

# 15

## Conclusion: Regional Elections in Comparative Perspective

*Arjan H. Schakel and Régis Dandoy*

### 15.1. Introduction

The 13 country studies presented in this book have analyzed the territorial heterogeneity of the vote in regional and national elections with the main aim of studying regional election results on their 'own terms' rather than solely from a second-order election perspective. Each chapter has explored the explanatory power of regional institutions and territorial cleavages with regard to regional electoral behavior (top-down approach), but the country experts have also provided additional causes or explanations for diverging regional party systems (bottom-up approach). In addition, all authors have looked at five aspects of electoral behavior which constituted the 'backbone' of the analytical framework for all country chapters. First, the authors looked at congruence between the regional and the national vote. Congruence of the vote was differentiated into three indicators: party-system, electorate and election congruence. In a second step, they assessed how far differences in the vote could be related to second-order election effects (turnout in regional and national elections and change in vote shares between regional and national elections) or to regionalized electoral behavior (congruence between regional and national governments and non-statewide party (NSWP) strength in regional and national elections). To place the regions in a comparative context, we provide average scores on the five dependent variables in Table 15.1. Average scores are calculated across all regions and all elections since 1970; the year 1970 has been chosen because regional elections were introduced in the 1970s or later in 9 out of our 13 countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany (eastern *Länder*), Greece, Italy (*regioni a statuto ordinario*), Norway, Spain and the UK) (see Table 1.1). In addition, the

Table 15.1 Overview of regional electoral behavior in 13 West European countries

Country	Region	Territoriality in the vote (vote share differences)		Top-down approach (nationalization)		Bottom-up approach (regionalization)								
		Congruence of the vote	Second-order election effects	Regional effects	Party system	Electorate	Election	Turnout	Vote share change	Gov. share	Opp.	cong.	Reg.	Nat.
Austria	<i>Länder</i>	16.06	9.06	10.26	-4.93	-2.37	2.10	39.26	0.05	0.00				
Belgium	<i>Gemeenschappen/Gewesten</i>	52.10	50.00	9.22	-2.11	-0.96	-0.18	56.81	100.00	100.00				
Denmark	<i>Amter/Region</i>	15.86	8.37	12.08	-14.23	0.71	0.45	44.00	0.00	0.00				
France	The Faroe Islands and Greenland	100.00	100.00	100.00	17.00	-	-	100.00	100.00	100.00				
Germany	<i>Régions</i>	21.19	11.20	18.75	-7.99	-6.39	1.54	88.99	1.51	0.43				
Greece	<i>Länder</i>	20.20	16.21	8.02	-11.01	-2.98	2.63	56.17	7.96	6.77				
Italy	<i>Nomoi/Peripheries</i>	13.48	7.70	13.27	-6.53	-4.02	1.09	50.03	0.00	0.00				
	<i>Regioni a statuto ordinario</i>	18.90	11.67	13.70	-4.72	-1.27	-0.68	28.25	2.82	2.72				
	<i>Regioni a statuto speciale</i>	27.98	24.79	19.42	-5.92	-1.31	-1.77	33.40	27.03	18.76				
The Netherlands	<i>Provincies</i>	15.13	9.50	10.20	-20.27	-1.99	1.36	40.79	1.33	0.00				
Norway	<i>Fylker</i>	15.05	12.35	9.12	-16.21	-4.00	2.39	60.99	0.37	0.12				
Spain	<i>Comunidades autónomas</i> (non-historic)	18.58	14.46	8.92	-5.13	-6.99	-0.06	40.37	9.02	6.62				
	<i>Comunidades autónomas (historic)</i>	42.87	30.70	13.79	-7.20	-8.54	2.72	74.06	32.26	29.41				
Sweden	<i>Län</i>	9.85	9.04	3.15	-1.71	-0.15	-0.47	30.30	0.31	0.00				
Switzerland	Cantons	29.44	35.08	17.58	2.31	-6.05	-1.59	28.64	0.42	0.19				
UK	Countries and London	24.89	10.64	12.84	-15.92	-17.46	3.75	66.91	26.84	28.58				

Notes: Shown are average scores for all regions and all elections since 1970. Turnout gap = difference in turnout between regional and national elections; Gov. = parties in national government; Opp. = parties in national opposition; Gov. cong. = congruence between regional and national government; NSWP Reg. and Nat. = Non-statewide party strength in regional and national elections. An explanation of the operationalization of the variables is provided in Section 1.5 of the Introduction

Table 15.2 Classification of regional elections in Western Europe

Nationalized	Mixed	Regionalized
<i>Länder</i> (Austria) <i>Régions</i>	<i>Länder</i> (Germany) <i>Amter/Region</i>	<i>Gemeenschappen/Gewesten</i> the Faroe Islands and Greenland
<i>Nomoi/Peripheries</i> <i>Provincies</i>	<i>Regioni a statuto ordinario</i> Non-historic <i>comunidades autónomas</i>	<i>Regioni a statuto speciale</i> Historic <i>comunidades</i> <i>autónomas</i>
<i>Fylker</i> London	<i>Län</i>	Cantons Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales

chapters show that regional electoral behavior has changed considerably since the 1970s in the countries where regional elections have taken place since 1945 (Austria, Germany (western *Länder*), Italy (*regioni a statuto speciale*), the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland).

The main task we take up now is to assess the factors which lead to 'regionalization' or 'nationalization' of the regional vote. That is, we ask the following question. Which factors may contribute to increasing territorial heterogeneity of the vote and/or to diverging regional electoral arenas? In Table 15.2 we classify regional elections as regionalized, nationalized or mixed on the basis of the average scores displayed in Table 15.1 and by relying on the conclusions drawn by the authors of the country chapters. We hasten to say that this classification does not do justice to the significant variation in the extent of nationalization of regional electoral behavior found for specific regions or for specific time periods.

In the regionalized category, we may find countries where congruence of the vote (especially electorate congruence) and government congruence tend to be low (indicated by high dissimilarity scores), second-order election effects are minimal and NSWPs (often with a claim for decentralization) tend to be electorally strong. The most extreme cases for regionalization are resembled by *Gemeenschappen/Gewesten*, the Faroe Islands and Greenland, and Northern Ireland. Dandoy notes (Chapter 3) that in Belgium the statewide parties split along linguistic lines during the 1960s and 1970s, and therefore no party competes across the statewide territory. The party systems of the Faroe Islands and Greenland are completely incongruent to the party system of Denmark proper.

That is, none of the Danish parties participate in elections in each of the three 'territories'. A similar case of almost complete party system incongruence can be observed for Northern Ireland in the UK.

Regional electoral outcomes can be regionalized in other ways as well. In Switzerland, most statewide parties tend to have regional strongholds which comprise a number of cantons. Bochsler and Wasserfallen (Chapter 13) note that the Swiss People's Party is electorally strong in the predominantly agricultural and protestant cantons, whereas the Christian People's Party recruits its electorate in the Catholic, mainly rural and mountainous cantons.

Regional electoral behavior in *Gemeenschappen/Gewesten*, the Faroe Islands and Greenland, cantons and Northern Ireland stand out with respect to the turnout gap between regional and national elections. Turnout in regional elections is systematically much lower in regional elections than in national elections except for these regions where we actually find that regional turnout is very close to or higher than turnout in national elections. This might be an indication that voters rank regional elections on a par with national elections, or that they consider regional elections to be first-order elections.

A third way to recognize regionalized electoral behavior is exemplified by the *regioni a statuto speciale* in Italy and the historic *comunidades autónomas* in Spain, where NSWPs obtain significant vote shares, often close to or above 30 per cent, which differentiates them from the 'normal' regions. This is also the reason why Massetti and Sandri (Chapter 8) and Gómez Fortes and Cabeza Perez (Chapter 11) analyze the special and historic regions separately from the ordinary and non-historic regions. Elections taking in place in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales may also be placed in the regionalized category due to the electorally strong NSWPs.

By classifying elections as regionalized, we do not want to suggest that second-order election effects are absent. On the contrary, government parties tend to lose and opposition parties tend to win vote share in elections for the *regioni a statuto speciale*, the historic *comunidades autónomas*, and Scotland and Wales. Nevertheless, these electoral outcomes can indicate regionalization as well because most NSWPs in these regions participate in regional and national elections. At the national level, these parties often find themselves in the opposition role because in national parliament they tend to be small parties which are not included in statewide government. Regional voters tend to switch their vote from a statewide party in national elections to an NSWP in regional contests, as is evidenced by higher vote shares for NSWPs in regional

elections than for national elections. Because the parties in statewide opposition do not tend to be the beneficiaries of dissatisfaction with parties in national government, we think it is justified to interpret these kinds of vote share switches as regionalized electoral behavior rather than second-order election effects.

Nationalized electoral outcomes may be found for elections in the Austrian *Länder*, *régions*, *nomoi/peripheries*, *provincies*, *fylker* and London (see Table 15.2). Here, congruence of the vote (especially electorate congruence) and government congruence tend to be high (indicated by low dissimilarity scores); there are clear second-order election effects, and NSWPs, if present, tend to be electorally weak. Jenny (Chapter 2) takes up the question whether low volatility between regional and national elections in Austria indicates that voters base their vote choice in regional elections on cues taken from the regional or national electoral arena. He sides with the latter explanation because there are no NSWPs and the dissimilarity in the vote, which is increasing in more recent elections, may be ascribed to new parties which obtain their support unevenly across the territory. New party success is interpreted by Jenny as an antigovernment swing – that is, a second-order election effect.

Escalona, Labouret and Vieira (Chapter 5), Skrinis (Chapter 7), Schakel (Chapter 9) and Rose and Hansen (Chapter 10) are quite straightforward in their interpretation of election results for *régions*, *nomoi/peripheries*, *provincies* and *fylker*: these are all nationalized elections. It is also in these regions where we can find the strongest second-order election effects, and some authors even suggest – on the basis of higher turnout figures for local elections than for regional elections (the Netherlands) or with the help of local election studies where voters were asked directly which type of election they find most important (Norway) – that voters conceive local elections to be more important than regional elections.

In the mixed category, we have placed countries where aggregate regional electoral outcomes point toward regionalization as well as nationalization. In the *amter/region*, German *Länder* and *län* congruence of the vote and government congruence are high (indicated by low dissimilarity scores) – which points toward nationalization. However, second-order election effects are muted or practically absent (*amter/region* and *län*) or NSWPs tend to be moderately strong (German *Länder*). Both of these are indications of regionalization. Individual-level survey data allow Bhatti and Hansen (Chapter 4) and Berg and Oscarsson (Chapter 12) to conclude that regional election results are

more properly understood as nationalized outcomes. Therefore, regional elections in *amter/region* and *län* side more to the 'nationalized' than to the 'regionalized' category. In the chapter on Germany (Chapter 6), Jeffery and Middleton take up the same question as posed by Jenny in the chapter on Austria (Chapter 2). Should dissimilarity in the vote be interpreted as an articulation of regional identity or as a protest against whoever is in federal government? Jeffery and Middleton can rely on the work by Völkl et al. (2008) which enables them to conclude that both statewide and region-specific factors seem to drive *Land* election results. Hence German *Land* elections might perhaps resemble the ideal case of a mixture of nationalized and regionalized regional election results which are reflections of differentiated multilevel statehoods among regional electorates.

'Contradicting' regional election results may also be observed for *regioni a statuto ordinario* and the non-historic *comunidades autónomas*. Congruence between the regional and the national vote and governments is relatively low (indicated by high dissimilarity scores) but, in contrast with *amter/region* and *län* elections, there is a relatively strong antigovernment swing. Despite these indications for nationalization, we can also observe that opposition parties in national parliament are not the main beneficiaries of dissatisfaction with parties in national government. Rather, it seems that NSWPs increase in electoral strength but, in contrast with regional elections in the 'regionalized' category, NSWP strength does not coincide with territorial cleavages (see Table 1.3). Massetti and Sandri (Chapter 8) observe that interelection volatility is increasing over time for *regioni a statuto ordinario* and they relate this trend to two regionalizing factors: first, an increase in the number and vote shares for regionalist parties which participate in elections in multiple regions (the *Lega Nord* and *Movimento per le Autonomie*); and, second, a reform in regional voting systems which introduced a seat bonus for the winning presidential list and favored a 'personalization' of electoral competition. Gómez Fortes and Cabeza Perez (Chapter 11) relate differences between regional election results for the historic and non-historic *comunidades autónomas* to regional identities and territorial cleavages. However, when we view the non-historic *comunidades autónomas* from a cross-regional perspective we may see that region-specific parties are relatively strong in the non-historic *comunidades autónomas* as well, and this leads us to place these regions in the mixed category.

The classification of regional elections allows us to assess the validity of the hypotheses developed in the Introduction. However, before

we turn to this discussion we will first consider three ‘caveats’ with regard to the interpretation of congruence of the vote (Section 15.2). In Section 15.3 we assess the impact of regional institutions and cleavages (top-down approach) and in Section 15.4 we summarize the findings and insights which derive from the bottom-up approach. In Section 15.5 we point out fruitful avenues for further research.

## 15.2. Caveats with regard to the interpretation of congruence of the vote

The analysis of regional electoral outcomes by the authors of the country chapters leads us to identify three caveats in the interpretation of congruence of the vote. The first concerns the interpretation of low dissimilarity scores which indicate high congruence between regional and national elections. Congruence between regional and national elections is often taken as an indicator of nationalization, which, at least in part, is based on the assumption that national elections have a first-order status. Voters do not change their vote between national and regional elections because they base their vote choice in regional elections on their preference in the more important national elections. However, the country chapters show that this assumption might not always hold. Election congruence – which compares the national vote at the regional level to the regional vote at the regional level (*NR–RR*) – is relatively high for elections taking place in *Gemeenschappen/Gewesten*, *provincies* (pre-1980s), *regioni a statuto ordinario* (pre-1990s) and cantons. Yet Schakel (Chapter 9) and Massetti and Sandri (Chapter 8) conclude for, respectively, the *provincies* and *regioni a statuto ordinario* that high congruence points toward nationalized regional elections, whereas Dandoy (Chapter 3) and Bochsler and Wasserfallen (Chapter 13) take high congruence scores for, respectively, *Gemeenschappen/Gewesten* and cantons as evidence for regionalized national elections. The authors need to resort to other dimensions of voting behavior in order to establish the appropriate interpretation. Both party-system (the national vote at the national level compared with the regional vote at the regional level (*NN–RR*)) and electorate congruence (the national vote at the national level compared to the national vote at the regional level (*NN–NR*)) are low for *Gemeenschappen/Gewesten* and cantons (indicated by higher dissimilarity scores) but are higher for *provincies* and *regioni a statuto ordinario* (indicated by lower dissimilarity scores). This is a clear indication that in Belgium and Switzerland national election results are regionalized instead of regional elections being nationalized.

These findings also point out that it is very useful to analyze the three congruence measures simultaneously.

The second caveat involves the interpretation of inter-election volatility (election congruence) whereby high dissimilarity scores are often taken as an indication of regionalization. However, the countries with the strongest second-order effects are also the ones where we may find high inter-election volatility. Elections in *régions*, *nomoi/peripheries* and *fylker* score relatively high on party-system and electorate congruence (indicated by low dissimilarity scores), which are signs of nationalization, but score low on election congruence (indicated by high dissimilarity scores), which implies regionalization. The authors conclude that elections in *régions*, *nomoi/peripheries* and *fylker* are nationalized because vote-switching between national and regional elections concerns vote share losses for parties in statewide government and vote share gains for parties in national opposition. In these regional elections, voters take their cues from the national political arena and base their vote choice on the governmental status of parties at the statewide level. Although regional and national electoral vote shares differ substantially, regional election results can still be considered as nationalized outcomes.

When we take the first two caveats together, we may conclude that nationalized regional electoral outcomes can lead to two different ‘constellations’ of the vote congruence measures. Nationalized regional elections may be indicated by congruence between party systems, electorates and elections, whereas a second form of nationalization may be revealed by congruent party systems and electorates but dissimilarity between elections. In the first case, voters cast their vote for the same parties in regional and national elections because they do not differentiate between electoral arenas. In the second case, voters switch their vote between national and regional elections but they still base their vote choice on cues taken from the national rather than the regional electoral arena. The two forms of nationalized regional elections may even be present in the same country. Massetti and Sandri (Chapter 8) observe for the *regioni a statuto ordinario* similar voting behavior in regional and national elections before the party system collapse in the 1990s but second-order election effects clearly increase afterward. Similarly, Schakel (Chapter 9) notes for *provincies* that the process of deconfessionalization has transformed provincial elections from producing the same results as for national elections to provincial electoral outcomes exhibiting strong second-order election effects.



A third caveat concerns the assumption that a subordinate status of regional elections *vis-à-vis* national elections implies that regional elections do not matter for first-order, national politics. One obvious effect of second-order election outcomes is that parties in national government are weakened in their governing capacity because the 'voter' has vented their dissatisfaction with national policies. It is not uncommon to replace ministers or to change policies after regional elections have been held. However, we would like to point to another impact of regional elections which concerns what we label as a 'springboard effect'. The introduction of electoral arenas amplifies the possibilities for political entrepreneurs to establish new political parties. The required number of votes needed to obtain a seat in regional parliament is often far lower than for national parliaments. Once a new political party has been successful in the regional electoral arena, entry costs for participating in national elections may be significantly lower. A party organization, a number of party members and a campaign are all in place and the new party might also have gained (national) visibility.

Several country chapters report on a springboard effect. For example, Jenny (Chapter 2) looks at newly established parties that managed to obtain seats in national or regional parliaments and he observes for the Austrian *Länder* that one party made a simultaneous entry at both levels but six parties obtained seats in a regional parliament first. The reverse order of national electoral success prior to regional success has not occurred yet. The springboard effect can be quite substantial. Masetti and Sandri observe increasing dissimilarity in the Italian vote since the 1990s and they ascribe this trend to the rise of the Lega Nord in the northern regions and, to a lesser extent, to electoral success of the Movimento per le Autonomie in the southern regions. Both parties have their origin in regional parliaments, both were able to break through to the national level and together they account for about 10 per cent of the statewide vote.

### 15.3. Top-down approach: regional institutions, territorial cleavages and electoral cycles

In the Introduction we noted that the second-order election model relies on a 'stakes-based' assumption. The extent to which we may observe second-order election effects in regional elections is inversely related to the perceived 'stakes' by voters. Following Jeffery and Hough (2009) we hypothesized that regional institutions – most importantly

regional authority – and territorial cleavages may increase the stakes in a regional election. One important intervening variable is the timing of regional elections. Jeffery and Hough (2006, pp.249–250) note that stronger second-order election effects may be observed when regional elections are held on the same day (horizontal simultaneity), and both elections tend to function according to a single, statewide logic when national and regional elections are held on the same date (vertical simultaneity).

In Table 15.3 we assess the impact of regional authority, territorial cleavages and electoral simultaneity on vote share changes between national and regional elections and turnout in regional elections (second-order election effects). We employ a linear regression model whereby elections are nested in regions and the model includes a control for correlation in second-order election effects over time. Regional authority is measured by the regional authority index (see Section 1.3) and territorial cleavages are indicated by introducing two dummy variables, one measuring whether there is an indigenous regional language that is different from the dominant (plurality) language in the state, and the other indicating whether the region has not been part of the current state since its formation (see Section 1.4). We also introduce dummy variables for vertical simultaneity with national and local elections, and horizontal simultaneity with other regional elections (see Table 1.2). Finally, we introduce a dummy variable for compulsory voting which should reduce second-order election effects as well, in particular the turnout gap.<sup>1</sup>

The results in Table 15.3 confirm our expectations. A 1-point increase on the regional authority index leads to a 0.21 percentage point decrease in the turnout gap, to a 0.31 percentage point smaller vote share loss for government parties and a 0.21 percentage point smaller vote share gain for opposition parties. Similarly, vertical simultaneity with national and local elections led to a reduction in the turnout gap (6.19 respectively 1.34 percentage points), to smaller losses for parties in national government (by 3.46 respectively 1.83 percentage points) and to smaller gains for parties in national opposition (by 1.12 respectively 0.12 percentage points; the latter result is not statistically significant). Finally, horizontal simultaneity among regional elections leads to a further increase in the turnout gap of 3.46 percentage points.

Territorial cleavages matter too. When a minority language is present in a region, it will lead to a 3.28 percentage point smaller turnout gap and when the region was assimilated into the state relatively late it leads to a 1.20 percentage point smaller vote share loss for government

Table 15.3 Top-down approach: Multivariate analysis of second-order election effects

	Turnout gap	Vote share changes	
		Government parties	Opposition parties
Regional authority index score	0.21* (0.12)	0.31** (0.09)	-0.21* (0.10)
Regional language index	3.28** (0.79)	-1.02* (0.60)	0.17 (0.44)
Regional history index	-0.00 (0.67)	1.20** (0.42)	-0.20 (0.28)
Vertical simultaneity with national elections	6.19** (0.49)	3.46** (0.42)	-1.12** (0.31)
Vertical simultaneity with local elections	1.34* (0.88)	1.83** (0.57)	-0.12 (0.39)
Horizontal simultaneity with regional elections	-3.46** (0.79)	1.52** (0.65)	0.39 (0.70)
Compulsory voting	5.56** (0.57)	1.08** (0.45)	-0.67* (0.32)
Constant	-10.41**	-9.92**	2.84
Rho	0.594	0.278	0.146
Wald Chi <sup>2</sup>	316**	168**	89**
R <sup>2</sup>	0.11	0.03	0.03
N elections	2277	2252	2154
N regions	246	244	242
N countries	13	13	13

Notes: \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01 (one-tailed).

Shown are the results of a linear regression model with panel corrected standard errors (elections are clustered in regions) in between parentheses. The models include a control for autocorrelation over time (rho). The turnout gap is the difference between turnout in a regional election compared with the turnout in the previous national election. Vote share changes compare the vote share of a regional election with the vote share obtained in the previous national election. Vote shares changes are summed per type of party.

parties. The presence of a minority language actually increases second-order effects; government party vote share losses increase with 1.02 percentage points. This result corroborates our interpretation given above for the observation of losses for government parties in elections for the *regioni a statuto speciale*, the historic *comunidades autónomas*, and Scotland and Wales. In these regions, voters tend to vote strategically for statewide parties in national elections but switch their vote in regional elections to their sincere preference for NSWPs, which tend to participate in regional elections only. As a result, parties in statewide

government lose vote share but parties in opposition in the statewide parliament are not the beneficiaries.

The results presented in Table 15.3 also shed some light on particular country study findings. Massetti and Sandri (Chapter 8) and Gómez Fortes and Cabeza Perez (Chapter 11) observe that, in contrast with their expectations, turnout is lower in the *regioni a statuto speciale* and historic *comunidades autónomas* than for the *regioni a statuto ordinario* and non-historic *comunidades autónomas*. One explanation may lie in vertical simultaneity between regional and local elections, which is the case for ordinary and non-historic but not for the special and historic regions. A stakes-based approach to regional elections assumes that voters are more inclined to cast a vote when regional elections tend to coincide with other types of election because the ‘combined stakes’ of the ‘election event’ are higher than for a single election event (Schakel and Dandoy, 2014). Further evidence for a stakes-based interpretation is provided by a comparison of turnout gaps between regional and national elections for Dutch provincial elections (since the 1970s: 20 per cent), which are held non-simultaneously with local elections, and regional elections in Denmark proper (14 per cent) and Norway (16 per cent), which are held simultaneously with local elections.

Table 15.3 presents one contradictory finding: under horizontal simultaneity, the turnout gap increases by 3.46 percentage points but the vote share loss for parties in statewide government declines by 1.52 percentage points. The former finding indicates stronger second-order election effects whereas the latter finding suggests reduced second-order election effects. The result for the turnout gap can be explained by ‘a lack of stakes’; horizontal simultaneous elections do not induce the voter to cast a vote because elections are not multiplied in a particular region. However, when regional elections are held on the same date one might expect more involvement of candidates, media and parties from the statewide electoral arena because for them elections are multiplied. Hence concurrent regional elections may lead to an approximation to a first-order, national poll. Particular country study findings corroborate the role of campaigns with regard to second-order election effects. Skrinis (Chapter 7) observes an exceptionally large number of new parties participating in the Greek regional elections of 2010 and relates this to voter dissatisfaction with the austerity measures taken by the government to combat the fiscal crisis. Similarly, Berg and Oscarsson (Chapter 12) explain the largest vote share loss for the party in statewide government in Swedish regional elections of 1966 by the timing of the regional elections which were held at the peak of public discontent with

the housing situation, which was invigorated by a badly received TV performance by the prime minister.

The electoral timing of regional elections *vis-à-vis* national elections shows a similar nuance in the extent to which we may observe second-order election effects. Several authors have linked the antigovernment swing to the placement of the regional election in the national election cycle. Escolana, Labouret and Vieira (Chapter 5) observe that the party in statewide government lost significant vote shares in the elections of 1992, 2004 and 2010 but not in the elections of 1986 and 1998. The elections in 1986 were held simultaneous with elections to the National Assembly, and the elections of 1998 were held within one year after national elections. Regional elections are held near mid-term of the national election cycle in Greece and Norway and, indeed, Skrinis (Chapter 7) and Rose and Hansen (Chapter 10) report the highest losses for government parties of up to 10 per cent. Similarly, Gómez Fortes and Cabeza Perez (Chapter 11) observe significantly smaller losses for the party in statewide government when Spanish regional elections are held close to the previous or to the next national election. Finally, Schakel (Chapter 9) calculates Pearson correlations for the days between Dutch provincial and national elections and party vote share changes, and he observes associations of  $-0.77$  for parties in national government and  $0.52$  for parties in national opposition.

Based on the top-down approach, we may concur with the conclusion drawn by Jeffery and Hough (2006, pp.250–251) – who looked at regional elections in Austria, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK – that ‘The general finding, then, is that most sub-state elections do indeed appear to be second order, subordinate to voters considerations of state-level politics. The second order “effect” is strongest where there is simultaneity of elections and social homogeneity. It is qualified where there [are] territorial cleavages’. Although the statistical results in Table 15.3 confirm a second-order election interpretation of regional electoral outcomes, the explained variance of the models (11 per cent for the turnout gap model and 3 per cent for the vote share changes models) indicate that a second-order election interpretation does not get us very far. As pointed out in the Introduction, we specifically aimed in this book to avoid a ‘methodological nationalism bias’ – that is, the tendency to choose the nation-state as a unit of analysis (Jeffery and Wincott, 2010). The second-order election model assumes that regional election outcomes are shaped by first-order national factors and, consequently, measurement of second-order election effects basically pits national election results against

regional electoral outcomes. We asked the chapter authors to specifically consider any factor beyond regional authority and institutions, and territorial cleavages, which, according to them, may contribute to diverging regional party systems. In the next section we will discuss the main findings resulting from the 'bottom-up' approach.

#### **15.4. Bottom-up approach: Statewide parties, electoral rules and regional government**

The bottom-up approach applied in each of the chapters leads us to identify three factors or variables which contribute to the regionalization of the vote. Here we would like to discuss statewide parties, electoral rules and regional government, all of which appear in several country chapters.

The first variable concerns the extent to which statewide parties are able to integrate the territory. Swenden and Maddens (2009a, p.253) highlight the important role of statewide parties in integrating national and regional party systems: 'the more successful [statewide] parties are in garnering electoral support across the regions of the state in statewide and regional elections, the stronger is the integration of the party system'. Following Swenden and Maddens (2009a) we may ask to what extent the organization, strategies and policies of the statewide parties are related to party system (de)nationalization. The clearest but also the most extreme example of the integrative role of parties is Belgium, where the split of the Christian-democratic, liberal and socialist statewide parties into Flemish- and French-speaking parties has led to two separate party systems. Another telling but unique example is Italy where the party system collapsed in the 1990s due to corruption scandals. The major statewide parties, and in particular the Christian-democrats, lost their dominant position and eventually even disappeared, which opened up the party system to new and more regionally based parties which resulted in increasing divergence between regional and national party systems.

However, the country chapters also show that the internal party organization and ideology of statewide parties can contribute to greater linkages between party systems. A first example are the cantons, where national and cantonal party systems have become more integrated over time. Boschler and Wasserfallen (Chapter 13) relate this nationalization trend to the professionalization of party organizations of the statewide parties at the federal level. Swiss parties used to be run by cantonal branches, which organized campaigns for both cantonal and federal

elections. At the federal level, the party was dominated by volunteers and lacked financial means. Over time, several parties have shifted funds to their federal offices and increased the number of professionals at the federal level, which – in conjunction with the development of media which increasingly covers both German- and French-speaking cantons – led to a nationalization of the federal and cantonal vote.

A second example which underlines the role of party organization is provided by the Dutch *provincies*. Despite significant provincial autonomy, partly exercised through an upper chamber which is elected by the provincial assemblies, Schakel (Chapter 9) observes strong second-order election effects in provincial elections. One of the variables he proposes to explain this finding is the centralized candidate-selection procedures of the statewide parties which leave little room for provincial branches to propose candidates for the lower as well as the upper chamber of national parliament. In other words, the effect of regional authority is counteracted and superseded by the centralized organizations of the statewide parties.

The integrative capacity of statewide parties may also be related to the ideology of parties as Gómez Fortes and Cabeza Perez (Chapter 11) show in their chapter on Spain. They find that turnout and dual voting are lower for the non-historic *comunidades autónomas* where the Popular Party is dominant. In other words, regional party systems tend to be more integrated when the Popular Party obtains most vote share than in regions where the other major statewide party, the Socialist Workers Party, gathers the absolute majority of the vote. Gómez Fortes and Cabeza Perez hypothesize that this finding can be explained by the ideology of the two major parties. The ideology of the Socialist Workers Party is more open to regionalization of the Spanish state than the ideology of the Popular Party. The authors use a content analysis of the framework programs of the statewide parties to illustrate the differing ideologies. The framework program is used by regional party branches as a basis for their party manifestos. In the framework program of the Socialist Workers Party, 25 per cent of the sentences referred to the regions and 64 per cent addressed cooperation between the state and regions. In contrast, 80 per cent of the text of the framework program of the Popular Party referred to the central state.

In the Introduction we noted that the authority exercised by regional government is often considered as a key institutional variable for explaining regional electoral outcomes. With decentralization we expect regional and national party systems to diverge because it creates incentives for political entrepreneurs to establish region-specific parties and to

mobilize voters according to region-specific issues. Most scholars assume that statewide parties will react to centrifugal pressures by decentralizing their own internal organization, by allowing regional branches to deviate from central party manifestos, and by endorsing constitutional change that strengthens the regions (Hough and Jeffery, 2006; Maddens and Libbrecht, 2009; Meguid, 2008). The findings from the country chapters clearly indicate that not all statewide parties adapt their internal organization and ideology in response to increasing regional autonomy and increasing regional party strength. This shows that the response of statewide parties toward decentralization of authority is not straightforward and that statewide parties may even be able to recentralize the party system (see also Fabre and Swenden, 2013).

A second factor which is proposed by the authors as an important explanatory variable for diverging regional and national party systems concerns electoral rules. Differences between the national and the regional vote can be expected when different rules which translate votes into seats are applied at the national and regional levels. Indeed, in 2 out of our 13 countries, majoritarian rules are applied at the national level whereas more proportional rules are used at the regional level (Table 1.3). In the UK, a first-past-the-post electoral system is used for national elections whereas various forms of proportional representation are applied in the devolved elections. McEwen (Chapter 14) thinks that, in addition to other devolved institutions, proportional rules in the devolved entities strengthen regionalized electoral behavior by producing variation in the composition of government across the UK, which gives NSWPs a platform to advance their territorial goals. Similarly, a proportional system for the regional level but a plurality system applied at the national level may increase the 'springboard effect' of regional elections. Escalona, Labouret and Vieira (Chapter 5) argue that the use of a proportional electoral system for French *région* elections from 1986 to 1998 facilitated opening up the French national party system, which made it easier for the far right or the ecologists to gain seats and visibility.

The effects of electoral rules on party-system integration go beyond the rules that translate votes into seats. The size of electoral districts may impact heavily on the decision of parties to run for elections or not. In Switzerland, small cantons hold only one or a few seats in the national parliament which leads to very restricted competition for seats. Official proportional rules may actually result in majoritarian electoral competition when there are only one or two seats to be won. Bochsler and Wasserfallen (Chapter 13) observe that parties participating in



elections in small cantons often informally agree to divide the mandates in the two chambers of national parliament. As a result, national elections often do not represent the full political landscape in small cantons, and the regional and national vote within the canton tend to diverge.

Dandoy (Chapter 3) notes that the boundaries of electoral districts support the separation between regional party systems in Belgium. The electoral districts for the regions cover mostly only unilingual territories, and therefore only Dutch-, French- and German-speaking parties compete in elections in Flanders, Wallonia and the German-speaking community, respectively. In the bilingual Brussels region, both Flemish- and French-speaking parties compete for the vote in elections to the Brussels parliament but additional electoral rules prevent the development of pan-linguistic/community lists. First, the number of seats in the Brussels parliament is fixed for each linguistic group (17 seats for the Dutch-speaking parties and 72 for the French-speaking parties), which effectively means that Flemish and Walloon parties compete for different electorates. Second, bilingual lists are forbidden in elections to the Brussels parliament.

Italy provides a third example of how electoral rules can impact on the regionalization of the regional vote. Reforms in 1995 and 1999 introduced majoritarian elements to the proportional electoral systems of the *regioni a statuto ordinario*. Nowadays, voters cast two votes: one for presidential candidates (often supported by a coalition of parties) and one for a party list (not necessarily the same coalition of parties). Seats are distributed proportionally between parties but the coalition supporting the winning candidate for president is awarded a seat bonus in order to ensure a majority in the regional assembly. The seat bonus is then redistributed among the parties of the winning coalition. Massetti and Sandri (Chapter 8) argue that the reform of the regional voting systems favored regionalization of electoral competition in the special statute regions through the introduction of region-specific 'presidential lists'. In contrast, the introduction of presidential lists contributes to the integration of regional and national party systems in the *regioni a statuto ordinario*. The latter finding is in line with those of Escalona, Labouret and Vieira (Chapter 5), who notice that the introduction of a majority bonus of 25 per cent of the total seats to the winning list in 2004 reinforced the second-order status of French *région* elections. Skrinis (Chapter 7) does not relate the majority bonus in Greek *nomoi/peripheries* elections (the winning list obtains at least 60 per cent of the seats) to the extent of second-order election effects (in great part because the electoral system has changed with each regional election), but from a comparative

perspective we may safely conclude that the majority bonus contributes to the nationalization of Greek regional elections.

The country chapters also highlight the role of regional government in explaining regionalization of the vote. In a number of countries, regional elections rarely result in a change in regional government. In Austrian *Länder*, *fylker*, *län* and cantons, formal and informal rules ensure that regional government consists of a coalition of parties including most or all parties. In *amter/regions* and *provincies* proportional electoral systems lead to large party coalitions at the regional level whereby regional government turnover is very rare. For example, Bhatti and Welling Hansen (Chapter 4) observe in Denmark that 9 out of 16 *amter* (including municipalities with *amter* responsibilities) did not experience a single turnover in the party controlling the mayoralty from 1974 to 2005; and two *amter* only experienced turnover within one side of the political spectrum. When regional elections do not lead to a change in regional government, should we expect *a priori* voters to vote according to regional issues? When regional elections do not matter for regional government, should we expect voters to be bothered to cast a vote unless they want to send a signal to the national electoral arena?

Indeed, elections in *fylker* and *provincies* display strong second-order election effects which may suggest that voters who support the party in national opposition are relatively more inclined to cast a vote than those who support the party in national government (Lau, 1985). However, the authors on Austria, Denmark, Sweden, and Switzerland note an absence of second-order election effects. The diverging results can be explained by congruence between regional and national governments. In the Netherlands, the Christian Democratic Party has been part of national government for decades but with parties from either the left or the right, ensuring a clear political color of the coalition. In Denmark and Switzerland, and to a lesser extent Austria, national government coalitions tend to be oversized, including many or all parties, and in Sweden the Social Democratic Party was dominant for many decades, and it obtained an absolute majority of the votes and formed single-party governments with the support of the Communist Party. In other words, when both national and regional governments tend to consist of multiparty coalitions or parties in government do not change, then regional elections are not used by voters to send a signal to parties in national government and therefore second-order election effects tend to be muted or absent. Indeed, we may find the

strongest second-order election effects in bipolar party systems with genuine government alternation at the regional and national level, and where party competition is polarized (e.g. France and Greece).

The findings with regard to the link between regional government and the extent of second-order election effects confirm the results found by studies which analyzed another type of second-order election. European election research has repeatedly found that second-order election mechanisms are at play in elections to the European Parliament (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Reif, 1985; Marsh, 1998; Hix and Marsh, 2007, 2011). These studies have also found that the loss by government parties is more noticeable in bipolar party systems (Reif, 1985) and countries with genuine alternation of parties in government (Marsh, 1998). Most studies on punishing and rewarding political parties in a multilevel context have focused on the American continent: Canada (Gelineau and Belanger, 2004; Johnston and Cutler, 2003), the US (Crew and Weiher, 1996; Niemi, Stanley and Vogel, 1995; Simon, 1989) and Argentina (Gelineau and Remmer, 2005). The federal state structure and the two-party systems in the Americas ensure that there is a clear division of tasks between the tiers of government, and that responsibility for policies can be clearly attributed to one of the parties. The extent to which second-order election effects can be found in regional elections seems to relate to the extent to which voters can hold regional or national government accountable in the regional electoral arena.

As the country chapters show, the nature of regional and national governments is important but there are also indications that the way in which competencies are divided between national and regional government matters too. Skrinis (Chapter 7) writes in the Greek chapter that the duties and responsibilities of the elected prefects and regional administrations are not clearly separated in the two metropolitan areas (Attica and Thessaloniki) and thereby a situation is created in which a voter cannot clearly attribute government responsibility across the tiers. Similarly, Gómez Fortes and Cabeza Perez (Chapter 11) report on Spanish survey data which indicate that voters do not know which tier of government is responsible for which policies.

Related to the finding that the clarity of responsibilities across tiers may impact on the vote are the observations about the role of regional elections and regional government in the composition of upper chambers. The way in which regional authority is exercised through shared rule via an upper chamber may import significant nationalization effects into regional election results. In 3 countries out of 13, we find

an upper chamber which is elected or appointed by regional parliaments or regional governments. In the Netherlands and Sweden (until 1970) the regional assemblies elect the representatives in the upper chamber of parliament, and in both countries we find nationalized regional elections either with or without second-order election effects. The case of Sweden is particularly interesting because the upper chamber was abolished in 1970. Berg and Oscarsson (Chapter 12) observe that before the 1970s, second-order election effects were practically absent whereas after 1970 and especially since the late 1980s government parties more often experience vote share losses in county council elections. In Germany the *Land* governments elect representatives in a second chamber (*Bundestag*) which holds veto power on most federal legislation. The effects of German cooperative federalism on party politics has been researched extensively but one conclusion by Jeffery and Middleton (Chapter 6) stands out: ‘the integrative pull of cooperative federalism co-exists in the voter’s mind with the centrifugal pressures of Germany’s 16 regional political systems [...] reflecting a differentiated form of multi-level statehood in Germany that is simultaneously unitarist and regionally diverse’. We think that this conclusion applies to all country chapters. Regional voting behavior moves on a regionalization–nationalization continuum and we have identified several ‘centripetal’ (top-down approach) and ‘centrifugal’ (bottom up approach) factors which eventually lead to different degrees and forms of nationalization of regional elections.

We think that the three factors discussed in this section are the most important ‘centrifugal’ factors for regional election outcomes since they were recognized in several country chapters. Table 15.4 summarizes the factors which come to the fore via the bottom-up approach. The list is not complete, however. Some authors have identified additional factors which await further analysis. To give one example, Dandoy (Chapter 3) points to the relevance of a split media landscape in Belgium which

*Table 15.4* Bottom-up approach: Variables affecting the regional vote

<b>Statewide parties</b>	<b>Electoral rules</b>	<b>Regional government</b>
Internal party organization	Rules translating votes into seats	Coalition government
Party ideology	Size and boundaries of electoral districts Presidential lists and majority bonus	Role of upper chamber

supports and maintains a regionally divided party system. The opposite happened in Switzerland as documented by Bochsler and Wasserfallen (Chapter 13). Media outlets have increasingly started to cover German- and French-speaking cantons at the expense of local and cantonal newspapers, and the emergence of a new political cleavage around issues of immigration and European integration have contributed to a nationalization of the vote. For reasons of space, we refer to the country chapters for those readers who want to inform themselves about all of the variables which have been identified by the authors as contributing to the regionalization or nationalization of the vote.

### 15.5. The way ahead

An obvious first avenue for further research would be to systematically explore the effects of the 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' variables which are identified with the help of the top-down and bottom-up approach. This book presents the data which allow us to pursue this research agenda (and which we will do elsewhere) with respect to electoral rules and regional government. Lacking, though, is comparative data on internal party organization in a cross-country, cross-regional and cross-time perspective (for a good attempt but on a limited scale, see Detterbeck and Hepburn, 2012; Fabre, 2008; on this point also see Fabre and Swenden, 2013). We hope that the country studies and data presented in the country Excel files (see Chapter 1) will spark off a fruitful research agenda on regional elections.

In this final section we would like to address two further issues which come to the fore in several country chapters and which also affect the study of elections in general. The first concerns the limitations of aggregate electoral data. The main research question we addressed in this book asks whether regional elections are regionalized or nationalized. As we noted in the Introduction, looking at aggregate election results will not allow us to reveal the considerations that regional voters might have when they cast their vote. By operationalizing congruence of the vote in multiple ways and by using various kinds of indicator, we have tried to get the most out of the aggregate data. Party-system congruence can be broken down into electorate and election congruence (see above for definitions), which enable the researcher to identify the main causes of diverging regional and national party systems. We may find party systems to diverge because electorates have different preferences or because voters switch their vote between elections. Different preferences of electorates can often be related to territorial

and sociological cleavages with respect to language, history or economy. Dual voting or vote-switching, however, may indicate nationalization or regionalization of regional elections. Here two additional indicators may be of help. When second-order election effects play a role, we expect to observe vote shares switches from parties in national government to parties in national opposition. However, when dual voting arises out of regional identities or regional issues, we would expect vote shares for NSWPs to increase.

One should be careful in taking the electoral strength of NSWPs as direct evidence of regionalized election behavior. A prediction of the second-order election model is that small parties gain vote share in regional elections and most NSWPs are small parties, particular in a national context. Hence we proposed to look at the ideology of those NSWPs in order to provide additional evidence for regionalization. The clearest example whereby NSWPs are indicative of regionalized regional elections are regionalist parties which explicitly mobilize the regional electorate on the basis of more government powers for the region, or even secession of the region from the state. However, the country chapters have shown that other kinds of regionally based parties may point to regionalized election behavior as well. An example is given by Berg and Oscarsson (Chapter 12) in the case of Sweden where we may find health-care parties in several *lan* which specifically mobilize the regional voter on the issue of the centralization of healthcare services to the capitals of the counties. The health-care parties do not participate in national elections and given that hospitals are run almost completely by the county councils, we can safely assume that the health-care parties are a sign of regionalized election behavior.

On the other hand, the case of Sweden also points out that we should still be careful not to jump to conclusions on the basis of aggregate election data. When we calculate average dissimilarity scores over all regional elections, we find a difference of 3.2 per cent for election congruence. This is by far the lowest figure for all 13 countries (averages are all above 8 per cent; see Table 15.1). This finding is not so surprising given that all local, regional and national elections have been held on the same date since 1970. What is surprising, though, is that Berg and Oscarsson look at individual survey data from election studies which show that ticket-splitters between national and county elections have increased from 6 per cent in 1970 to 27 per cent in 2010 (see Figure 12.2). Therefore, we strongly advise the use of individual survey data when interpreting aggregate election results.

Nevertheless, in this book we decided to focus on aggregate electoral outcomes rather than on individual voter surveys for several reasons. First, we asked the authors to cite regional election studies when available and it appears that voter surveys are especially rare for regional elections. In addition, most national election surveys do not allow for a regional breakdown because often there are too few respondents per region. Moreover, different questions are asked in different surveys which significantly hamper comparison. Second, most regional election surveys are recent whereas the institutional and political context at the regional and national level has changed quite dramatically over the past four decades. To be able to study the effects of these changes on electoral behavior, we have to rely on macrolevel outcomes. Third, there is still a lot to gain from a macrolevel approach as we hope we have shown here. Conducting surveys among voters is expensive and time-consuming, and to make them more effective and efficient we need to gain further insights into the territorial heterogeneity of the vote and the factors that might impact on the vote so that we can better target voters and ask better questions.

The second issue we would like to raise involves the ‘orderliness’ of elections. Several authors question whether regional elections should be conceived as ‘third-order’ rather than second-order elections. The most direct and strongest evidence for ‘orderliness’ of elections is reported by Rose and Hansen (Chapter 10) for Norwegian *fylker*. In the local election study of 1999, voters were asked to indicate which kind of election is most important to them. Only 2 per cent of the respondents said that *fylker* elections were most important whereas 72 per cent indicated parliamentary elections and 27 per cent municipal elections. When asked how important voters perceived *fylker* elections to be, 53 per cent of all respondents indicated that they were of little or no importance while only 10 per cent responded that they were of great importance. Schakel uses turnout data as an indicator on how important Dutch voters find a particular kind of election. He finds that before 1987, provincial turnout was consistently higher (up to 7 per cent) than local turnout. However, since 1987 turnout for provincial elections has been between 4 and 13 per cent lower than for local elections. Here we compare the regional vote to the vote cast in election to the lower house of parliament with the assumption that the latter are often conceived to be the most important elections by voters. Escalona, Labouret and Vieira (Chapter 5) rightfully question this assumption in their chapter on France. They draw on turnout data to show that presidential elections

are probably the first-order election: in 2007, voter turnout in the first round of the presidential election was 85.3 per cent whereas it was 61 per cent in the first round of the legislative elections held a few weeks later.

The issue of 'orderliness' of elections has been raised by scholars who analyzed and compared several types of second-order election (Heath et al., 1999; Rallings and Thrasher, 2005; Skrinis and Teperoglou, 2008). Heath et al. (1999) studied the almost simultaneous local and European elections in the UK and the results of their analysis induced them (1999, p.391) to suggest that 'If the elections to the European Parliament are regarded as second-order, then we might think of elections to local councils as "one and three-quarters order".' The in-depth country studies presented here clearly show that the extent of second-order election effects in regional elections differs widely and the findings also question whether a second-order election perspective is the most appropriate framework for the study of regional elections. The question about 'orderliness' of elections goes beyond researching the conditions under which regional elections retain first- or second-order election effects. We think that this question opens up a whole new research agenda on multilevel electoral systems or multilevel party systems.

Multilevel party systems are characterized by a dispersion of elections and authority across several tiers of government. According to Swenden and Maddens (2009b, p.6) 'the multilevel party system brings together a statewide party system which emerges from statewide elections and a set of regional party systems reflecting the outcome for regional elections'. A full understanding of party competition in federalized party systems 'requires consideration of these separate party subsystems, as well as the interactions between them' (Gibson and Suarez-Cao, 2010, p.37). By approaching elections from a multilevel party system perspective, we arrive at new and interesting research questions, such as the following. When and how do voters make use of the opportunities of voice provided by the various types of election? To what extent do voters hold regional, national or European government responsible across electoral arenas? However, we may also arrive at normative questions: when regional elections are found to be third-order elections, it might reveal a subnational democratic deficit in analogy to the democratic deficit in the European Union. Given the rise in number of subnational and supranational (European) elections combined with increasing authority at both the subnational and supranational (European) level, the study of multilevel party systems and the study of elections beyond national ones becomes increasingly important.



## Note

1. In other work, we analyze regional electoral outcomes in greater detail. For congruence of the vote, see Schakel (2013); for turnout, see Schakel and Dandoy (2014); for vote share changes between regional and national elections, see Schakel and Jeffery (2013); and for NSWPs, see Massetti and Schakel (2013).