institutions and processes of territorial politics subsequently became a growth industry in political science (see Urwin, 1985; Keating, 1988; 1993; 1996; De Winter, 1998; Müller-Rommel, 1998; Hough, 2002). At the heart of this renewed interest were three principal questions:

- Why has this new regionalism arisen? Which combinations of cultural identity, socio-economic structures and deficits in national politics have facilitated the breakthrough of regional parties?
- What does the rise of new regionalism mean for the future of the national state? Given that all regional parties demand greater autonomy for their territories from the centre, what are the implications for the institutions and the coherence of the national state?
- What effects will the new territorial politics have on the dynamics that underpin national party systems?

The last of these questions is naturally of most interest for this article. Over the last 25 years or so an important component of party and party system analysis has been the growing volatility of contemporary voting behaviour as well as the processes of partisan dealignment that are held to underlie it. The core of the dealignment thesis is that the rise of new parties – principally Green and far-Right – and the increasing inability of older parties to mobilize their traditional bases of support can be put down to an ‘uncoupling’ of social structure and party identification. This logic can also be applied to the breakthrough of regional parties – although it rarely appears to have been so applied. If parties that compete on a statewide basis lose their integrative capacity, prospects for new, territorial parties that articulate other interests and sentiments open up (De Winter, 1998: 214–19; Müller-Rommel, 1998: 25–6).

One way of capturing the effects of territorial politics on a party system would be a measure that could somehow reflect the weakening (or otherwise) ability of the major parties to integrate voters at

different levels. A number of articles have thrown light on the increasing differentiation of party competition that appears to exist among regions, and they have stressed that this is evidence of a rise in the salience of centre–periphery cleavages (e.g. Hearl et al., 1996). These contributions have nonetheless tended to sidestep the question of whether these ‘horizontal’ region-by-region differences are also flanked by ‘vertical’ differences between regional and statewide election results in the same region. The analysis tends, in other words, to be limited to regionally disaggregated analysis of statewide elections. The following reason has been put forward in justification:

As the main policy objective of ethnoregionalist parties is the reorganisation of the national power structure towards an increase in the degree of self-government, and for this reorganisation only legislative bodies at the national level are competent, ethnoregionalist parties tend to focus on increasing their political weight at the level of the national parliament, rather than at sub-state levels of political representation. (De Winter, 1998: 211–12)

Such reasoning may have made sense in studying the era in which the fight for regional autonomy is under way, but in an era where such battles have largely been won it is unconvincing. Belgium, Spain, Italy, France and most recently the United Kingdom have, over the course of the last 30 years, all created (or in the Italian case called into practice) regional tiers of government. It is quite conceivable that since the granting of autonomy (in whatever form) regional parties now choose to direct their energies towards the newly empowered regional level of government. And national parties also have to react to the new circumstances, as do voters, who are now asked to cast ballots in both the statewide and regional arenas. Put another way – and this point applies, too, in states like Germany or Austria that have much longer traditions of regional elections – do statewide and regional electoral processes (still) follow the same logics and rhythms in the era of regionalization?

This question takes on even more importance when we recall the limited success of the notion of second-order elections in explaining electoral outcomes at the regional level in Germany and Spain. Regional and statewide elections do not necessarily have a hierarchical and one-way relationship to one another. It is also conceivable

Table 1 The index of dissimilarity in selected regions (%)

	Germany				Spain				Canada			
	Bavaria	Hamburg	Baden- Württemb.	Brandenb'g	Catalonia	Galicia	Extremad.	Castilla-La- Mancha	British Columbia	Ontario	Manitoba	Alberta
1949		19.1							7.3	16.5	6.2	33.4
1953	9.9	7.9	16.5						17.3	16.8	13.7	25.3
1957	11.6	7.7	10.2						29.8	6.3	14.6	17.3
1958									46.6	10.4	16	36.1
1961	10.3	9.2	6.6									
1962									27.7	7.3	9.1	30.3
1963									28.7	13.5	5.9	35
1965	9.8	10.1	4.3						31.6	12.7	2.3	32
1968									48.7	16	18.7	51.3
1969	3.6	7.0	14.0									
1972	8.5	10.7	3.1						33.6	11.1	17.1	36.9
1974									64.3	10.7	20.1	20.9
1976	3.6	12.7	4.6									
1979					19.0	22.8			62	6.5	12	25
1980	4.3	12.3	8.5						59	8.5	21	24.5
1982					25.6	22.1	8.8	8.13				
1983	4.0	7.2	2.5									
1984									58.5	11.5	15	18.5
1986					19.4	9.6	9.0	2.74				
1987	4.5	5.2	8.2									
1988									41.5	14.5	4	23.5
1989					13.8	10.1	4.1	5.65				
1990	4.8	8.4	13.4	8.2								
1993					18.9	18.3	6.6	8.41	29	42	47	51.5
1994	4.1	22.4	7.9	11.0								
1996					19.0	16.7	4.9	3.36				
1997									38.5	28.5	45	52
1998	9.7	19.8	10.5	8.8								
2000					14.9	6.6	7.0	12.67				
2001												
2002	13.9	23.6	13.5	17.9								
Average	8.1	12.2	11.3	11.5	18.7	15.2	6.8	6.8	39.0	14.6	16.7	32.1

that they may have little or no relationship to each other. In order to investigate such ideas further we require some means of capturing whether and how far statewide and regional elections operate according to distinctive, even divergent, logics and rhythms. The Western European literature remains surprisingly unhelpful in this regard, but a sideways glance across the North Atlantic helps to fill the gap.

Looking to Canada: the index of dissimilarity

In Canada there have long been stark differences between statewide and provincial election results, and party systems are often quite different from one province to the next. One analytical tool applied by a number of Canadian authors in their attempts to pin down provincial/national divergence in election results is the calculation of an 'index of dissimilarity' (Johnston, 1980; Abedi and Siaroff, 1999). Indices of dissimilarity are generated by comparing the results of a statewide election in a particular province with the results of the provincial election in that province nearest in time to the statewide election. The index expresses the proportion of the electorate who would have to change their vote in order for the provincial election result to be converted into the national one. The dissimilarity index in this way offers a clear and straightforward measure of how divergent electoral outcomes at different levels are. Maximum dissimilarity would be 100 percent (all voters cast their vote in different ways in provincial compared to national elections in a certain province); minimum dissimilarity would be 0 percent (no one voted differently).

Canada is an extreme case of regional–statewide divergence. In Canada there is no single 'party system', but rather 10 provincial party systems often with quite distinctive features, as well as one statewide party system. The statewide party system comprises parties that in part have only a loose relationship with the parties that share the same name at the regional level (Robin, 1978; Wolinetz and Carty, forthcoming). Given this, it should not come as a surprise that the levels of regional–national dissimilarity are high. Voters do routinely vote for different parties at different levels.

Parties that are strong at the one level cannot be sure that that strength will be reflected electorally at the other. In the most extreme example the Conservative Party won just 1 percent of the vote in the provincial election in British Columbia in both 1983 and 1986, but polled 47 percent of the votes in British Columbia in the intervening federal election of 1984! In the 1970s and 1980s approximately 60 percent of the votes that were cast in provincial elections in British Columbia would have needed to have been cast differently to have replicated the result of the most recent national election. As Table 1 shows, the situation is not dissimilar in Alberta where regional–statewide dissimilarity has long been considerable, as it has been more recently in Manitoba. The same applies in Ontario, particularly since the collapse of the Conservative Party's vote in the early 1990s and its increasing inability to act as a party of statewide integration. The Liberal Party is now the only Canadian party that garners meaningful levels of support throughout Canada in both provincial and national elections. The Liberals aside, the dynamics of provincial and national elections are largely separate from one another.

Regional–statewide dissimilarity: Germany and Spain

It is immediately obvious from Table 1 that the statewide and regional election results for Germany and Spain are more similar than is the case in Canada. This is most obviously the case in Germany. In Germany (at least before unification) much the same set of parties competed at both the statewide and regional levels on more or less the same terms across the whole of the country. As a result dissimilarity indices have rarely exceeded 10 percent. There are two periods of exception. The first concerns the early years of the Federal Republic. This was a period in which an initially fragmented postwar party system quickly consolidated into the familiar patterns that applied through to 1990. Before party system consolidation was complete there was considerable 'churn' between statewide and regional election results. The second exception concerns the post-1990 era. As was shown earlier, unification has introduced new territorial dynamics to German elections. These are

reflected also in higher dissimilarity indices, with several results – in east and west – of over 10 percent and even 15 percent. Again we see here evidence of the declining capacity of the main parties to continue to integrate voters on the same terms at both statewide and regional elections.

The Spanish data reveal a territorially uneven pattern. In Castilla-La-Mancha and Extremadura the dissimilarity indices are close to the lower end of the German scale, with averages of 6.8 percent and 6.7 percent respectively over the period 1979–2000. In Catalonia and Galicia the indices are more like those in Canada at 18.7 percent and 16.6 percent respectively; in these regions every fifth or sixth voter behaves differently in regional as compared to statewide elections. The reasons for higher dissimilarity scores in Catalonia and Galicia would appear to lie in the role that regionalist parties play in the Spanish party system. In Catalonia the strongest regionalist party, the *Convergència i Unió*, always does better in regional than statewide elections, as does the *Bloque Nacionalista Galego* in Galicia. In those regions it seems that voters make conscious use of the possibilities of the decentralized Spanish state to favour regionalist solutions to political questions. In Castilla-La-Mancha and Extremadura this is not the case. These are two of the regions in Spain that lack a strongly defined sense of regional identity. Territory is less important a political cleavage than one like social class which plays out statewide. Catalonia and Galicia are, by contrast, two of the historic nationalities, each with a strong sense of identity, including widely spoken national languages, and reflected in the higher level of autonomy accorded to them in the decentralized system. In these circumstances there are evidently sufficient incentives for voters to vote according to different regional and statewide logics in regional and statewide elections. The situation is comparable in Canada, where language again plays a vital role in building territorial cleavages. Add to this the sheer diversity of regional interests and political cultures across a vast state territory and regional and statewide voting logics become even more dissimilar and divergent.

Conclusions

This article set out to find ways of capturing better the relationship of regional and statewide electoral processes in multi-level systems. ‘Dinkel curves’ and the dissimilarity index provide at least initial techniques for mapping out the dynamics of multi-level voting. Dinkel tests for the subordination of regional elections to the electoral rhythms of statewide politics. Dissimilarity explores how different patterns of voting behaviour are in the same region in regional compared with statewide elections. Together the application of the two techniques suggests the following conclusions. These conclusions must necessarily remain tentative as they draw on limited datasets from just three country cases.

The first is that in contexts which lack deep territorial cleavages, regional and statewide election results are broadly similar, with political debate structured by the same set of parties at regional as at statewide levels, and with regional results tending to be driven by the rhythm of a statewide electoral cycle. Regional elections under these circumstances are indeed second-order elections, conforming to the assumptions that Reif and Schmitt set out. This was the finding about pre-unification Germany. Whether similar conclusions apply to other states such as Austria, Australia or France which also lack strong territorial cleavages and which have congruent party systems at regional and statewide levels is a question for further research.

Second, territorial heterogeneity breaks up this pattern of subordination of regional elections. In Germany the second-order quality of regional elections has been challenged by the new territorial cleavages evident since unification. There is growing dissimilarity of regional and statewide election results, and a reduced tendency for regional election results to follow statewide electoral rhythms (Hough and Jeffery, 2003b). The impact of territorial heterogeneity is confirmed by the Canadian and Spanish cases. Regional elections do not conform to expectations about second-order elections in Spain. Most interestingly, dissimilarity indices vary considerably between regions with and without strongly defined senses of territorial identity. In other words, the extent to which regional and statewide electoral processes operate according to different logics can vary considerably

across regions within a state. States with similar patterns of metropolitan core and distinctive peripheries – e.g. the UK (Hough and Jeffery, 2003a) and arguably Italy – may also reveal this kind of differentiated pattern. Canada is, it seems, an outlier case. Regional and statewide elections seem to have quite different logics in the minds of voters in a state where size and territorial identities combine to produce distinctive patterns of voting and party systems from one region to the next. Perhaps there are similar patterns in other big, multinational states such as Russia or India.

In sum, the obvious analytical lens for exploring regional elections, that of ‘second-orderness’ is found wanting. Regional elections are evidently less open to domination by statewide debates than, say, European or local elections. To put it in the terms of Reif and Schmitt, more is ‘at stake’ in regional elections, especially where territorial cleavages structure political debate differentially across a state. To put it another way, the ways elections, voting behaviour and party systems operate at the regional level are more important a topic for political science than has traditionally been thought.

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Notes

- ¹ Though Dinkel does factor in the supplementary influence of regional party system factors and Land government incumbency, he consciously excludes potential differential effects produced by different incumbent parties at the federal level, ‘events’ with federal or Land electoral resonance, socio-structural differences between the Länder, personalities and the economic cycle. See Dinkel (1977: 351–2).
- ² Though a review of the data Dinkel analysed shows that a number of his entries were miscalculated.

- ³ The period 1949–60 was one in which a fragmented multi-party system consolidated into a simple three-party system, in part due to adjustments to the electoral system. It is therefore an outlier period which we leave to one side.
- ⁴ This is a partial exception. The CSU forms a single parliamentary fraction in the federal parliament with the Christian Democratic Union. The CDU stands for election across all Germany except Bavaria; the CSU does not put up candidates for election outside Bavaria. CDU/CSU together are to all extents and purposes a common party at federal level.

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