

7 Patterns of regional democracy

Government forms and performance in federal and decentralized West European countries

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Introduction

During the last 40 years, the combined processes of decentralization and Europeanization have strongly strengthened the regions in Europe as systems of representation, delegation and political accountability, endowed with specific parties and party systems, with directly elected assemblies, executive powers and with their own public services. Today, many European regions can be conceived as fully-fledged democratic political systems and thus allow an analysis of their institutional configurations through comparative research and an assessment of classic democratic enquiries similar to those used for comparing countries.

The aim of this chapter is to develop specific methodological and analytical instruments for evaluating how democratic regions have developed different institutional structures and how these variations can impact on their public policy capabilities. In his seminal work *Patterns of Democracy* (1999, 2012), Arend Lijphart concludes that the institutional design may shape not only the democratic performance of a polity, but also its socio-economic public policies. This chapter applies Lijphart's analytical approach to the regional political systems of federal and decentralized countries in Western Europe.

The research design we develop in the chapter is based on this conceptualization, but it considers also the critiques that have been formulated over the years. We have also added some variables specifically linked to the regional political phenomenon. In this context, it is relevant to question not only the validity of Lijphart's conclusions on the quality of democracy at regional level, but also to assess the impact of institutional configurations at national level on regional democratic functioning. We thus develop a research design for assessing to what extent regional institutions and processes vary within countries and across countries and, to what extent regional institutions correspond to the 'majoritarian versus consensus' model elaborated by Lijphart almost two decades ago. Our main normative argument is that the institutional form of West European regions has an impact on their performance not only in terms of democratic processes, but also in terms of public policy achievements.

Most fundamentally, this chapter aims to overcome the nation-centric bias in mainstream research on the quality of democracy by integrating existing scholarship on democratic governance with tailored research designs aimed at measuring democratic quality in multilevel systems.

The quality of democracy at sub-national level

During the last 40 years, several European countries have launched a process of transfer of policy competences and powers from the central (unitary) state to the regional level of government. Some countries have set up a fully-fledged federal model, others an asymmetric form of federalism and regionalization, and a few countries have only engaged in limited reforms by delegating or de-concentrating competences to specific regions. Several scholars have shown that the combined processes of globalization, decentralization and Europeanization have strengthened the specificities of the regions as systems of political representation, delegation and accountability, endowed with specific parties and party systems, with directly elected assemblies, executive powers and with their own civil services, decision-making processes and policy outputs (Keating, 1998; Loughlin, 2001; Swenden, 2006, Carter and Pasquier; 2006; Hooghe *et al.*, 2010 and 2016). This is particularly the case in regions with a strong civil society and cultural identities distinct from those of their respective state-wide political systems, like Scotland, Catalonia or Flanders.

Nowadays, scholarly literature conceives many European regions as fully-fledged democratic political systems. A structured assessment of their institutional configurations through a comparative research design similar to those used for comparing countries could contribute to develop the literature on the quality of democratic governance. The complexity that sub-national political systems have achieved during the last three decades suggests that a pertinent research question would explore to what extent regional institutions and processes vary between and within states in Europe. The results of such a line of empirical enquiry may indicate the prospects and limits of institutional engineering on the enhancement of the representative systems and legitimacy at regional level (Loughlin, 2001). This chapter thus discusses the regional dimension of the assessment of the democratic performance of contemporary political regimes. The trend towards more regionalization and devolution processes and the data availability at this level of government indeed makes such a research both empirically relevant and feasible.

In his seminal *Polyarchy. Participation and Opposition*, Robert Dahl stressed that ‘even within a country, sub-national units often vary in the opportunities they provide for contestation and participation’ (1971: 14). However, existing research on democratic governance is strongly biased by methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Schiller, 2002; Jeffery, 2008; Jeffery and Schakel, 2013). This holds particularly true for advanced and European democracies, while some theoretical and empirical studies have been developed for studying the quality of sub-national democracy in other geographical areas and

particularly in Latin America (see for instance Linz and de Miguel, 1966; O'Donnell, 1993; Putnam, 1993; Cornelius *et al.*, 1999; Montero and Samuels, 2004; O'Donnell *et al.*, 2004; Falletti, 2010; Gervasoni, 2010). The need to overcome the nation-centric bias in mainstream research on the quality of democracy is crucial if we consider to what extent the regional level is important for democracy. If we focus in particular on European countries, the relevance of democratic regimes at sub-national level is mainly related to the substantial variation in the type of regional institutional settings than can be found within and between European Union (EU) member states.

EU member states are nowadays characterized by a large variety of state structures in terms of territorial distribution of power, which ranges from federal to highly centralized settings. If initially regions were administrative and spatial units for economic planning, since the 1970s a process of empowerment of the regional level of governance has emerged. As a result, the weight of regional actors on national politics has increased, thanks for instance to second chambers, reserved seats in national executives, veto powers, etc. Some countries have set up forms of asymmetric decentralization (for instance in Spain and Italy) while others have endowed their sub-national authorities with specific representation in national institutions (reserved seats in parliament, government, etc.) and EU institutions. At the EU level the role and powers of sub-national authorities has also been strengthened through the Committee of the Regions, the development of regional policies and structural funds, the subsidiarity principle, treaty provisions stating the regional participation in EU council, etc.

Even in terms of traditional political representation processes, the role and specificities of regional authorities have been strengthened: the degree of territorialization of voting patterns in regional elections and in national elections at regional level has been growing, with the emergence of increasing differences in turnout, differences in voting rights (for instance voting from abroad), different electoral systems (proportional vs. majoritarian), direct elections of governors, etc. (Dandoy and Schakel, 2013; Schakel, 2017). Some regions have directly elected assemblies or parliaments, others do not (for instance in the UK and Portugal). Some regions have elections, others do not; some regions do not participate in national legislative elections (for instance in Washington DC) while some have an over-proportional representation in the upper chamber. Substantial differences persist within and between countries in terms of regional party systems and of patterns party competition at regional level (for instance in Belgium), and are reinforced by the emergence of regional, ethno-regional, autonomist and secessionist parties.

Since regionalization processes and regionalism are not uniform across EU member states, the outcomes differ significantly from one country to the next. If, as a result, several unitary states such as France, Italy or Poland now possess three levels of sub-national government (regional, provincial, local), the complexity of territorial structures of power at regional level in Europe is quite high. The variation concerns a broad range of institutional and political settings: institutions, powers, policy-making capacity, financial resources, EU-state-

region relations, economic development, etc. (Biela *et al.*, 2013). The variety of new forms of territorial action, policy and powers is constantly increasing, and ranges from purely administrative or deconcentrated regions to constitutional regions or regions with primary legislative power. The argument is that democracy varies not only between but also within states and this variation needs to be properly assessed through a tailored analytical framework.

Moreover, several studies (and consociational theory in particular) have shown that the adoption of decentralized forms of governance in Europe facilitates social stability and democratic consolidation especially in multinational states (Lijphart, 1999, 2012; Vatter, 2007, 2009; Norris, 2008). For instance, the creation of directly elected regional assemblies is meant to give citizens multiple points of access and thus larger opportunities for public participation, to increase the accountability and responsiveness of elected officials and to provide incentives for more responsive democratic government. Also, fiscal decentralization is said to decrease corruption and increase the transparency of decision-making.

In many European states there is nowadays a regional system of governance that is nearly as well institutionally equipped as the state level, with direct democracy mechanisms, directly elected legislatures, a specific party system, a government with a Prime Minister or a directly elected President and cabinet ministers, a civil service, including an increasingly powerful ‘corps para-diplomatique’, and regional political elites. Hence, many regions have become fully-fledged political systems that merit attention from comparative analysts for several reasons.

First, while there is no doubt that regional political systems respect the minimal requirements of democracy (respect for civil and political liberties, competitive elections, and separation of powers), it is less clear which ‘model of democracy’ they adopt (parliamentary versus presidential regime, negotiation versus majoritarian democracy, etc.). Nevertheless, comparative analyses of national or federal governments indicate that institutional patterns do matter for explaining their policy outputs, their degree of inclusiveness of (often large) minorities, their democratic accountability and policy-making transparency, their legitimacy (public support) and even their respective regime stability. Hence, the analysis of the variation of regional political-institutional configurations may also contribute to answer the question of ‘do variations in democratic institutions matter?’

Second, the process of regional empowerment has been in many cases triggered by a lack of satisfaction of with the unitary state model and its centrally steered top-down policies of welfare state. Devolution of powers to a lower level (region) is believed to carry significant added value: proximity between decision-makers and citizens allows for better knowledge of citizen preferences, and thus for better tailoring public policies to the needs of specific policy receivers; it produces more transparent policy making and democratic accountability; it allows for stronger citizen participation; it respects rights of regional and other minorities, and thus also contributes to enhancing the legitimacy of the wider national political system. In other words, the

representative quality and policy performance of democracy are enhanced by transferring considerable policy competencies from the state level to democratic regional political institutions. In fact, many regions have introduced new instruments for improving regional and local democracy such as local referendums, popular legislative initiatives, petitions, deliberative and citizen panels, consultative forums, etc.

In this chapter, we focus on regions as spaces for politics and thus present an original research design for analysing, on one hand, the characteristics and the functioning of sub-national political systems in terms of institutional (executive and legislative) organs, electoral systems and party systems features, and on the other hand, democratic and policy outcomes of regional institutions. We aim, on the one hand, at providing an integrated, multidimensional and multilevel longitudinal approach that studies the particularities of regional institutional configurations, their democratic and policy effects, and the determinants of regional variation. On the other hand, we elaborate an original research design that analyses the cross-time, cross-section interplay between sub-national, national or even supranational systems of governance, in order to examine the causes and effects in interregional variation.

Regions in existing democracy measures

In the last two decades, a new strand of literature on democratic governance has burgeoned, aiming at analysing the functioning and differences of democratic regimes on the basis of their 'qualities' or constitutive dimensions democracy (Lijphart 1999, 2012; Altman and Pèrez-Liñan, 2002; O'Donnell *et al.*, 2004; Diamond and Morlino, 2005; Merkel, 2008; Roberts, 2010). These studies develop a quantitative assessment of the performance of democratic regimes. In this context, several academic or non-academic democratic ranking systems have been developed: Freedom House,³ the Vanhanen's index,³ the Democracy index by The Economist,⁴ the Polity Data Series,⁵ the Democracy Barometer,⁶ the V-Dem project⁷ and many others. Without entering the debate on the methodological and analytical pros and cons of each set of indicators and assessment tools (see for instance Munck and Verkuilen, 2002), the importance of democracy indices has grown over time, leading to the almost current redundancy between competing (and often contradicting) measures.

Besides, each of these sets of indicators is based on alternative concepts of democracy, from electoral, to liberal, participatory, or deliberative conceptions, which in turn affect the way in which scholars actually measure democratization and select cases in a way that is reliable, valid and legitimate. The conceptualization of democracy as well as the measurements used and the way in which indicators are aggregated vary significantly from one index to the next.

At least some of these complex indexes measuring the quality of democracy also integrate different territorial levels of analysis in their measures. Besides the seminal work by Norris (2008), which empirically examined the link between federalism, decentralization and democracy with the normative aim of demonstrating that decentralization of political power does strengthen the

quality of democracy, there are two main and academically developed democratic ranking systems that integrate some variables that assess democratic settings at regional level: the Democracy Barometer and V-Dem projects. Yet, these measurements do not indicate a variation of democracy across sub-national units as indicators are common to all regions in a country (where there is no common value for all units, the mean is often used as the score for that specific country, even if V-Dem sometimes includes measures of distributions and outliers for some electoral variables).

Within the Democracy Barometer project (based at the University of Zurich), four variables are used for measuring the quality of democracy at regional level. The first two indicators concern the degree of federalism while the later deals with sub-national fiscal autonomy: federalism (0 = non-federal; 1 = semi-federal; and 2 = federal); bicameralism (0 = unicameral; 1 = weak bicameral; and 2 = strong bicameral); sub-national expenditures as a percentage of the total national expenditures; sub-national revenues as a percentage of the total national revenues.

The V-Dem index of democratic quality (based at the University of Gothenburg and the University of Notre Dame) integrates measures of democracy at sub-national level both in terms of procedure, by adding a clarification to all the questions in the expert survey questionnaire stating that ‘if you think there are large discrepancies between the national/federal and sub-national/state level, please try to average them out before stating your response’, and in terms of specific variables. In total, the index comprehends no less than 22 variables/questions dealing with the ‘regional’ dimension of democracy based on three fundamental elements of democracy – elections, government authority and constraints, and civil liberties (McMann, 2017): four address the existence of sub-national government, four the presence of sub-national elections, two the authority of sub-national elected offices, seven the freeness and fairness of sub-national elections, and five civil liberties.

If these indices in the Democracy Barometer and V-Dem projects provide a crucial background for studying varieties of democracy at regional level, other projects also indirectly discuss sub-national democracy. For instance, the level of quality of government is empirically measured by the Quality of Government Institute (Charron *et al.*, 2014, 2015). This is also the case for works dealing with regional autonomy as the political decentralization measure developed by Faust *et al.*, 2008 that included indicators of sub-national elections, direct democracy and political rights. Another example has to be found in the seminal Regional Authority Index (Hooghe *et al.*, 2010, 2016) that, among others, gathers indicators on the election of the regional assembly and executive.

However, and with the remarkable exception of the Regional Authority Index, the conceptual framework at the basis of each of the above-mentioned indices is developed at the level of national or federal government. Given that this chapter aims at overcoming the nation-centric bias in mainstream research on democratic governance, we need to develop tailored measures for assessing the quality of democracy in multilevel system. In the next two sections, we discuss potential specific methodological and theoretical instruments for measuring democracy at regional level.

Lijphart's model

In order to assess the variation in sub-national institutions – regional in particular – in Western Europe and to measure the quality of democracy at regional level, we develop a research design aimed at replicating Lijphart's *Patterns of Democracy* (1999, 2012) but at the regional level. The analytical framework we propose in this chapter is therefore based on the region as the unit of analysis.

Arend Lijphart presented in his seminal work two ideal-types of democratic regimes, namely 'consensus' versus 'majoritarian' democracy ideal-types, which he distinguished through institutional variation on ten dimensions. On the basis of the empirical analysis of 36 countries between 1945 and 2010, he concluded that the institutional configuration not only affects the quality of representative democracy, but also the policy performance of political regimes. Hence, if we consider many existing regions as nearly full-fledged political systems, we can analyse their institutional arrangements following an approach similar to the one used by Lijphart for comparing states and to test the main hypotheses drawn from current neo-institutionalist theory. The basic idea of this approach is that the dichotomy majoritarian versus consensus democracy developed in Arend Lijphart's work may be a useful conceptual and methodological tool to understand the nature of democracy in European regions and to empirically assess the degree of democratic quality in those government units.

More specifically, Lijphart based his analysis of state institutions on the study of ten variables clustered along two main dimensions: the executive-parties dimension and the federal-unitary dimension. In the first cluster of variables he included indicators measuring the horizontal organization of political power: the relations between executive and legislative, the concentration of power within the executive, the features of the party system, of the electoral system and of the interest group system. In the federal-unitary dimension he included indicators measuring the vertical organization of power: the degree of decentralization of the state, the presence of a bicameral parliament, the degree of rigidity of the constitution, the procedures of constitutionality control over the legislation and the degree of independence of the central bank (see [Table 7.1](#)).

However, we have to take into account a number of conceptual and methodological challenges that arise when applying Lijphart's theoretical model, and thus its ten institutional dimensions, to regional political systems. An important methodological question is whether the indicators Lijphart used for studying countries are relevant for regional democracies. One can distinguish three main issues.

First, there are some dimensions of analysis that are not relevant when studying regions, because a similar institution usually does not seem to exist at the regional level. In the federal-unitary dimension, it concerns for instance the fact that regions usually do not have formal federal structures, constitutionally guaranteeing the division of powers between the regional and sub-regional levels (dimension 2.1). Regions have seldom the second chambers. As they find their main legitimating factor and their historical origin in the representation

of sub-national political levels, regions do not seem to require such forms of territorial sub-regional representation, although one could imagine the existence of a regional senate representing provinces, counties, and/or cities (dimension 2.2). Regions usually do not seem to have rules designing flexible constitutions, but rather rigid ones (dimension 2.3). Regions usually do not have constitutionality control exerted by the legislature but mainly they rely on forms of judicial review. Therefore, the absence of variation in this variable makes it not pertinent for analysing regional democracy (dimension 2.4). Finally, regions usually do not have central banks, apart from the Bank of Scotland, probably because a proper currency and monetary policy would make regions very vulnerable to international speculation (dimension 2.5).

Table 7.1 The ten institutional dimensions in Lijphart's model

<i>Executive-parties dimension</i>	<i>Federal-unitary dimension</i>
1.1. Concentration of executive vs. executive power sharing	2.1. Centralized-unitary vs. decentralized-federal government
1.2. Executive dominance vs. executive-legislative balance of power	2.2. Unicameralism vs. bicameralism
1.3. Two-party system vs. multiparty system	2.3. Flexible constitution vs. rigid constitution
1.4. Majoritarian electoral system vs. proportional representation	2.4. Constitutionality control by the legislature vs. judicial review
1.5. Pluralist interest group system vs. corporatist interest group system	2.5. Dependent vs. independent central bank

As a result, the federal-unitary dimension described by Lijphart may be considered as hardly applicable to the analysis of regional institutional structures. He acknowledges that in the empirical reality its actual functioning (and thus its effects) would be dependent on a range of factors, from population size to societal pluralism and cultural tradition. Moreover, if the variables measuring the degree of executive dominance over the legislative and the distribution of power within parliaments are in general pertinent also at the regional level, yet the indicators for assessing the role of regional parliaments are not easily identifiable on the basis of the existing literature. Also, specific indicators measuring the concentration of power within regional parliaments need to be integrated in the model, such as for instance the composition of regional legislatures, the organization of the parliamentary committees (number and size of committees, chair allocation, powers) and the agenda-setting rules. Finally, regions usually do not have a proper interest group system that is completely independent from the national one, especially in countries characterized by a strong corporatist interest group system.

Second, there are variables and indicators that need to be added to Lijphart's model because they are specifically relevant for regions (but not for states).

For instance, the application of Lijphart's model at regional level entails the adaptation of its dimensions of analysis by adding a set of new, regionally-tailored indicators such as the degree of policy competencies of the regions vis-à-vis the state-wide institutions, including fiscal autonomy. This variable concerns the vertical relations between national and sub-national levels and related indicators measure the degree of political and institutional autonomy of the region from the central state.

Finally, there are variables and indicators that need to be added to Lijphart's model because they are relevant for the regional as well as the state level but that were not used by Lijphart. One indicator that needs to be added is the use of direct democracy instruments like referendums and popular initiatives (Vatter, 2002, 2007). The model could benefit also by integrating measures of the use of instruments limiting the concentration of power in male hands, such as party and electoral quotas and alternation in candidate lists, but also of indicators measuring party finance rules at regional level, territorial power concentration within party organizational structures as well as multilevel political career paths.

Overall, the applicability of Lijphart's model to territorial levels of government other than the national one is supported by the case selection operated by Lijphart himself. He applied his dichotomous typology of consensus vs. majoritarian democracy to political systems at other levels than the state. In fact, he presents the EU, which is a supranational political system (not a national or federal state, not even a confederation), as one of the three real-world examples that come closest to the consensus ideal-type. So, by presenting the EU as a very good example of a consensus democracy, Lijphart himself skips levels without legitimating this level jump. In fact, theoretically, the typology of consensus and majoritarian democracies can be applied to any democratic political system, even if institutionally it is less fully equipped than the state. Institutional power sharing or concentration of power can vary also in local or provincial political systems. One could even apply the notions of power sharing or concentration of power to non-political complex authority systems, like the Catholic Church, a multinational enterprise, or a university.

A few studies recently applied Lijphart's framework to the study of democratic governance in regional or sub-national authorities. For instance, Hendriks *et al.* (2010) agree that this framework can be translated to the sub-national level in a heuristically valuable way but that some key indicators are missing. Vatter (2007) replicated Lijphart's analysis in the Swiss sub-national context in order to explain the relationships of political-institutional variables in the Swiss cantons. Freitag and Vatter (2008) also replicated the consensus versus majoritarian democracy model for evaluating the patterns of democracy in the 16 federal states of Germany. Vatter (2009) published a study that updated Lijphart's data collection at national level for the most recent period (1997–2006), partially responded to criticisms of Lijphart's measurement of a number of variables and of case selection, while integrating direct democracy as an additional variable. However, the geographical focus of such studies has mainly been quite narrow, concentrating on small-N comparisons limited to specific areas or on case studies. The need for a cross-time, large-N cross-

country comparative study of the diversity of regional institutional settings in Europe remains, and this chapter tries to provide an analytical proposal for filling the gap in the existing literature.

Furthermore, many of the critiques to Lijphart's analysis focused on the simplicity of his explanations of the effects of institutional variation on policy outcomes. Many scholarly critiques formulated over the years concerned the validity and reliability of indicators used for evaluating the effects of national institutional settings over policy outcomes. Some of the explanatory factors identified by Lijphart have been considered too simplistic and based on logical shortcuts rather than valid causal relations. For example, Lijphart often adopts the most undisputed theories. Most of his operationalizations are straightforward, based on the most standard techniques used in comparative research. Yet, in other cases, he has a difficult time choosing between competing operationalizations and therefore develops new scales based on the average of existing ones; sometimes he creates new operationalizations from scratch, and sometimes he gives scores to countries purely on the basis of his 'educated guess' or 'intelligent estimate'.

In conclusion, if the Lijphart's model certainly bears some analytical potential and could be replicated at regional level, we need to adapt it to the specificities of regional institutional and political settings and to take into account the main methodological critiques that have been elaborated by other scholars over the last two decades. Several analytical and methodological challenges thus emerge when trying to measure the quality of democracy at regional level in Europe on the basis of Lijphart's model. We will discuss the main methodological issues we are facing – and propose a few solutions – in the next section.

Conclusion: methodological challenges and research perspectives

This chapter proposes an original research design for assessing the quality of democracy at the regional level. Before any data collection process, though, several methodological issues need to be addressed. The main challenge concerns the case selection, both at country and regional levels. In terms of selection of country cases, the major issue deals with the selection criterion of being a democracy at the national level. Also, the issue of size is relevant because it raises the question of including or not small states.

In terms of selecting regional cases, the first problem concerns the definition of the unit of analysis. In countries where there may be more than one intermediate level, one needs to determine which level is the regional one. A definition often used is the one of the political level immediately below the national level, but it refers to a large variety of political, administrative and/or policy realities. In addition, there is significant regional asymmetry among European sub-national authorities. Previous studies have shown substantial variations in size, population, peripheral position, etc. as well as in terms of

degree of regional autonomy across countries but also within countries (Swenden, 2006; Norris, 2008; Vatter, 2009; Hooghe *et al.*, 2010, 2016; Schakel, 2015). However, a valid research design needs to take into account only established regions, based on a clear and stable territory, and that possesses a certain threshold of administrative and political institutions. This leads for instance to the exclusion of a large set of ‘natural’, geographic, cultural regions.

Furthermore, in order to guarantee comparability without stretching too much the original concepts of consensus and majoritarian democracies, the selection of cases needs to be limited to regions that enjoy a sufficient degree of autonomy from state-wide actors in order to constitute a proper ‘system’ of interactions of its components. If all interactions between regional actors and institutions depend on state actors and institutions and their competences are limited to locally implementing and applying decisions taken at national level, it makes no sense to look for specific patterns of democracy at the regional level, as these would be entirely dependent on those found at the state level. Thus, we have to take into account the degree of autonomy from state institutions and actors, in order to be able to roughly distinguish between autonomous regional political systems and state-determined regional administrative (and not fully political) systems. The literature on comparative federalism and regional autonomy is not unequivocal on how to classify regions in Europe (Swenden, 2006; Hooghe *et al.*, 2010, 2016; Schakel, 2015).

The ideal-type of an institutionally fully developed and autonomous regional political system would include the following features:

1. the region’s existence is guaranteed by constitutional or other basic law;
2. the region has its own constitution that specifies its competencies in which the state level cannot interfere;
3. revisions of the state constitution (regarding the division of competencies between state and region) can only be made by co-decision between state and regions (under consensus or special majority rule);
4. proper policy competencies are guaranteed by constitutional or other basic law;
5. the region has a directly elected regional assembly and is granted classical parliamentary functions (legislation, executive oversight, government making);
6. the region is autonomous in the design of regional or sub-regional (local) institutions;
7. the region has the right to appeal to a constitutional or other higher (federal) court to solve conflicts with the state level;
8. the region has a constitutional court or other specialized courts to autonomously solve conflicts between actors within the regional political system (like in the US states);
9. the region participates in the decision-making at the national level through a guaranteed representation in a second chamber, or through other explicit provisions or intergovernmental agreements for policy coordination;

10. the region participates in EU decision-making when matters of (exclusive) regional competence are treated by the European Council of Ministers, through a variety of ways;
11. the region enjoys large taxing and spending autonomy.

Currently, no European region enjoys fully the entire set of these institutional development and autonomy features. Hence, the question of identifying a threshold that allows dichotomizing real-world cases between ‘autonomous’ and ‘state-determined’ regional political systems arises.

The nomenclature used by the European Union (the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics – NUTS) is not useful, as it is based on population size, administrative units, functional policy relevance, and statistical coverage. Hooghe and Marks (2001) define political (and not only administrative) regions as the most authoritative tier of intermediate (between the ‘national’ and the ‘local’) government at a given point of time. Depending on the country, this corresponds to NUTS1, NUTS2 and NUTS3 regions in the EU categorization. The Committee of the Regions is an official EU body created at the occasion of the Maastricht Treaty. However, this institution works as an assembly of local and regional representatives that accepts a large variety of sub-national authorities, i.e. regions but also counties, provinces, municipalities and cities. Also at the European level, the voluntary associations of regions (so as RegLeg – the Conference of European regions with legislative power; CALRE – the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies; or ARE – the Assembly of the Regions of Europe) put the emphasis on a directly elected regional assembly with primary legislative powers.

Other main challenges concern the selection of indicators to be collected in any attempt to measure democracy at the sub-national level and how they will be collected. Expert-based surveys are frequently used in comparative studies of democracy, be it as the core of the data collection process (as in the V-Dem project) or as combined with secondary sources (as in the Polity IV or Freedom House projects). Yet, this subjective method of data collection has been seldom used at the sub-national levels. Exceptions are to be found in the Russian and Argentinian cases (McMann and Petrov, 2000; Gervasoni, 2010). This exceptionality of expert surveys at the regional level is probably explained by the need of large human resources for significantly covering all sub-national units. For example, Gervasoni (2010) used no less than 155 experts in order to cover the 24 Argentinian provinces. A comparative design across different countries would demand a (too) large effort in terms of human resources. In addition, some regions do not witness the presence of enough regional experts, especially in small regions, or in regions that do not possess sufficient academic structures.

Regions are embedded in national contexts, and regional democracy depends to large extent to the state of democracy at the national level. We have discussed above the fact that many Lijphart’s dimensions – especially concerning the federal-unitary dimension – do not exist at the regional level. But this

absence does not mean that we should leave aside such indicators. A way to circumvallate this issue is to collect national data, but at the regional level. For example, turnout in national elections and in national referendum can be integrated in the analysis once they are collected at the regional level. In this proposed research framework, data collection would rely on a balanced combination of two types of indicators: national indicators at the collected at the regional level and regional indicators per se.

Among these regional indicators that could be added to Lijphart's framework,⁸ a first set concerns the regional measures of phenomena that are similar to the national level. This is for example the case of the regional electoral systems, including the direct election of the regional governor (Hendriks *et al.*, 2010); the structure of the regional party systems, including regionalist and secessionist parties; turnout for regional elections and regional direct democracy instruments; relations between the regional executive and the regional parliament; party organization, including regional funding of parties; independence of the public administration at regional level; independence of regional media, etc.

A second set of regional indicators concerns the multilevel nature of political regimes. In other words, regional democracy is also dependent on the relation between the region, its national state and/or the EU. These multilevel indicators concern for instance the composition of the regional government and its congruence with the national government; the career patterns, including the multiple office-holding of regional and national mandates; the degree of formal and informal/actual involvement of regions in EU policy making, etc.

In that regard, the selection of indicators that will be collected in order to grasp sub-national democracy beyond Lijphart's model could also be inspired from the research projects that are developed in Latin America, even if it often concerns country case studies. More recently, scholars have worked on specific indicators of sub-national democracy. These works concern for instance regional electoral competitiveness (Arce and Mangonnet, 2013; Saikkonen, 2016), regional participation and citizen's political engagement (Flavin and Shufeldt, 2015; Fatke, 2016), regional accountability (Polverari, 2015) or regional government quality (Kyriacou and Morral-Palacín, 2015; Rodríguez-Pose and Garcilazo, 2015).

Finally, a last step in this chapter directly concerns the research perspectives. If there is no doubt that democracy varies at the sub-national levels both between and within countries, the question that now rises concerns its potential impact on performance. Taken as an independent variable in a research design, regional democracy may be mobilized as the main explanatory factor for variations of public policy performance in regional (and potentially national) governments.

Besides the sub-national replication of classic works on neopatrimonialism or on corruption, one can envisage mobilizing measure of sub-national democracy in order to explain regional (regime) capacity (Saikkonen, 2016) and national regime change (McMann, 2017), quality of government (Bubbico *et al.* 2017), corruption (Fan *et al.*, 2009), regional protest (Arce and Mangonnet, 2013), regional delivery of public goods (Nooruddin and Simmons, 2015), efficient

use of EU structural and cohesion funds (Rodríguez-Pose and Garcilazo, 2015) and regional representation of women (Vengroff *et al.*, 2003).

Regarding the socio-economic consequences of the different regional structures and more specifically the impact of sub-national democracy on economic performance, preliminary works on average scores at the national level indicate that it tends to foster regional economic growth (Rodríguez-Pose and Garcilazo, 2015; Knutsen *et al.*, 2016). The inclusion of the variation of sub-national of democracy in the explanatory models would enrich these analyses with a more detailed and fine-grained perspective. Undoubtedly, the adaptation of Lijphart's dimensions to the sub-national political arena will enrich our understanding of government performance in a large range of policy issues.

Notes

1. According to McMann (2017) and based on the V-Dem data, the percentage of countries across the world with elected offices at the regional office has increased, with 24 per cent of countries having some regional elected office in 1900 and 68 per cent having some in 2012.
2. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2015#.VXa7V2AyyY>.
3. www.nsd.uib.no/macrodatabguide/set.html?id=34&sub=1.
4. www.eiu.com/Exception.aspx?aspxerrorpath=/default.aspx.
5. www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm.
6. www.democracybarometer.org/.
7. <https://v-dem.net/>.
8. According to Hendriks *et al.* (2010) indicators of consensus democracy such as interactive policy-making procedures as well as informal patterns of representative democracy can be added to Lijphart framework in an attempt to analyse sub-national democracy.

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