

A Tale of Two Arena's: How do Regionalist Parties Strategically Behave when they Hold Power in Regional and National Government?

A Comparative Research between Multi-Level Political Systems

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Abstract

An increasing amount of regionalist parties has participated in regional or national executive office. Their programmatic party behavior is examined here by applying quantitative discourse analysis on party manifestos. The data reveal that the regionalist party type employs a specific, multi-dimensional party strategy adjusted to the tier of government in question.

Contrary to expectations, incumbency leads to a perceived ideological persistence on the territorial dimension both at the regional and the national level. Moreover, the territorial axis appears to be the primary one on which regionalist parties strategize when crossing the threshold of national government. In contrast, regional incumbency primarily triggers an increase in salience of the social-economic and a decrease of the liberal-authoritarian dimension, whilst adopting a more centrist position on both axes.

Keywords: Regionalist Parties, Party Strategy, Party Ideology, Multi-Level Governance, Manifesto Research

Introduction

The central research question of this article is situated at the crossroads of regionalist parties and government participation. For the first time, the programmatic profile of the regionalist party type is quantitatively measured throughout their whole life cycle (1); whereby the impact of government participation is mapped (2) on the three main dimensions of ideological party competition (3) and this simultaneously at the regional and the national policy making level (4).

In other words, the effect of crossing the threshold of government (=the “independent” variable) on the party ideology (=the “dependent” variable) of regionalist parties is investigated here. Programmatic party behavior is operationalized by applying quantitative discourse analysis to three identified axes of party competition: left-right, centralization-decentralization and liberal-authoritarian. This allows for a broad comparison across time (=the postwar II period) and space (=Western democracies).

The central claim in this article is that the applied MARPOR- data show that the regionalist party type actually employs a multi-dimensional party strategy when maneuvering into executive office. Different programmatic shifts are empirically observed depending on the perspective of the measurement (salience or position) and on the tier of government (regional or national) in question. In brief, the findings underneath are an amendment to the theoretical framework on regionalist party strategies developed in the Special Issue of *Party Politics* (2015).

The added value of this research is versatile. First, incumbency effects have already frequently been researched. However, since there continues to exist a clear “methodological nationalism bias” (Hepburn & Detterbeck, 2013; Schakel, 2013), the regional policy-making level as well as possible dynamics between both levels remain a blind spot in academic research. In particular, party competition in regional electoral arenas remains under exposed (Fabre & Swenden, 2013). Therefore, both regional and national government participation are mapped and included in this research.

Second, regionalist parties have re-gained electoral momentum in several Western multi-level democracies (De Winter & Türsan 1998). An increasing amount of them has by now participated in executive office (Elias & Tronconi 2011; Tronconi, 2015). Nowadays, regionalist parties are considered as a distinct party family and as a structural actor in political party competition (Gomez-Reino, 2008; Hague, Harrop & McCormick, 2016; Marks, Wilson & Ray, 2002).

Third, most research on programmatic party competition is focused on the traditional left-right divide, whilst the territorial dimension has only been fragmentarily investigated (Alonso, Cabeza & Gomez, 2015). The same is true for the liberal-authoritarian dimension. Although, the relevance of both post-materialist axes has gradually increased and is surely relevant with regard to the regionalist party type (Cole, 2005; Mc Angus, 2015; Toubreau & Wagner, 2016; Wauters & Bouteica, 2016).

Fourth, voter behaviour is frequently examined, but the study of party behaviour and party strategy is less elaborated (Belanger & Meguid, 2008; Clark & Bennie, 2016; Van Der Brug, 2004). This is partly because it is just more difficult to map this aspect. While “established”, “state-wide” parties have effectively been subjected to this kind of research the under-exposure is definitely true for regionalist parties (Field & Hamann, 2015; Kluver & Sagarzazu, 2015).

Fifth, political parties fulfill different functions. Whereas the organizational and electoral one have been frequently examined (Fabre & Swenden, 2013), the focus here is solely on its programmatic function. When studying the regionalist party type it is particularly for this ideological function that one would expect striking contrasts in comparison to other party families.

Sixth, relatively few comparative discourse analyses include a longitudinal approach (Libbrecht, Maddens, Swenden & Fabre, 2009). In contrast, this article counterbalances the limited number of selected regionalist parties by observing them for a longer time period, whereby their programmatic profile is measured for consecutive electoral cycles.

Last but not least, to bridge existing research gaps it is important to combine traditional areas of party research (e.g. ideological change) with new dynamics such as multi-level governance (e.g. regional and national tier of government) (Barrio, 2013).

Contrary to expectations, the conducted descriptive statistics and variance analyses indicate that incumbency not necessarily triggers a process of “watering down” the core business of the regionalist party profile.

Regionalist parties who enter regional government clearly show a higher social-economic and lower liberal-authoritarian saliency score whilst their territorial salience remains remarkably stable. Simultaneously, regional government participation equals to a stable territorial position as well as more centrist social-economic and liberal-authoritarian positions.

Surprisingly, at the national level the decentralization dimension renders even more salient and more radical when taking up power in executive office. Simultaneously, the social-economic and liberal-authoritarian dimension remain rather stable or even slightly decrease in salience terms, and show only small and diverging movements in positional terms.

The ANOVA, correlation and GLM analyses complete the picture of the empirical relationship between party ideology and government participation. All of the observed ideological movements can partly be explained by the transition to executive office, however government participation alone cannot account for the whole of the ideological moves measured on each dimension, even when controlling for economic welfare and institutional decentralization. Therefore, other factors will need to be investigated.

Indeed, as previous scholars have highlighted, entering government requires regionalist parties to find points of convergence with potential coalition partners (Dandoy, 2014, Laver & Budge, 1992). So a more centrist stance as well as modified salience scores on the social-economic and liberal-authoritarian dimension might indicate a willingness to primarily accommodate on these two axes of party competition. However clearly visible at the regional level, movements on the latter two axes remain rather limited at the national level.

As aforementioned, the territorial dimension renders even more prominent when in **national** government and is kept constant when in regional government. Since the decentralization issue remains regionalist parties’ programmatic core business on which they apparently do not want to give in, one could make mention of an “ideological persistence” in this domain as well as of a constitutional sense of urgency and awareness (“now or never”).

Taking up power in **regional** executive office does not trigger movements on the territorial axis but does show important changes on the two others: an increase in social-economic and a decrease liberal-authoritarian salience whilst also holding more centrist positions on both ideological dimensions. Again, the observed “freezing” on the territorial dimension could be due to an ideological persistence when it comes to the own core business. On the other hand, the deliberate centrist move on the two other dimensions could again indicate a clear willingness to compromise on these two ideological domains. Furthermore, at this point an increase in social-economic saliency goes hand in hand with a decrease in liberal-authoritarian saliency. The latter cluster of issues is gladly used by regionalist parties to narrate their communal feelings expressing a “sense of belonging together”. Taking up governmental responsibility however limits them to freely make use of this language, inter alia since it can cause friction with coalition partners. A so-called “substitution” party strategy could then help to explain this parallel move: regionalist parties express their community-building feelings in an alternative way by translating this discourse into social-economic notions (e.g. welfare chauvinism). An alternative, adding interpretation for the increased social-economic saliency could be an “inverse subsuming” party strategy, whereby regionalist parties articulate their territorial demands (their primary axis) through a social-economic lens (their secondary axis). This would be an amendment to the existing theoretical framework of party strategies as laid out by Elias, Szocsik & Zuber (2015).

It has to be noted that party platforms are not the only relevant document to take into account when assessing programmatic party strategy (Walgrave, Varone & Dumont, 2006; Mansergh & Thomson, 2007). The assumption made above rely on quantitative research that stems from only one written source of documents. Therefore, these preliminary findings will need to be more complemented with broader quantitative as well as in-depth qualitative analysis to further verify and clarify these party dynamics.

Theoretical framework

The aim of this research to analyse and explain the programmatic dimension of regionalist parties’ party behaviour by making use of quantitative discourse analysis. Since most empirical knowledge about party change is embedded within the research field of party competition (Downs, 1957; Robertson, 1976), this study heavily relies on this segment of the literature segment for its theoretical framework.

Regionalist parties are defined in this research as “*parties that refer to geographically concentrated minorities which challenge the working order, even the democratic order, by demanding recognition of their cultural identity. Regionalist parties articulate discontent at the constitutional status quo of their 'territory', advocating anything from cultural autonomy to national independence*” (Müller-Rommel, 1998). In line with De Winter & Türsan (1998, p. 204-205) regionalist parties are described here on the basis of their ideology, whereby the primary concern of this party type is to reach a form of territorial self-governance. Basically, stemming from their origin and nature, the programmatic core business of regionalist parties is shaped by their decentralization claim. Schakel (2016) adds that “*although the definition is based on ideology, it also entails a territorial characterization: regionalist parties are only present, as organizations or in terms of electoral activity, in a specific territory of the state. In other words, 'regionalist' parties are also 'regional' ('non-statewide') or, more precisely, they are a sub-set*

of regional parties.” While it is clear that regionalist parties move their positions on the territorial axis solely in one direction (Alonso, 2012), within this “peripheral” side however, they differ substantially ranging from radical to moderate opinions (De Winter & Türsan, 1998), from autonomist to secessionist parties (Mazzoleni, 2009). There is a large divergence in assertiveness to demand regional autonomy, but no regionalist party can depart its claim for self-determination without losing its own identity (Tronconi, 2015).

Next, programmatic party behaviour is defined in this research as temporal movements in terms of salience and position on three main dimensions of party competition: social-economic (left-right), territorial (centralization-decentralization) and liberal-authoritarian (migration, security, fabric of society). These three ideological axes were identified in line with the works of previous scholars, particularly Elias et al. (2015) and Wagner et al. (2017).

Elias, Szocsik and Zuber (2015) developed a theory of party strategies in a two-dimensional space depicted by (1) a “economic left-right” and (2) a “territorial center-periphery” dimension. Due to its recent character this promising theory is accompanied by only fragmented empirical evidence. This article studies programmatic party behavior inter alia through these two established dimensions of party competition and also tests Elias’ recent theory by confronting it with available empirical data.

Wagner and Meyer (2017) mapped the ideological party profile of radical right parties across Europe by applying (1) an “economic” and a (2) “liberal-authoritarian” dimension. The first one clearly overlaps with the Elias’ first dimension, the second is a cluster of issues that captures ideological views relating to various “identity” topics. Previous scholars have called the latter the “New Politics” dimension or the “cultural” dimension (Inglehart & Flanagan, 1987; Hooghe, Marks & Wilson, 2002; Kries, 2010). The term “liberal-authoritarian” was already used by Kitschelt (1994). This article studies programmatic party behavior inter alia through these two dimensions of party competition, but now applied to the regionalist party type.

Both the salience and position approach are applied since both perspectives are widely acknowledged to be complementary when it comes to quantitative content analysis. To measure salience and position, quantitative discourse analysis is conducted on party manifestos of regionalist parties. The “Manifesto Project Dataset” provides a well-established tool to process and compare coded party platforms collected throughout different elections at the national level. Three clusters (social-economic, territorial and liberal-authoritarian) are derived from the MARPOR ¹ coding scheme, whereby each cluster represents one dimension of party competition. The scores for these three clusters are computed and compared over time and across space.

Whilst the transition to holding power in executive office confronts regionalist parties with similar strategic challenges as those of their “state-wide”, “established” counterparts, they might strategize and behave differently in response to these challenges. Based on the relevant literature four specific expectations are summed up underneath. These hypotheses are subsequently tested by using the MARPOR data. The results allow to get a better insight in the effect of crossing the threshold of

¹ The Manifesto Project provides the scientific community with parties’ policy positions derived from a content analysis of parties’ electoral manifestos. It covers over 1000 parties from 1945 until today in over 50 countries on five continents. The MARPOR project continues the work of the Manifesto Research Group (MRG) and the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP).

government (=the “independent” variable) on the party ideology (=the “dependent” variable) of regionalist parties.

Government participation is a strategic choice that implies a trade-off between votes, office and policy (Muller & Strom, 1999). Regionalist parties have a particular motivation to take part in national governance since the key to the fulfillment of their own ideological core business is located at this level (=policy-seeking incentive). Also, the so-called “springboard effect” predicts that it is advantageous to participate in national elections just to grow on within the own region (=vote-seeking incentive).

When focussing on solely the programmatic component of strategic party behaviour, parties react within a competitive environment by temporarily making adjustments in the issues they emphasize and the positions they take up. Previous scholars have demonstrated that parties who ideologically connect more closely have a bigger chance to become partners in a next coalition government (e.g. Laver & Budge, 1992), thereby forming “logical” and “homogeneous” coalitions. When it comes to programmatic flexibility, Harmel & Janda (1995) distinguish between the “image” a party creates through its issue salience and on the other hand the “identity” formed by the positions it takes up. In this respect, Bouteau & Devos (2016) demonstrated that parties are more flexible in the package (emphasis) than in the content (position) they defend.

Hypothesis one concerns the *national* tier of government seen from the *salience* perspective:

H1a: When regionalist parties enter national government their social-economic saliency scores significantly increase.

H1b: When regionalist parties enter national government they significantly reduce their territorial emphasis.

Regionalist parties who aspire to enter national government will need to give in on their primary axis of party competition, that is the territorial axis (Alonso, Cabeza & Gomez, 2015), to find convergence with other “state-wide”, “established” parties. Continued emphasis on the decentralization claim may hamper the coalition potential of regionalist parties, especially at the national policy-making level. Indeed, decentralization issues have gradually become more salient in European democracies over the last decades, but have eventually remained only a marginal point of attention in the whole political debate (Basile, 2015). Instead, ideological connectedness will need to be found on the primary axis of the “state-wide”, “established” parties, that is, the traditional left-right axis (Heller, 2002; Rovny, 2015; Verge, 2013). As a consequence, one may expect the territorial emphasis to decrease and the social-economic emphasis to increase in the case of regionalist parties crossing the threshold of national government.

Hypothesis two concerns the *regional* tier of government seen from the *salience* perspective:

H2a: When regionalist parties enter regional government, their social-economic salience scores significantly increase. This effect is larger at the regional level than at the national level.

H2b: When regionalist parties enter regional government, they do not show a significant lower territorial salience score.

Similar to the first hypothesis, regionalist parties aspiring to enter the regional government need to find convergence with other “state-wide”, “established” parties. Again, movement on the social-

economic axis is most likely. Regionalist parties have a natural preference to primarily govern their own region, thereby implementing those social-economic policies that are considered best for the welfare of the own people. Cooperation in this field with better experienced coalition partners is even recommendable. At the same time, regional government participation grants regionalist parties access to patronage resources and the opportunity to use regional institutions to further territorial demands (Massetti & Schakel, 2015).

The incentive to compromise on the demand of self-determination is less present at the regional level. It would barely help to create ideological convergence with others since constitutional reform is generally decided at the national tier of government (Dion, 1996; Massetti & Schakel, 2013; Massetti & Schakel, 2016). Furthermore, other political parties active in the same regional arena often also ventilate autonomist sentiments in their discourse (Libbrecht, 2009).

Hypothesis three concerns the *national* tier of government seen from the *positional* perspective:

H3: When regionalist parties enter national government, they become more centrist on the three ideological axes.

Regionalist parties who aspire to enter regional government can also try to establish ideological convergence by modifying their issue positions. "State-wide", "established" parties normally hold mainstream policy positions in the center of the political spectrum, whereas regionalist parties generally take up positions in the periphery of the spectrum (Hepburn & Detterbeck, 2013). Therefore, centrist moves on every of the three axes can be expected.

Hypothesis four concerns the *regional* tier of government seen from the *positional* perspective:

H4: When regionalist parties enter regional government, they become more centrist on the social-economic and the liberal-authoritarian axes, but not on the territorial axis.

Similar to the third hypothesis, one would expect a more centrist positioning on the liberal-authoritarian and social-economic axis when in regional government. For the territorial axis however, a stable position is expected. Since party competition on this dimension is likely to be higher within the own autonomist region (Fabre & Swenden, 2013), there is less manoeuvring space here for the regionalist party if it wants to preserve its issue ownership. Again, since constitutional reform is ultimately decided at the national tier of government, giving in on this issue also would barely help to find convergence at this point.

Data and Research Method

The universe of regionalist parties is gradually expanding as they have clearly gained electoral strength the last decades. Massetti & Schakel (2016) publicized a comprehensive list of 227 identified regionalist parties in 16 Western democracies since the postwar II period. Since this list provides an actual and complete overview of this party type it is used as the starting point for case selection in this study. Quantitative manifesto analysis is applied by using the 2017b version of the Manifesto Project Dataset

– a well-known dataset comprised of coded party platforms, providing a broad range of cases in terms of time and space.

The 227 parties from Massetti & Schakel’s list (2016) are checked with the available coded manifestos in the dataset.² Thirty-six regionalist parties from nine different countries (all Western democracies) are mentioned in both the dataset and the list. Twelve more parties are added to this subset since they can rightfully also be labelled as “regionalist” and contain at least one coded party manifesto in the dataset. This amounts to a total of 181 available manifesto-cases (see: [Appendix A](#)).

Initially, the potential number of cases was higher (240), but various coded manifestos were excluded from the final selection. It is a difficult trade-off between adhering to theoretical orthodoxy on the one hand and maintaining a high number of cases on the other hand, but a deliberate choice was made not to compromise on the possibilities to make generalizations at the end on behalf of the regionalist party type as a whole. Next to the removal of prominent parties such as CDU/CSU (Germany), UP (Northern Ireland) and Swedish People’s party (Finland), other cases were excluded because of missing values within the database. In sum, the remaining 181 cases provide a highly-reliable standardized set of figures suitable for advanced comparative quantitative content analysis.

The main **dependent** variable, i.e. programmatic party behavior, is operationalized by deriving three ideological clusters (social-economic, territorial and liberal-authoritarian) from the MARPOR coding scheme. Each cluster represents one dimension of party competition. Earlier factor analyses proved that these issues tend to frequently appear together in manifesto’s (Cole, 2005). Bakker and Hobolt (2013) already constructed a “social-economic” (twenty issues) and a “liberal-authoritarian” (sixteen issues) cluster for their programmatic research. The territorial cluster here is comprised of merely two issues. Note that, since these three clusters do not include all of the existing MARPOR codes, the sum of the relative frequencies of the three clusters does not necessarily amounts to 100%. [Table one](#) provides an overview of the three ideological clusters and the codes from the MARPOR coding scheme.

Each code represents percentages of the party program devoted to a certain issue. Clustered saliency scores are then the sum of a grouping of issues. Indirectly, this salience approach also allows for “position” to be computed by splitting the three clusters into bipolar categories, as also shown in [Table one](#). Therefore, within each cluster the total “weight” of both poles is corrected so that both sides count equal. For the social-economic position the authoritative, broader “RILE” scale is applied. Positions are measured on a -100/+100 scale, however, nearly all the cases fall within the -50/+50 scale, which actually is a more appropriate point of reference. Territorial position equals to decentralization saliency minus centralization saliency; RILE position is right emphasis minus left emphasis (so: “-” is left whereas “+” is right); liberal-authoritarian position is liberal frequency minus authoritarian frequency (so: “-” is authoritarian-orientated whereas “+” is liberal-minded).

Table 1: Three ideological clusters (salience and position perspective)

² Please note that the relevance criterion is higher in the MARPOR dataset. In the list of Massetti & Schakel each regionalist party is included which obtained at least 1% of the vote and/or one seat in one national or regional election, whereas MARPOR only takes parties into account which obtained at least one seat in national parliament.

PROGRAMMATIC PARTY BEHAVIOR --> THREE IDEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF PARTY COMPETITION					
social-economic		territorial		liberal-authoritarianism	
left	right	decentralisation	centralisation	liberal	authoritarianism
market regulation 403	free market economy 401	de-centralization 301	centralization 302	freedom and human rights 201	political authority 305
economic planning 404	economic incentives 402			democracy 202	national way of life : positive 601
corporatism/mixed economy 405	protectionism : negative 407			anti-growth economy : positive 416	traditional morality : positive 603
protectionism : positive 406	economic growth : positive 410			environmental protection : positive 501	law and order 605
Keynesian demand management 409	economic orthodoxy 414			culture : positive 502	multiculturalism : negative 608
controlled economy 412	welfare state limitation 505			national way of life : negative 602	social harmony 606
nationalization 413	education limitation 507			traditional morality : negative 604	
marxist analysis : positive 415	labour groups : negative 702			multiculturalism : positive 607	
equality : positive 503				underprivileged minority groups 705	
welfare state expansion 504				non-economic demographic groups 706	
education expansion 506					
labour groups : positive 701					
right-left position ("RILE")					
left emphases	right emphases				
anti- imperialism 103	military : positive 104				
military : negative 105	freedom and human rights 201				
peace 106	constitutionalism : positive 203				
internationalism : positive 107	political authority 305				
democracy 202	free market economy 401				
market regulation 403	economic incentives 402				
economic planning 404	protectionism : negative 407				
protectionism : positive 406	economic orthodoxy 414				
controlled economy 412	welfare state limitation 505				
nationalisation 413	national way of life : positive 601				
welfare state expansion 506	traditional morality: positive 603				
education expansion 506	law and order 605				
labour groups : positive 701	civic mindedness : positive 606				

The main **independent** variable, namely government participation, is operationalized by a dichotomous variable (value "0" or "1"). Both for the regional and national policy-making level this variable needed to be mapped for the whole life cycle of the 48 regionalist parties included in this study (see: [Appendix A](#)). Drafting this overview required extensive historical in-depth research. Up until now, only fragmented overviews on this matter existed. For the national level the "0" and "1" values were aligned with the existing ParlGov dataset (Döring and Manow, 2018), which already provides "0" and "1" values for incumbent parties in postwar national governments. In fact, this means that coalition support as well as caretaker governments are also labeled as "1"-values here.

Descriptive statistics and group comparisons (=variance analyses) were performed for the set of 181 relevant manifesto-cases. Next, additional *binary* variables are created, allowing to distinguish separate effects for the different tiers of governments. Also, two additional *ordinal* variables "PAIRNAT" (1st-5th) and "PAIRREG" (1st-9th) filter out sequential pairs of party's manifestos before ("0"-situation) and after ("1"-situation) their government entry at the respective policy-making level.

Results

a. Descriptive statistics

Mean values, standard deviations and standard errors are computed for the three ideological clusters. [Table 2](#) provides an overview of average salience and position for the regionalist party type along the three main ideological dimensions of party competition. Only the most prominent results are reported underneath. From the 181 manifesto-cases, 27,6% were publicized during participation in national government and 45,9% during regional government incumbency. These figures are in line with previous research on affiliated party types (Tronconi, 2015). For sure, the defining criterion of the regionalist party type is their devotion to the territorial issue, with an overall average saliency score of 11,5%. This is a high percentage since this ideological dimension is composed of merely two issues. Furthermore, 94% of the statements on this bipolar axis are positioned on the decentralization-side, reflecting their firm stance on self-determination. Overall, regionalist parties appear to be principally

left wing-orientated when looking at the average RILE scale (-9) and at the saliency of leftist (20,9%) versus rightist (14,9%) social-economic issues. Concerning the liberal-authoritarian cluster, their average saliency is 31,7% but is clearly leaning more towards liberal (24,3%) instead of authoritarian topics (6,7%). This is also reflected in their overall (“weighted”) liberal-oriented position (+12) on a factual -50/+50 scale.

Table 2: Regionalist party type : Average salience and position

Descriptive Statistics	N=181		
	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Dev.
Avg. Soc-ec cluster salience	27,59	0,76	10,23
Avg. Terr cluster salience	11,52	0,6	8,12
Avg. Lib-auth cluster salience	31,68	0,81	10,88
Avg. Ri-le position	-9,03	1,02	13,73
Avg. Terr. Position	11,4	0,61	8,2
Avg. Lib-auth position	11,96	1,44	19,34

Next, the manifesto-cases are split into different groups by introducing the main independent variable. This allows for more specific comparisons. Government incumbency is operationalized twice by a dichotomous variable with values “0” and “1”, once at the national and once at the regional level (see: [Table 3](#)).

Surprisingly, the figures show a *higher* territorial saliency (10,3% versus 14,6%) for manifestos belonging to regionalist parties incumbent at the national level at that moment **versus manifestos** drafted by regionalist parties in national opposition. At the regional level this finding is affirmed, although the difference is less outspoken (10,9% versus 12,3%). The expectation of a significant *higher* social-economic saliency when in executive office is confirmed at the regional (24,7% versus 31%) but not at the national (27,4% versus 28,7%) level. Also, government participation *lowers* liberal-authoritarian saliency both at the regional (34,8% versus 28,1%) and at the national (32,9% versus 28,5%) level.

The two binary variables also allow to split the data into four different groupings. These “net effects” are visualized in [Appendix B](#). Then, for example at the extremes the discrepancy in territorial (10,7% versus 15,9%) and social-economic (24,2% versus 28,7%) saliency scores becomes clearly visible.

From a positional point of view, shifting from a “0” to a “1” situation at the regional level equals with a more centrist stance on the liberal-authoritarian axis (+16,3 versus +6,9) whilst the decentralist and left-right opinion remain rather stable (see: [Table 3](#)). At the national level however, the shift into executive office equals to steady values on the left-right and liberal-authoritarian axis but a more outspoken decentralization opinion (+10,2 versus +14,6). When looking at the “net effects” at the extremes ([Appendix B](#)), the more moderate stances in liberal-authoritarian (+15,7 versus +9,1) and social-economic (-9,6 versus -6,5) topics in situations of government incumbency becomes clearly visible, in line with the expectations. Curiously, incumbency vastly strengthens decentralization opinions at the extremes (+10,6 versus +15,9).

When isolating the manifesto’s belonging to parties who ever participated in (any) government, N drops to 158 cases (see also: [Table 5](#)). Three (VB, PA and SF) of the 48 parties are then filtered out, providing an opportunity to also distinguish effects between parties instead of between manifestos.

However, this party-wise comparisons does not reveal any notable differences, except that those regionalist parties only in opposition are vastly *more* liberal-orientated (+3,5 versus +13,2), hereby confirming the expectation that incumbent regionalist parties tend to converge towards the center of the political spectrum.

Alternatively, manifesto-cases can be split **between groups of parties** according to whether they ever participated in a particular tier over government (N=181 cases: see [Table 4](#)). Surprisingly, at the national level a *lower* social-economic (30,2% versus 26%) and a *higher* territorial (9,1% versus 12,9%) saliency score are found among incumbent regionalist parties. In contrast, at the regional level both social-economic and territorial saliency scores remain more or less stable but liberal-authoritarian saliency is significantly lower (34,7% versus 30,8%) among incumbent regionalist parties. From a positional point of view, manifestos drafted when in national government are more centrist on the RILE-axis (-11 versus -7,9) as expected, but surprisingly radicalize on the territorial axis (+9 versus +12,8) and on the liberal-authoritarian axis (+8 versus +14,3). At the regional level, positional scores prove remarkably stable for the three axes in both governmental and oppositional situations.

b. Variance analysis

The overall figures above camouflage large variances between cases. Therefore, a series of independent T-tests³ are performed to determine whether the observed differences between groups of manifestos or between groups of parties are also statistically significant. With regard to these tests, only those results are presented for which the assumption of normality of the dependent variable is confirmed (Shapiro-Wilks test) and the assumption of homogeneity of variance is confirmed (Levene's test of equality). Again, only the most prominent results are reported underneath. Significant effects are reported with one asterisk when the p-value (Sig. 2-tailed) <0.05; two when <0.01 and three when <0.001.

Primo, discrepancies **between manifestos** when "in" (value=1) and "out" (value=0) of regional government are examined. Significant differences in terms of salience are found for both the social-economic (*higher* when incumbent: 24,7% versus 31,1%) and libertarian-authoritarian (*lower* when incumbent: 34,8% versus 28,1%) issues, but not for territorial ones. In terms of position a significant difference is found for the liberal-authoritarian axis (*less liberal = more* centrist when incumbent: +16,3 versus +6,9) but not for territorial and left-right position. On the other hand, discrepancies **between manifestos** when "in" and "out" of national government are examined – providing a different image. Here, there are significant differences in salience for the territorial (*higher* when incumbent: 10,33% versus 14,64%) and for the liberal-authoritarian cluster (*lower* when incumbent: 32,92% versus 28,5%). The positional side of the medallion only reports a significant difference with regard to the territorial axis: manifesto's publicized when in national government indicate a *more* decentralized discourse (+10,2 versus + 14,6) when compared to situations in national opposition. These results are reported in [Table 3](#).

Table 3: Differences between groups of manifestos

³ This is an inferential statistical test that determines whether there is a statistically significant difference between the means in two unrelated groups, whereby there is one independent, categorical variable that has two levels or groups and one continuous, dependent variable.

Group Statistics - Independent Samples T test (Total N = 181 cases)											
Perspective	In/Out of Reg. Gov.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Er.	In/Out of Nat. Gov.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Er.	
Soc-ec cluster salience	0	98	24,66***	10,69	1,08	0	131	27,42	10,5	0,92	
	1	83	31,05***	8,49	0,93	1	50	28,04	9,58	1,36	
Terr cluster salience	0	98	10,9	7,15	0,72	0	131	10,33***	7,88	0,69	
	1	83	12,25	9,12	1	1	50	14,64***	7,97	1,13	
Lib-auth cluster salience	0	98	34,75***	11,28	1,14	0	131	32,92*	11,17	0,98	
	1	83	28,06***	9,23	1,01	1	50	28,45*	9,47	1,34	
Ri-le position	0	98	-10,29	14,58	1,47	0	131	-9,07	13,08	1,14	
	1	83	-7,53	12,59	1,38	1	50	-8,91	15,45	2,19	
Terr position	0	98	10,82	7,17	0,72	0	131	10,19***	7,98	0,7	
	1	83	12,09	9,27	1,02	1	50	14,58***	8	1,13	
Lib-auth position	0	98	16,28***	21,01	2,12	0	131	11,81	20,52	1,79	
	1	83	6,85***	15,81	1,74	1	50	12,36	16,03	2,27	

Secondo, discrepancies **between parties** when “in” and “out” of national government are computed and reported in [Table 4](#). Significant differences in terms of salience among parties’ manifestos are found for both the social-economic (*lower* when incumbent: 30,2% versus 26,1%) and territorial (*higher* when incumbent: 9,1% versus 12,9%) issues, but not for liberal-authoritarian ones. In terms of position, both the territorial (+9 versus +12,8) and liberal-authoritarian (+8 versus + 14,3) axis display a significant radicalizing effect – contrary to the expectations. Again, discrepancies **between parties** when “in” and “out” of regional government provide a different image. Here, comparing between both situations reveals no significant differences in salience, except for the liberal-authoritarian cluster (*lower* when incumbent: 34,7% versus 30,8%).

Table 4: Differences between groups of parties

Group Statistics - Independent Samples T test (Total N = 181 cases)											
Perspective	In/Out of Reg. Gov.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Er.	In/Out of Nat. Gov.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Er.	
Soc-ec cluster salience	0	42	26,88	11,35	1,75	0	67	30,22**	8,67	1,06	
	1	139	27,8	9,9	0,84	1	114	26,05**	10,78	1,01	
Terr cluster salience	0	42	10,36	7,95	1,23	0	67	9,13**	8,97	1,1	
	1	139	11,87	8,16	0,69	1	114	12,92**	7,25	0,68	
Lib-auth cluster salience	0	42	34,69*	11,37	1,75	0	67	33,33	10,53	1,29	
	1	139	30,78*	10,61	0,9	1	114	30,72	11,02	1,03	
Ri-le position	0	42	-9,96	18,28	2,82	0	67	-11,03	14,69	1,8	
	1	139	-8,75	12,1	1,03	1	114	-7,85	13,06	1,22	
Terr position	0	42	10,3	7,93	1,22	0	67	8,98**	9,05	1,11	
	1	139	11,73	8,28	0,7	1	114	12,82**	7,33	0,69	
Lib-auth position	0	42	10,4	23,03	3,55	0	67	7,98*	20	2,44	
	1	139	12,43	18,15	1,54	1	114	14,29*	18,64	1,75	

Tertio, creating pairs of manifesto-cases per party just “before” and “after” their entry in executive office allows for a time-based analysis, thus detecting policy shifts over time (see: [Table 5](#)). These sequential pairs are identified in the dataset and labeled by introducing two additional ordinal variables - namely “PAIRNAT” and “PAIRREG”. For each variable value=0 indicates situations “before” government entry and value=1/2/3/... indicates situations “after” (consecutive) government entries. Consequentially, regionalist parties’ manifestos who have never participated in any government are filtered out of this analysis, lowering N (again) to 158 cases (cf. *supra*).

For the national level, cases are split between 108 manifestos with value=0 and 50 with value ≥ 1. When binary-coding these values by 0=“before”=“0” and (1-5)=“after”=“1” government entry, the

territorial axis shows a statistical significant difference both for saliency (*higher* when incumbent: 10,4% versus 14,6%) and position (more radical when incumbent: +10,3 versus +14,6). Also, the liberal-authoritarian salience score is deviant (*lower* when incumbent: 32,2% versus 28,5%).

For the regional level, cases are split between 76 manifestos with value=0 and 82 with value ≥ 1 . When binary-coding these values by 0="before"="0" and (1-9)="after"="1" government entry, both the saliency and position perspective show significant differences on the social-economic as well as on the liberal-authoritarian scale. Incumbent situations display a *higher* social-economic salience (24,4% versus 30,9%) and a *less* leftist (or: *more* centrist) position (-11,9 versus -7,5) coupled with a *lower* liberal-authoritarian salience (34,4% versus 27,9%) and a *less* liberal (or: *more* centrist) position (+19,6 versus +7,3). Again, at the regional level the territorial scale appears to remain steady with regard to salience and position.

Table 5: Time-based analysis before ("0") and after ("1") government entry

Group Statistics - Independent Samples T test (Total N = 158 cases)										
Perspective	PAIRREG	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Er.	PAIRNAT	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Er.
Soc-ec cluster salience	0	76	24,38***	11,45	1,31	0	108	27,65	10,94	1,05
	1	82	30,91***	8,45	0,93	1	50	28,04	9,58	1,36
Terr cluster salience	0	76	11,13	6,61	0,76	0	108	10,42**	7,73	0,74
	1	82	12,34	9,15	1,01	1	50	14,64**	7,97	1,13
Lib-auth cluster salience	0	76	34,4***	10,97	1,26	0	108	32,21*	10,85	1,04
	1	82	27,89***	9,15	1,01	1	50	28,45*	9,47	1,34
Ri-le position	0	76	(-)11,87*	12,57	1,44	0	108	-9,92	11,38	1,1
	1	82	(-)7,5*	12,67	1,4	1	50	-8,91	15,45	2,19
Terr position	0	76	11,04	6,65	0,76	0	108	10,26**	7,84	0,75
	1	82	12,17	9,29	1,03	1	50	14,58**	8	1,13
Lib-auth position	0	76	19,56***	18,29	2,1	0	108	13,57	18,77	1,81
	1	82	7,28***	15,43	1,7	1	50	12,36	16,03	2,27

Quarto, one step further would then be to only consider the manifesto-cases of those parties who effectively demonstrate a "0" (=before) and "1" (=after) situation at the national level - in other words, parties that display both a situation where PAIRNAT=0 and a situation where PAIRNAT=1 (Table 6).⁴ This reduces the N in this analysis further to only 99 cases, which might comprise the results.⁵ From a salience point of view, now only the territorial cluster shows a significant difference (*higher* when incumbent: 12,2% versus 15,3%). From a positional point of view, two ideological dimensions show significant differences: the remaining regionalist parties are *more* decentralization-orientated (+12,1 versus +15,2) and less liberal-minded (or: more centrist) (+18,6 versus +9,8).

Analogously, parties that display both a case where PAIRREG=0 and a case where PAIRREG=1 can be assessed (Table 6). The N in this analysis is then reduced to 112 manifesto-cases. In line with expectations, a significant *higher* social-economic (23% versus 30,8%) and a *lower* liberal-authoritarian (34,8% versus 28,9%) salience is detected. When parties enter regional government, they are significantly *less* liberal-orientated (+20,7 versus +8,9) when compared to time periods when they are in regional opposition.

⁴ Note that at this point the ordinal independent variables PAIRNAT and PAIRREG are still converted into a binary variable.

⁵ Indeed, several regionalist parties under study show missing values at this point: some did only participate at the regional policy level, some only show "1" situations, some are only measured at one moment in time, etc.

Table 6: Regionalist Parties displaying both a “0” and a “1” situation (**binary** coding)

Group Statistics - Independent Samples T test										
Perspective	PAIRNAT	N = 99	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Er.	PAIRREG	N = 112	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Er.
Soc-ec cluster salience	0	60	23,63	11,32	1,46	0	56	22,99***	9,95	1,33
	1	39	25,37	7,39	1,18	1	56	30,82***	8,23	1,1
Terr cluster salience	0	60	12,17*	6,14	0,79	0	56	11,3	6,53	0,87
	1	39	15,27*	6,19	0,99	1	56	11,16	7,35	0,98
Lib-auth cluster salience	0	60	32,41	12,24	1,58	0	56	34,8**	11,31	1,51
	1	39	28,21	9,83	1,57	1	56	28,9**	8,43	1,13
Ri-le position	0	60	-7,85	10,62	1,37	0	56	-10,54	11,2	1,5
	1	39	-4,28	10,85	1,74	1	56	-7,16	11,82	1,58
Terr position	0	60	12,12*	6,14	0,79	0	56	11,21	6,59	0,88
	1	39	15,2*	6,25	1	1	56	10,98	7,54	1,01
Lib-auth position	0	60	18,59*	17,87	2,31	0	56	20,69***	18,36	2,45
	1	39	9,75*	16,58	2,66	1	56	8,89***	13,8	1,84

This analysis only provides a global overview between “0” and “1” situations, hereby making abstraction of subsequent government participations : even up to nine in the (regional) case of PNV in Pays Basque and up to five in the (national) case of LN in Italy). [Appendix C](#) provides a fine-grained overview of these (national and regional) sequential pairs of manifestos.

Quinto, the binary variables “PAIRREG” and “PAIRNAT” are converted into ordinal variables again, and only those paired manifesto-cases showing a “0” and subsequent “1” value are kept for further analysis. Each pair resembles a regionalist party going through a period of “immediately before” and “immediately after” government entry.

For the national level, this means that N diminishes to 32 manifestos - that is: 16 pairs stemming from 12 different regionalist parties. For the regional level N diminishes to 40 manifestos – that is: 20 pairs among 15 unique parties. [Appendix C](#) provides an overview of these pairs.

The results of the independent samples T test as reported in [Table 7](#) seem disappointing: neither saliency nor position reveal for any of the three dimensions a significant ideological difference rightly before (“0”) and after (“1”) government entry! The lack of statistical significant differences could be due to the N becoming too low. This low N also renders further examination of 2nd, 3th,... consecutive incumbency situation meaningless. Also, it could be that this time frame is too short to detect ideological shifts. Political parties may change their programmatic profile, but have to maneuver with caution in order not to lose their credibility and reputation. They may modify their saliency and position, however slow and even with a certain delay. As aforementioned, regionalist parties may also display an “ideological persistence” with regard to their primary (territorial) axis when crossing the threshold of government.

Table 7: Regionalist Parties displaying both a “0” and a “1” situation (**ordinal** coding)

Group Statistics - Independent Samples T test										
Perspective	NATPAIR	N = 32	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Er.	REGPAIR	N = 40	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Er.
Soc-ec cluster salience	0	16	26,44	7,79	1,95	0	20	27,66	7,16	1,6
	1	16	26,49	7,76	1,94	1	20	31,49	8,01	1,79
Terr cluster salience	0	16	13,75	4,7	1,17	0	20	12	7,83	1,75
	1	16	14,43	6,85	1,71	1	20	11,74	8,72	1,95
Lib-auth cluster salience	0	16	29,2	10,67	2,67	0	20	31,18	9,95	2,23
	1	16	28,66	10,73	2,68	1	20	29,42	9,81	2,19
Ri-le position	0	16	-11,5	8,46	2,12	0	20	-9,35	12,08	2,7
	1	16	-5,29	11,55	2,89	1	20	-10,31	11,44	2,56
Terr position	0	16	13,73	4,68	1,17	0	20	11,93	7,92	1,77
	1	16	14,32	6,87	1,72	1	20	11,66	8,79	1,97
Lib-auth position	0	16	14,65	16,84	4,21	0	20	13,39	17,02	3,81
	1	16	11,17	16,93	4,23	1	20	10,69	13,35	2,98

c. One Way ANOVA, correlations and GLM

Next, both dichotomous independent variables (in/out nat. gov. and in/out reg. gov.) are merged and converted into one ordinal variable (named "GOVCAT"), which ranges from value=(1) only in opposition; (2) solely national government participation; (3) solely regional government participation; (4) both national and government participation. ⁶ A one way- ANOVA analysis enables to compare between these four groupings of manifesto-cases simultaneously - instead of the parallel pairwise comparisons conducted in the independent T-tests above. [Appendix B](#) shows the descriptive and group statistics for these four groupings. Five out of the six dependent variables (except: RILE position) show a statistical significant difference at the <0,01 level. ⁷

The existing relationship between party ideology (=salience and position scores) and government incumbency (GOVCAT(a)) is highlighted once more when computing the correlations, a figure that shows the magnitude, direction as well as the statistical significance of the relationship (see: [Table 8](#)). In contrast, none of the two added control variables, namely economic welfare and institutional design, show any significant correlation with the dependent variables. "Economic growth" is operationalized by making use of the OECD Data (2018) and for "institutional design" the Regional Authority Index Scores (Hooghe et. al., 2016) were applied. Inserting these controls slightly impacts the numeric relationship between party ideology and government incumbency, they do not affect it fundamentally: see the partial and controlled correlations under (GOVCAT (b)).

Table 8: Correlations between party ideology and government incumbency (+ two control variables)

⁶ Since from the previous empirical findings regionalist parties seem more prepared to maneuver on the ideological dimensions of party competition when aiming for regional executive power, situations of regional government entry are categorized as "3". From their point of view, the stakes are thus higher when it concerns regional government incumbency.

⁷ However, it is noteworthy that the ANOVA simulation only provides (global) insight into the biggest difference between the four groupings and thus not into the (specific) differences between every group.

Correlations					
Perspective		GOVCAT(a)	RAISCORE	EC GROWTH	GOVCAT(b)
Soc-ec cluster salience	Pearson Correlation	0,269***	-0,028	-0,131	0,182*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,74	0,082	0,033
	N	181	144	177	136
Terr cluster salience	Pearson Correlation	0,158*	0,15	-0,1	0,088
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,033	0,072	0,184	0,306
	N	181	144	177	136
Lib-auth cluster salience	Pearson Correlation	(-)0,324***	-0,045	0,119	(-)0,253**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,594	0,113	0,003
	N	181	144	177	136
Ri-le position	Pearson Correlation	0,085	-0,006	-0,033	0,225*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,253	0,94	0,661	0,008
	N	181	144	177	136
Terr position	Pearson Correlation	0,154*	0,158	-0,097	0,084
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,038	0,059	0,197	0,325
	N	181	144	177	136
Lib-auth position	Pearson Correlation	(-)0,198**	0,002	0,108	(-)0,238**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,008	0,979	0,153	0,005
	N	181	144	177	136

Finally, a (multivariate) General Linear Model Analysis gives a more specific view on the explanatory value of the included variables. Again, both the measurements for economic growth and territorial decentralization are inserted as control variables here.

Table 9: **GLM** (Independent Variable = GOVCAT; Covariates = RAISCORE ; EC GROWTH)

(Multivariate) General Linear Model - Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Perspective (Dependent variable)	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	F	Sig. (two-tailed)	Partial Eta Squared	R ² for corrected model
Soc-ec cluster salience	1257,26	3	6,115	0,001	0,12	0,146 (Adj. = 0,114)
Terr cluster salience	586,205	3	4,999	0,003	0,101	0,117 (Adj. = 0,084)
Lib-auth cluster salience	1061,83	3	3,471	0,018	0,072	0,079 (Adj. = 0,044)
Ri-le position	1283,033	3	3,058	0,031	0,064	0,068 (Adj. = 0,033)
Terr position	586,849	3	4,949	0,003	0,1	0,118 (Adj. = 0,085)
Lib-auth position	3843,793	3	3,49	0,018	0,072	0,082 (Adj. = 0,048)

In general, the results provide additional empirical evidence for the pairwise findings above. For each of the six conducted tests the relationship between government incumbency and party ideology proves to be statistically significant at the <0,05 level (see: [Table 9](#)). Partial Eta Squared then indicates the net explanatory value of the main independent variable for each dependent variable: e.g. 12% of the variation in social-economic salience can be explained by the variation in government participation. This value ranges between 6 and 12%, which makes it a modest but relevant predictor within the discipline of social sciences since a lot of other factors can play a role here. Adding the two control variables does not really augment these numbers (see R² for the explanatory value of the whole model).

Discussion

The conducted variance analyses are summarized in [Table 10](#), which allows to identify a couple of trends.

Table 10: Summary of the variance analyses

Level	Cluster	Perspective			
		Salience		Position	
NAT 0 -> 1					
	Terr.	↑ (1)	↑ (2)	↑ (3)	↑ (4)
	Soc-ec.	=	↓	=	=
	Lib-auth.	↓	=	↓	=
REG 0 ->1					
	Terr.	=	=	=	=
	Soc-ec.	↑	=	↑	↑
	Lib-auth.	↓	↓	↓	↓

The four symbols in each grid represent (from left to right): (1) comparison between manifestos with $n=181$ as in Table 3 ; (2) comparison between parties with $n=181$ as in Table 4; (3) comparison between pairs coded as “0” and “≥1” with $n=158$ as in Table 5 ; (4) comparison between pairs coded as “0” and “1” with $n=99$ and $n=112$ as in Table 6.

With:

- *centr.* = more centrist ; *rad.* = more radical ; ↑ increase ; ↓ decrease ; = no difference
- $0 \rightarrow 1$ = shift from opposition (0) to government (1) incumbency

In a situation of **national** government incumbency both the **territorial** salience renders higher and the territorial position becomes more radical. This is not easy to explain since these findings run contrary to hypotheses 1b and 3. Two possible political explanations are suggested. First, national government entry might actually trigger regionalist parties even more to endeavor decentralization reforms, since these are eventually decided at the national government level, hereby creating a constitutional sense of urgency (=“now or never”). Secondly, there may also be an “ideological persistence” among regionalist parties, i.e. a reluctance to give in when it comes to their own territorial core business.

Alternatively, it has to be noted that this awkward move could also be ascribed to methodological choices included in this research. For example, the indirect (suboptimal) measurement of policy position that is applied here. Furthermore, there is a possible discrepancy between the discourse in the party platforms and the actions they undertake in reality. Also, “crossing the threshold of government” is only one potential factor influencing party ideology. In addition, the regionalist party family is a heterogeneous group comprised of both moderate and radical parties which might lead to diverging results when being aggregated (cf. supra). Finally, the coding in “0” and “1” situations lacks some nuance: “1” here also includes quasi-opposition situations (caretaker government, informal coalition support, etc.).

Regional government incumbency has a different effect on the **territorial** dimension as it clearly remains stable (“freezing”) in terms of both salience and position. This is a confirmation of hypotheses 2b and 4. Again, this might point to an ideological persistence among regionalist parties when it comes to their own core business. Alternatively, regional government participation might not suffice as a trigger to maneuver in either direction on the territorial dimension, not only because this would not help to create ideological convergence (cf. *infra*), but also because they are primarily dealing with governing issues located within other policy domains at that moment.

With regard to the **social-economic** dimension regionalist parties keep their salience and position remarkably stable at the **national** level in between “0” and “1” situations, which runs contrary to the hypotheses 1a and 3. Simultaneously, at the **regional** level this dimension is clearly subjected to changes in line with hypotheses 2a and 4: a clear increase in salience but also a tendency to take up a more centrist (=less leftist) stance.

Concerning the **liberal-authoritarian** cluster, entering executive office tends to lower its salience and to encourage regionalist parties to hold a more centrist (=less liberal) position, hereby confirming hypotheses 3 and 4. This effect is more outspoken at the **regional** level than at the **national** level. In other words, for this cluster the strength of the effect depends on the tier of government.

The rich literature on party change and party competition helps to explain these findings. Primo, parties do not change their program that easily (“ideological persistence”) since they are actually collective actors that operate in a context of bounded rationality (Toubeau & Wagner, 2016). Parties make rational choices but are also limited by their historical background, their *raison d’être*, their deep ideological roots – which limits their programmatic manoeuvring space if they do not want to lose their credibility and reputation (Rovny, 2015; Wagner & Meyer, 2013; Walgrave & De Swert, 2007). At some moments programmatic change is more problematic than expected, and some issues are more susceptible to change than others. For regionalist parties this might especially be true for their primary (territorial) axis of party competition. In this respect, Pogorelis (2005) proved that the specific social, historical and ideological background of parties are good predictors of their long-term issue salience and position.

Parties can change their programmatic profile but can also display inertia in between two elections. Panebianco (1988) showed that political parties, as “conservative organisations”, have an built-in tendency to organisational inertia. This inertia could be assumed more broadly here, i.e. also as programmatic inertia, helping to explain the observed “ideological persistence”.

Several regionalist parties are real issue entrepreneurs (De Vries & Hobolt, 2012; Wagner & Meyer, 2017) and behave as niche players who timely break into programmatic gaps as they originate from the political agenda. For example, important phenomenon’s such as the revival of territorial politics, the New Politics movement and the growing importance of post-materialist and non-economic values are situated within the same time frame as the development of several regionalist parties (Cole, 2005; Zons, 2015). Indeed, strategic party behavior does not take shape in a vacuum but should be seen in relation to the behavioral pattern of other parties in the arena. Political opponents react to strategic actions (Fabre, 2008) whereby the existing programmatic gaps in the public agenda are (however partially and with delay) filled up again.

Secondo, the much-debated conceptual difference between “mainstream” and “niche” parties ⁸ is useful because both labels are accompanied by a list of behavioral and programmatic characteristics that can be ascribed to them (Meyer & Miller, 2015). For example, niche parties are believed to be more policy-seeking and more single-issue, and to focus more on non-economic issues (Wagner, 2012). Meguid (2008) originally categorized the regionalist party type as a whole as “niche”, but now authors acknowledge that the niche-ness of a party rather varies over time, and that this label cannot be attributed to a party family as a whole (Meyer & Wagner, 2013).

Still, many authors link regionalist parties with the niche party label and its defining characteristics. Many regionalist parties primarily claim issues on the territorial axis, while their principal political opponents (= the “mainstream” parties) primarily claim issues on the social-economic axis (Alonso, Cabeza & Gomez, 2015). Walgrave & De Swert (2007) even argue that a “division of labour” arises on the basis of which political parties start to specialize and differentiate from each other. Again, this can partly explain why regionalist parties are reluctant to give in to their primary (territorial) dimension and more willing to move on their secondary (social-economic and liberal-authoritarian) dimension.

Tertio, the location of a political party within the “center-periphery” spectrum is a reliable predictor for its susceptibility for ideological party change (Mazzoleni, 2009). “Peripheral” parties, among which the regionalist parties are frequently categorized (Tronconi, 2015), are associated with policy-seeking strategies and are considered ideologically less flexible compared to “centrist” parties. The latter are more associated with vote-seeking and office-seeking strategies. Peripheral parties’ ideology is more resistant to external shocks and they are less willing to change their salience or position since they are under the compelling supervision of a loyal rank and file (Mazzoleni, 2009). ⁹ Again, these behavioral characteristics can help to explain the observed reluctance among regionalist parties to move on their territorial core business, but also gives insight in the rather limited movements on the two other ideological dimensions when it concerns the national policy-making level. At the regional level the movements on both secondary axes are of a bigger magnitude: this discrepancy between the two policy-levels requires further explanation as well (cf. *infra*).

Quarto, previous scholars have demonstrated that newer and younger parties have a sharper ideological profile and thus have a stronger issue ownership (Walgrave & De Swert, 2007). Regionalist parties often belong to this younger category (Wagner, 2012). Hepburn (2009) demonstrated that regionalist parties will only thicken their profile over time as they enter into continued electoral competition with “established”, “state-wide” parties. This process of programmatic broadening comes with a delay, however, again helping to explaining ideological “freezing” at some moments (cf. *supra*).

Quinto, regionalist parties may prefer not to give in to their territorial core business but are rather flexible on the two other dimensions of party competition. Adopting such a multi-dimensional party strategy adds to understand the moves on the social-economic and the liberal-authoritarian axes. These moves are more outspoken at the regional level than at the national level, maybe reflecting regionalist parties’ natural preference to govern their own region over co-governing at the national level. The deliberate centrist move on both dimensions at the regional level then shows a clear willingness to compromise on these two domains in order to create ideological convergence with

⁸ In terms of salience, “niche” is the degree to which an issue highlighted by one party is neglected by its political opponents, while in terms of position “niche” mainly refers to the ideological distance between parties on a same (non-economic) issue. Therefore, “niche” is not an obsolete but rather a relational label: the niche-ness of a party depends on the issue emphasis and issue position of political opponents – factors that are susceptible to temporal variation.

⁹ Mazzoleni also demonstrated that peripheral parties have kept their emphasis for decentralization rather constant over time (2009).

potential coalition partners (cf. *supra*). This double centrist move on the *positional* perspective is in line with the expectations.

And whilst the higher social-economic *saliency* is an affirmation of the expectation, the lower liberal-authoritarian saliency isn't. The latter cluster of issues is gladly used by regionalist parties to narrate their communal feelings expressing a "sense of belonging together". Taking up governmental responsibility however deprives them to freely make use of this (often polarizing) language, *inter alia* since it can cause friction with coalition partners. A so-called "**substitution**" party strategy could then help to explain this parallel move: regionalist parties express their community-building feelings in an alternative way by translating this discourse into social-economic notions (e.g. welfare chauvinism). An alternative, adding interpretation for the increased social-economic saliency could be an "**inverse subsuming**" party strategy, whereby regionalist parties articulate their territorial demands (their primary axis) through a social-economic lens (their secondary axis). This assumption amends the existing theoretical framework of party strategies as laid out by Elias, Szocsik & Zuber (2015).

In any way, these explanations share the idea that regionalist parties alternate between dimensions of party competition, and thus employ a rather specific, multi-dimensional party strategy adjusted to the tier of government in question.

Lastly, there is the pairwise comparison of chronological couples of parties' manifestos showing consecutively a "0" and "1" situation. This was the last step in the conducted variance analyses (ordinal coding, see [Table 7](#)). The output seemed disappointing since no significant difference was found between immediately "before" and "after" government entry. This finding could be due to "ideological persistence" but rather highlights that party ideology needs to be observed over a longer time span and depends also on other variables than solely government participation.

The ANOVA, correlation and GLM analyses complete the picture of the empirical relationship between party ideology and government participation. All of the observed ideological movements can partly be explained by the transition to executive office, however government participation alone cannot account for the whole of the ideological moves measured on each dimension, even when controlling for economic welfare and institutional decentralization. Therefore, other factors will need to be investigated.

Conclusions

Regionalist parties employ a multi-dimensional party strategy when maneuvering into executive office. The territorial demand is and remains their programmatic core business, rendering it even more prominent when entering national government while keeping it constant when entering regional government. This is contrary to expectations and might be due to an "ideological persistence" as well as to a constitutional "sense of urgency" among these regionalist parties.

Political parties operate in a context of bounded rationality which limits their programmatic maneuvering space more than one would initially expect. Regionalist parties, often categorized as "niche", "peripheral", and "newer" parties, are particularly reluctant to move on their primary (territorial) axis of party competition.

Movements on the two other dimensions of party competition are rather limited when entering national government but more outspoken in the case of regional government incumbency. This

willingness to compromise on other domains is actually necessary if regionalist parties want to create ideological convergence with potential coalition partners. In brief, regionalist are not inclined to give in to their territorial core business but are rather flexible on social-economic and liberal-authoritarian issues.

With regard to the social-economic dimension the results are in line with the expectations at the regional level but are in contrast with the hypotheses put forward at the national level. Since this dimension constitutes the primary axis of most “established”, “state-wide” parties, it is most likely that ideological convergence will need to be found here. The natural preference of regionalist parties to primarily govern their own region over co-governing at the national level can be the trigger to initiate bigger shifts within this domain at the regional than at the national level.

For the liberal-authoritarian cluster the strength of the saliency and positional effect clearly depends on the tier of government. When crossing the threshold of government regionalist parties hold a more centrist position on this axis, hereby confirming the hypotheses at the regional as well as at the national tier of government.

There were no specific expectations formulated on beforehand concerning salience for this third dimension, but a decrease at both policy-levels is visible in the results. Since government incumbency hampers the ability to hold a polarizing community-building discourse as captured by the liberal-authoritarian cluster, regionalist parties might opt to “substitute” this language for a similar narrative, however now expressed in social-economic terms (e.g. welfare chauvinism), which simultaneously explains the increased social-economic saliency. Alternatively, increased social-economic saliency can be explained by an “inverse subsuming” party strategy whereby regionalist parties articulate their territorial demands (their primary axis) through a social-economic lens (their secondary axis). This would be an amendment to the existing theoretical framework of party strategies as laid out by Elias et al (2015).

In any way, these explanations share the idea that regionalist parties alternate between dimensions of party competition, and thus employ a specific, multi-dimensional party strategy adjusted to the tier of government in question. It is the central claim of this article. Having used two possible benchmarks for measurement, i.e. comparisons between manifestos and between parties, it is noteworthy that the former is preferred since it actually provides more detail and nuance in the assessment. As an avenue for further research, to get a better insight in the relationship between party ideology and government incumbency, ideological change and stability probably needs to be observed over a longer time span and by other means than just party manifesto's.

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Appendix A:

The case selection of the regionalist parties (motivation and overview)

Next to the thirty-six initially identified regionalist parties, the following twelve parties were included on personal initiative in this study: Foro Asturia, EH Bildu, En Comun, Compromis-Equo, Amaiur, Democràcia i Libertat, South Schleswig Voters Union, En Marea, A La Valencianna, Autonomy Liberty Democracy, Swedish People's Party, In Common We Can.

From the **240 potential manifesto-cases**, the following were excluded:

UUP a.d. 1949 (NIRE, rowe 203) : missing values for the frequencies of nearly all the categories **(-1)**

and UUP a.d. 1921 + 1933 + 1938 + 1945 + 1953 + 1958 + 1965 + 1969 (NIRE, rowe 197, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 207, 208) : no territorial score attributed (missing values) for several years, and finally opted not to classify this as a regionalist party. **(-8) → whole UP (-12)**

also: UP a.d. 1965 (NIRE, rowe 207): no score attributed to the liberal-authoritarian scale (missing values in the frequencies of several categories)

LdT a.d. 2011 (CH, rowe 178) : missing values for the frequencies of different codes **(-1)**

LN a.d. 2006 (ITA, rowe 52): no score attributed to the territorial scale (missing values) **(-1)**

CDU/CSU a.d. 1957 + 1961 + 1965 + 1969 + 1972 + 1990 + 1994 (GER, rows 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 164, 166): finally opted not to classify this as a regionalist party but rather as a regional party. **(-7) → whole CSU (-19)**

SF a.d. 1997 + 2002 + 2011 (IRE, rows 210, 211, 213): no score attributed to the territorial scale (missing values). Finally opted not to classify this as a regionalist party **(-3) → whole SF (-5)**

SFP a.d. 1945 + 1948 + 1951 + 1954 + 1966 + 1987 + 1991 + 1995 + 1999 (FIN, rows 223, 224, 225, 226, 229, 235, 236, 237, 238): no score attributed to the territorial scale (missing values). Finally opted not to classify this as a regionalist party **(-9) → whole SFP (-19)**

UP a.d. 2016 (ESP, rowe 141): Podemos is actually not a regionalist party as the research object is strictly defined in this study, although it is categorized as such in the MARPOR database. **(-1)**

FDF and PRL-FDF are considered as a whole, as one continuous political formation. This is open for debate, but FDF constitutes an major faction with the electoral alliance PRL-FDF. Same logic is applied in the case of Compromis, En Marea, En Comun.

➔ Finally, 181 manifesto-cases remain.

PARTY	FULL NAME	COUNTRY	IN/OUT CMP DATASET	IN/OUT S&M CLASS.	IN/OUT OWN STUDY	NUMBER OF CODED MANIFESTOS	REGIONAL GOV PARTICIPATION	NATIONAL GOV PARTICIPATION
VU	Volksunie	BEL	IN	IN	IN	13 + 1 CVV + 1 in cartel with ID21	1981-1985 and 1988-1995 and 1999-2003 (Flanders) and 1989-1999 (Brussels)	1977-1979 and 1988-1991
FDF	Front Democratique Francophone	BEL	IN	IN	IN	10 + 2 cartel with PRL	1989-2004 and 2014-... (Brussels)	1977-1980 and 1999-2003
RW	Rassemblement Wallon - Walloon Rally	BEL	IN	IN	IN	6	Only in opposition	1974-1977
N-VA	Nieuw Vlaamse Alliantie - New Flemish Alliance	BEL	IN	IN	IN	3 (+ 1 own coding (2014))	2004-2014 (Flanders)	2007-2008 and 2014-...
VB	Vlaams Belang - Flemish Interest	BEL	IN	IN	IN	10	Only in opposition	Only in Opposition
BQ	Bloc Quebecois	CAN	IN	IN	IN	8	Only active in general elections	2006-2011 (0,5 min. Gov. support oa. Budget approval)
LDT	Ticino League	CH	IN	IN	IN	2	1995-... (Ticino)	Only in Opposition
MCG	Geneva Citizens' Movement	CH	IN	IN	IN	1	2013-... (Geneva)	Only in Opposition
EE	Basque Left - Euskadiko Ezkerra	ESP	IN	IN	IN	5	1978-1980 and 1991-1993 (Basque)	Only in Opposition
PAR	Aragonese Regionalist Party - Partido Aragonés	ESP	IN	IN	IN	6	1987-1993 and 1995-2005 (Aragon)	Only in Opposition
PNV	Basque Nationalist Party - Partido Nacionalista Vasco	ESP	IN	IN	IN	13	1978-2009 and 2012-... (Basque) and 1999-2003 (Navarre)	1982-1986 and 1993-2000 and 2015-2016 (0,5 caretaker) and 2016-2018
EA	Basque Solidarity - Eusko Alkartasuna	ESP	IN	IN	IN	6	1991 and 1995-2009 (Basque) and 1999-2003 (Navarre)	Only in Opposition
PA	Andalusian Party - Partido Andalucista	ESP	IN	IN	IN	6	Only in opposition (Andalucia)	Only in Opposition
CHA	Aragonist Council - Chunta Aragonesista	ESP	IN	IN	IN	2	2015-... (Aragon)	Only in Opposition
UPN	Navarrese People's Union - Unión del Pueblo Navarro	ESP	IN	IN	IN	2	1991-1995 and 1996-2015 (Navarra)	2011-2015
GBAI	Gerao Bai - Future Yes (= PNV+ in Region of Navarre)	ESP	IN	PNV since 2015	IN	1	2015-... (Navarra)	Only in Opposition
FAC	Asturias Forum - Foro Asturia	ESP	IN	OUT	IN	1	2011-2012 (Asturias)	2015-2016 (0,5 caretaker gov.)
EH Bildu	Basque Country Unite - EH Bildu	ESP	IN	OUT	IN	2	2015-... (Navarra)	2015-2016 (0,5 caretaker gov.)
BNG	Galician Nationalist Bloc - Bloque Nacionalista Galego	ESP	IN	IN	IN	5	2005-2009 (Galicia)	2004-2008
ECP	En Común Podemos (in Catalonia) - In Common We Can (= part of UPodemos)	ESP	IN	OUT	IN	2	Only in opposition (Catalunia)	2015-2016 (0,5 caretaker gov.)
CQ	Coalicio Compromis - Compromis-Equo	ESP	IN	OUT	IN	1	2015-2019 (Valencia)	2015-2016 (0,5 caretaker gov.)
EM	En Marea - In Tide = ANOVA + Podemos + EU (Galicia) = Deel Upodemos	ESP	IN	OUT	IN	2	Only in opposition (Galicia)	2015-2016 (0,5 caretaker gov.)
CPE	Compromís (=CQ)-Podemos-És el moment Commitment - We can It is time (=since 2016 : "A La Valencianna")	ESP	IN	OUT	IN	2	2015-... (Valencia)	2015-2016 (0,5 caretaker gov.)
CC	Canarian Coalition - Coalición Canaria	ESP	IN	IN	IN	8	1993-...	1996-2008 and 2015-2016 (0,5 caretaker gov.)
CIU	Convergence and Union - Convergència i Unió (=CDC+UDC)	ESP	IN	IN	IN	10	1980-2003 and 2010-2015	1993-2004
CDC	Democratic Convergence of Catalonia - Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya	ESP	IN	IN	IN	1	1980-2003 and 2010-2017	1993-1996 and 2015-2016 (0,5 caretaker gov.)
ERC	Catalan Republican Left - Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya	ESP	IN	IN	IN	13	1984-1988 and 2003-2010 and 2015-2017	2004-2008 and 2015-2016 (0,5 caretaker gov.)
AMA	Amaiur (=predecessor GBAI = EA+Aralar)	ESP	IN	OUT	IN	1	Electoral alliance, only active in the general elections ESP 2011 and 2015	2015-2016 (0,5 caretaker gov.)
DL	Democracy and Freedom - Democràcia i Llibertat (=CDC+ in 2015)	ESP	IN	OUT	IN	1	1980-2003 and 2010-2017	1993-1996 and 2015-2016
UP	United We Can - Unidos Podemos in 2016	ESP	IN	OUT	OUT	1	Only in Opposition	2015-2016 (0,5 caretaker gov.)
SFP	Swedish People's Party - Svenska folkpartiet i Finland	FIN	IN	OUT	OUT	19	20 regions in FIN but no regional elections (only municipal and national elections)	1945-1946 and 1948-1954 and 1954-1957 and 1958-1959 and 1962-1964 and 1966-1968 and 1970 , 1972 and 1975-1977 and 1979-2015
CDU/CSU	Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union	GER	IN	IN	OUT	19	1946-... (Bayern)	1949-1969 and 1980-1998 and 2005-...
BP	Bavarian party	GER	IN	IN	IN	1	1954-1957 and 1962-1966 (Bayern)	Only in Opposition
SSW	South Schleswig Voters Union	GER	IN	OUT	IN	1	2005-2005 and 2012-... (Schleswig)	Only in Opposition
PDS	Party of Democratic Socialism	GER	IN	IN	IN	4 + 1 kartel Die Linke	1998-2006 (Mecklenburg) and 2002-2011 (Berlin) and 1994-2002 (0,5 Sachsen ; SPD-led min. gov. support)	Only in Opposition
PDS*	Party of Democratic Socialism	(EAST) GER	IN	IN	IN	1	1998-2006 (Mecklenburg) and 2002-2011 (Berlin) and 1994-2002 (0,5 Sachsen ; SPD-led min. gov. support)	Only in Opposition
UP	Ulster Unionist Party	NIRE	IN	IN	IN	13	1921-1975 and 1998-2003 and 2007-2016	1922-1923 and 1924-1929 and 1931-1945 and 1951-1964 and 1970-1974
LN	Lega Nord	ITA	IN	IN	IN	7	1994-...	1994-1996 (0,5 caretaker) and 2001-2006 and 2008-2011 (0,5 technocraten) and 2018-...
SVP	South Tyrolean People's Party - Südtiroler Volkspartei	ITA	IN	IN	IN	2	1948-2017	1968-1972 and 1994-1996 (0,5) and 2006-2008 (1) and 2008-2011 (0,5)
ALD	Autonomy Liberty Democracy (Aosta Valley) - Autonomie Liberté Démocratie	ITA	IN	OUT	IN	1	Only in opposition (Aoste Valley)	2006-2008 (1)
VdA = UV	Autonomy Progress Federalism Aosta Valley = Valdostan Union in national elections	ITA	IN	IN	IN	1	1946-1954 and 1959-1966 and 1974-1990 and 1993-2017	1994-1996 (0,5 caretaker gov.)
PC	Plaid Cymru	UK	IN	IN	IN	1	2007-2011	Only in Opposition
SNP	Scottish National Party	UK	IN	IN	IN	4	2007-2017	Only in Opposition
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party	UK	IN	IN	IN	4	1921-1975 and 1998-2003 and 2007-2016	1922-1923 and 1924-1929 and 1931-1945 and 1951-1964 and 1970-1974
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party	UK	IN	IN	IN	4	1998-2003 and 2007-2017	2017-...
SF	Sinn Féin - We Ourselves	UK (NIRE)	IN	IN	IN	3	1998-2003 and 2007-2017	Abstention
SF	Sinn Féin - We Ourselves	IRE	IN	IN	IN	5	Unitary state	Only in Opposition
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party	UK	IN	IN	IN	1	1974-1975 and 1998-2003 and 2007-2016	Informal support to Labour Whip in 1974-1979 and 1997-2010

Appendix B: Saliency and Position scores in four different scenario's

Descriptive Statistics per policy-level (net effects) (Total N = 181 cases)					
In/Out of Nat. Gov.	In/Out of Reg. Gov.	"GOVCAT"	Perspective	N	Mean
0	0	1	Avg. Soc-ec cluster salience	82	24,28
		1	Avg. Terr cluster salience	82	10,70
		1	Avg. Lib-auth cluster salience	82	34,83
		1	Avg. Ri-le position	82	-9,57
		1	Avg. Terr. Position	82	10,63
		1	Avg. Lib-auth position	82	15,68
0	1	2	Avg. Soc-ec cluster salience	49	32,68
		2	Avg. Terr cluster salience	49	9,70
		2	Avg. Lib-auth cluster salience	49	29,72
		2	Avg. Ri-le position	49	-8,23
		2	Avg. Terr. Position	49	9,45
		2	Avg. Lib-auth position	49	5,32
1	0	3	Avg. Soc-ec cluster salience	16	26,64
		3	Avg. Soc-ec cluster salience	16	26,64
		3	Avg. Lib-auth cluster salience	16	34,37
		3	Avg. Ri-le position	16	-13,98
		3	Avg. Terr. Position	16	11,80
		3	Avg. Lib-auth position	16	19,36
1	1	4	Avg. Soc-ec cluster salience	34	28,70
		4	Avg. Terr cluster salience	34	15,93
		4	Avg. Lib-auth cluster salience	34	25,66
		4	Avg. Ri-le position	34	-6,53
		4	Avg. Terr. Position	34	15,90
		4	Avg. Lib-auth position	34	9,06

Group Statistics-One Way ANOVA (Total N = 181 cases) Between&Within Groups					
Perspective	Sum of Squares	df	F	Sig.	
Soc-ec cluster salience ***	2226,50	3,00	7,91	0,000	
Terr cluster salience **	881,37	3,00	4,74	0,003	
Lib-auth cluster salience ***	2346,22	3,00	7,29	0,000	
Ri-le position	661,10	3,00	1,17	0,322	
Terr position **	926,10	3,00	4,89	0,003	
Lib-auth position **	4459,81	3,00	4,19	0,007	

Appendix C

a) Pairs of “0” and “1” situations at the national policy making level (ranging from 1 to 5 consecutive government participations)

PARTY	PAIRNAT 1	PAIRNAT 2	PAIRNAT 3	PAIRNAT 4	PAIRNAT 5
BNG	2000-2004	2008			
BQ	2004-2006	2008	2011		
CC	1993-1996	2000	2004	2008	
CC	2011-2015	2016			
CIU	1989-1993	1996	2000	2004	
ERC	2000-2004	2008			
ERC	2011-2015	2016			
FDF	1974-1977	1978			
LN	1992-1994	1996	2001	2006	2008
NVA	2003-2007				
PNV	1979-1982	1986			
PNV	1989-1993	1996	2000		
PNV	2011-2015	2016			
RW	1971-1974	1977			
VU	1974-1977	1978			
VU	1987-1991				

b) Pairs of “0” and “1” situations at the regional policy making level (ranging from 1 to 9 consecutive government participations)

PARTY	PAIRREG 1	PAIRREG 2	PAIRREG 3	PAIRREG 4	PAIRREG 5	PAIRREG 6	PAIRREG 7	PAIRREG 8	PAIRREG 9
BNG	2004-2008								
CIU	1979-1982	1986	1989	1993	1996	2000			
CIU	2008-2011								
DUP	1997-2001	2015							
EA	1993-1996	2000	2004	2008					
EE	1979-1982								
ERC	1982-1986								
ERC	2000-2004	2008							
ERC	2011-2015	2016							
FDF	1987-1991								
LN	1992-1994	1996	2001	2006	2008	2013			
PAR	1986-1989	1993	2000						
PDS	1990-1994	1998	2002	2005					
PNV	1977-1979	1982	1986	1989	1993	1996	2000	2004	2008
PNV	2011-2015	2016							
SF	1997-2001	2015							
SNP	2001-2015								
UUP	1997-2001	2015							
VU	1978-1981	1985							
VU	1987-1991	1995	1999						