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Party competition in regional elections: The strategies of state-wide parties in Spain and the United Kingdom

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Abstract
This article focuses on the electoral strategies of state-wide parties (SWPs) with regard to centre–periphery issues in regional elections. It applies Meguid's Position–Salience–Ownership (PSO) theory to regional electoral competition in Spain and the United Kingdom. We anticipate that SWPs will seek to vary their strategies, especially in regional elections where they face fierce competition from regionalist parties. We also expect their strategies to be influenced by the SWPs' strategy in state-wide elections. The analysis reveals that the key assumptions of the PSO stack up quite well when applied to regional elections. It also reveals the influence of the multi-layered institutional context in which SWPs compete: at the regional level, said parties do not necessarily adopt the most logical strategy according to the PSO theory if this runs counter to the prevailing SWP strategy at the state-wide level.

Keywords
Britain, content analysis, elections, political parties, Spain

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Introduction

This article is based on an exploratory study that applies Meguid's (2005, 2008) Position–Salience–Ownership (PSO) theory to regional electoral competition in Spain and the United Kingdom. The PSO framework assumes that in order to maximize voters during electoral campaigns parties make important choices in regard to *which issues* they should address (salience) and *what position* they should take on these issues. Directional theories of issue voting mostly consider parties' strategies with regard to the Left–Right dimension, but much less so with respect to 'niche issues' such as the environment or the territorial organization of the State (but see Flanagan and Lee, 2003; Hooghe et al., 2002; Inglehart, 1997; Meguid, 2005, 2008). We seek to explain party strategies in relation to such niche issues by considering how mainstream parties (state-wide parties or SWPs) strategize on centre–periphery issues ('the regionalist issue') in state-wide and regional elections.[1] We anticipate that SWPs will seek to vary their strategies, especially where they face fierce competition from regionalist parties (De Winter and Türsan, 1998; De Winter et al., 2006).

SWPs are parties that campaign in all or most regions of the state, and they participate in state-wide and regional elections. By comparison, regionalist parties are parties that campaign in only one region of the state (albeit usually also in state-wide and regional elections). They are primarily concerned with strengthening the region; for instance, by seeking to increase its institutional autonomy (competencies) or by attempting to strengthen its influence in the centre (shared rule). The more successful these regionalist parties, the more SWPs will have to take their issues into consideration during the elections. However, following the PSO framework, we hypothesize that the strategy of the SWP with regard to the autonomist competitor will depend not only on the electoral strength of the latter but also on its ideological proximity to the competing SWP(s). We test our framework on two multinational states with a substantial number of regionalist niche parties: Spain and the United Kingdom.

Empirically and analytically, this article adds to traditional research on issue voting in three ways. First, we modify the CMP (Comparative Manifesto Project) methodology to measure the strategy of parties with regard to the 'regionalist issue'. Second, we apply the PSO framework to analyse SWP strategies in national and regional elections. By including regional elections we correct the 'national' (i.e. state-wide) bias that has permeated most research on issue voting and electoral studies (Jeffery and Wincott, 2010). Finally, we bring in *ideology* as an additional variable, since we assume that the degree to which SWPs vary their electoral profile between (national and regional) elections may also depend on the ideological features of the party.

The article is structured in four parts. In the first, we introduce the PSO approach to issue voting, adapt it to a multi-level electoral environment and formulate five hypotheses. In the second part, we specify how we measure our dependent variable, i.e. the strategy of mainstream parties on the regionalist issue. In the third part, we justify the selection of our cases and in the final part we analyse the data and test the

case-specific hypotheses. The conclusion summarizes our key findings and offers avenues for future research.

How parties address the rise of new challengers: The PSO approach

Four strategies

Table 1. Possible strategies of a party with regard to an issue based on combinations of salience and position

		Position		
		Pro-regionalist	Ambiguous or status quo	Contra-regionalist
Salience	High	Salient accommodative	Salient ambiguous *or* salient status quo	Salient adversarial
	Low	Dismissive		

Theories of issue competition assume a prominent place in the study of party competition. According to these theories, parties have two ways of carving out a party-specific electoral strategy: either they make clear choices with regard to how to position themselves on a number of issues, or they put disproportionate emphasis (salience) on one or a few issues which they seek to own (Downs, 1957; Enelow and Hinich, 1984; Meguid, 2005, 2008; Petrocik, 1990; Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989). Some theories of issue voting emphasize position over salience (proximity theory), whereas issue ownership theories only take salience into account. Meguid's PSO theory, which forms the basis of our analysis, combines both perspectives: salience and position (Meguid, 2004, 2008).

With regard to salience, PSO considers two options which a mainstream party can adopt in relation to an emerging niche party: it may keep silent about the issue with which the niche party is associated and thereby dismiss it as unimportant, or it may stress the issue and thus attempt to increase its salience among the electorate. In Table 1 this gives rise to two types of strategy: *low salience* or what Meguid (2004, 2005, 2008) labels *dismissive strategies* versus *high salience* strategies.

The position of a party vis-à-vis an issue refers to the substantive content of the party's issue profile, i.e. the direction the party prefers with regard to an issue. If a party downplays the importance of an issue simply by not or hardly mentioning it in its manifesto, its position with regard to that issue is simply unknown or irrelevant. As such, the dismissive strategy is the only possible 'low salience' strategy (bottom row of Table 1). In contrast, parties that give an issue significant attention are compelled to take a stance (position) with regard to the issue.

For instance, assume that a SWP is forced to address the issue of regional autonomy because it faces strong competition from a regionalist niche party. The SWP could seek to further the present levels of regional autonomy (an explicit pro-regionalist stance) or

to transfer powers to the central level (an explicit pro-centralist position). Applying Meguid's terminology (2004, 2005, 2008), in the former case the SWP opts for an *accommodative strategy* vis-à-vis the niche party, in the latter case it chooses an *adversarial strategy*. Both the accommodative and adversarial strategies will normally *increase the salience* of the regionalist issue in the election and thus its impact on the vote.

In addition to the three strategies identified by Meguid, we assume that a party could also opt to give the regionalist issue significant salience without giving clear cues as to where it stands. For instance, in one section of its manifesto a party may wish to increase the current levels of regional autonomy (say in taxation powers), whereas in another it may wish to shift competencies back to the central level (say in environmental policy). The outcome is a rather ambiguous profile with regard to the regionalist issue. Alternatively, a party can be consistent in its viewpoint on the regionalist issue but repeatedly defend the institutional status quo. In this case, the chosen strategy with regard to the regionalist issue is not an ambiguous but a status quo strategy.

Mainstream party strategy in relation to a niche party: What the PSO theory predicts

According to Meguid, the chosen strategy of a mainstream party with regard to a niche party will depend on the extent to which such a party poses a threat in the electoral arena. If the niche party does not constitute an electoral threat, i.e. if it emerges but does not attract many votes, Meguid expects the mainstream competitors to adopt a dismissive strategy with regard to the issue given priority by the niche party (2008: 100 f.).

On the other hand, a mainstream party that is confronted with a successful niche party must choose between an accommodative and an adversarial strategy. Its choice is determined by the electoral threat of the niche to the mainstream parties (Meguid, 2008: 101–3). Where this treat is direct, because the niche party is closest to the mainstream's party ideological profile on the Left–Right axis, an accommodative strategy is most likely. By comparison, a mainstream party that is not directly threatened by the niche party is expected to adopt an adversarial strategy if the niche party threatens its mainstream opponent. In doing so the mainstream party raises the salience of the issue and strengthens the legitimacy of the niche party, thereby weakening its mainstream opponent and strengthening its own relative position.

Adapting the PSO framework to a multi-level electoral setting

The purpose of this article is to explain the chosen strategy of a SWP (i.e. the equivalent of the mainstream party above) with regard to the regionalist issue (i.e. the equivalent of a niche issue above). We consider such strategies in state-wide and, especially, regional elections

There are various reasons for expecting the PSO framework to perform well when analysing the strategy of SWPs on the regionalist issue in regional elections. The regional party branches of SWPs are limited in the extent to which they can diverge from the strategies that are pursued by the SWPs in state-wide elections. SWPs are intrinsically multi-level; they seek to maximize their electoral support in state-wide and regional

elections across as many regions of the state as possible. Not all regions may have regionalist parties and their electoral strength and ideological position can vary from one region to the next. Therefore, while SWPs will try to appeal to regionalist sensitivities, they will avoid upsetting the programmatic coherence of the party as a whole. For this reason we would expect the party programme and strategy of SWPs in state-wide and regional elections to be similar. A SWP with a salient and pro-centralist (adversarial) position in state-wide elections but a salient and highly pro-regionalist (accommodative) position in regional elections would undermine its own credibility. Therefore, we expect such a party to opt for a salient but highly ambiguous strategy in the region instead. Applying PSO to a context of multi-level elections with regionalist party competitors therefore generates the following four hypotheses with regard to the strategic positioning of the SWPs in regional elections:

> *Hypothesis 1:* The smaller the size of the regionalist parties against which the SWPs compete, the more likely the latter will pursue a dismissive strategy on the regionalist issue.
> *Hypothesis 2:* SWPs that compete against a successful regionalist party and are directly threatened by this party are most likely to pursue an accommodative strategy.
> *Hypothesis 3:* SWPs that compete against a successful regionalist party but are NOT directly threatened by this party are most likely to pursue an adversarial strategy if their state-wide competitor is directly threatened by this party.
> *Hypothesis 4:* SWPs which are compelled to adopt a salient strategy in the region will resort to a salient ambiguous stance rather than adopt a strategy that runs counter to the strategy in state-wide elections.

The above hypotheses assume that the strategies of SWPs in regional elections are similar to those in state-wide elections. However, there is reason to assume that the opposite may hold. Regional elections always speak to a smaller group of voters and in the context of a multi-level state they determine a set of policies that fall beyond the (constitutional) scope of the central government. Therefore, parties that are contesting state-wide *and* regional elections can reasonably be expected to raise more attention to state-wide issues in the former and to regional issues in the latter (Libbrecht et al., 2009). For the same reason, SWPs could be expected to adopt their comparatively most pro-regionalist profile in regional elections due to the more 'regionalist atmosphere' in which regional elections take place. This is especially the case in plurinational democracies, where regional elections are often held in regions with a strong sense of regional (or indeed 'national') identity. Consequently we can formulate the following hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 5:* Other things being equal, SWPs can be expected to put more emphasis on the regionalist issue and adopt a more regionalist stand in regional than in state-wide elections.

Operationalizing the dependent variable

The strategies of parties are measured on the basis of their salience and position with regard to the regionalist issue. We only consider the extent to which campaign statements express a preference with respect to regional self-rule or the participatory rights

of the regions in the centre (shared rule). By emphasizing the institutional aspects of the regional issue, we leave out identity, linguistic or cultural aspects. In addition, we do not code issues as 'regionalist' where a regional party branch expresses a preference to diverge from state-wide party policy unless the regional branch seeks policy ownership (self-rule) to enable such divergence.

How do we measure salience and position? In order to map 'regionalist issues', we consider the profile of parties on the basis of their manifestos (Ashworth, 1999; Budge et al., 2001). The party manifesto is only one way of studying party strategies and we are aware of its limitations (Laver and Garry, 2000). Alternative methods are interviews with party activists or party elites, expert or public opinion surveys, analyses of roll-call votes of party office-holders in regional or state-wide parliaments or a content analysis of party speeches, media coverage or campaign pamphlets. Given that we are analysing the party strategies of 5 parties in 10 regions for 20 regional and 3 state-wide elections, doing so by studying their party manifestos is the most transparent and feasible method. Furthermore, compared with alternative party sources, party manifestos are the only official documents that are presented by a party on a regular basis, i.e. before elections (Volkens, 2007). They present a clear indication of a party's policy intentions (Ashworth, 1999: 5) and they are strategic documents written or at the very least endorsed by a party's elite. Normally, manifestos are presented by each party for each election; they are easily accessible and relatively cheap to collect. As a clear textual document they are easy to analyse and re-analyse.

The text of the manifesto is first split up into separate statements, or quasi-sentences, applying the CMP guidelines (Budge et al., 2001; Volkens, 1992). Next, the statements pertaining to the regionalist issue are identified. For this, we did not apply the CMP coding scheme, since variables 301, 302 of the CMP codebook – which measure centralization and decentralization, respectively – are too restrictive. Instead, we simply identified the statements that touch upon the relationship between the regions and the centre because these involve the division of competences and/or the balance of power between them. Double-blind coding ensured that the same quasi-sentences were identified as pertaining to the regionalist issue and were coded in a similar way, thus reducing the measurement error.

Following the PSO theory, we cannot limit the analysis to the salience component (as in the CMP approach), but need to 'unpack' campaign messages according to position as well.

The *salience* of the regionalist issue is measured as the share of statements or 'quasi-sentences' on regional autonomy of all statements or 'quasi-sentences' in the manifesto.

The substantive *position* of a party with regard to the regionalist issue requires a more sophisticated procedure involving a qualitative assessment of statements according to the directional cues which they provide. Following directional theory (Macdonald and Rabinowitz, 1993: 65; Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989), we assume that a party's position can be defined as the probability that a party will prefer one direction (for instance, more competences for the region) over the other (such as more competences for the centre). This probability or 'directional certainty' ranges from –1 (certainty that the party prefers one direction) over 0 (probability of preferring one option equals the probability

of preferring the other) to 1 (certainty that the party prefers the other direction). For measuring the directional certainty of the regionalist issue, we developed a coding scheme which distinguishes between five main categories: (1) centralist, (2) status quo centralist, (3) status quo, (4) status quo regionalist, (5) regionalist.[2] Statements expressing a preference for more competences for the region (category 5) are considered as clear cues in support of the autonomist direction, while the reverse holds for statements favouring a recentralization of certain competences (category 1). Category 3 contains status quo or highly ambiguous statements that provide no cue whatsoever as to the preferred direction and can be considered as an implicit stance in favour of the status quo.[3]

Taking these categories into account, the directional certainty variable can be measured as the difference between the number of clear directional statements in one sense minus the number of clear directional statements in the other sense, divided by the total number of relevant statements. In this way the certainty would equal (minus) 1 if all the relevant statements provided consistent directional cues, or zero if all relevant statements fell within the status quo category or if statements in one sense cancelled out statements in the opposite sense.

The interpretation of categories 2 and 4 is less straightforward, since they do not express an explicit preference for a change of the status quo in either sense, but contain a positive assessment of the status quo, from a more regionalist (category 4) or centralist (category 2) perspective. The less explicit cue of these statements with regard to the regionalist issue is taken into account by weighing these statements by half. Directional certainty could thus be measured as the number of clear directional statements in one sense plus half the number of hints in that sense minus the number of clear directional statements in the other sense minus half the number of hints in that sense, divided by the total number of relevant statements.

$$\text{Directional certainty} = \frac{\sum \left(C_{d1} + (H_{d1}/2) \right) - \left(C_{d2} + (H_{d2}/2) \right)}{\sum S_r}$$

with S_r the number of relevant statements, C_{d1} the number of clear directional statements in one direction, H_{d1} the number of hints in the same direction, C_{d2} the number of clear directional statements in the other direction and H_{d2} the number of hints in that same direction.

Case selection and case-specific hypotheses

Spain and the UK are selected for an in-depth analysis of the hypotheses listed above. Both states are multinational and multi-layered. In Spain, regional elections are held across all of the 17 autonomous communities. In the UK, devolved elections have been held since 1999 in Scotland and Wales. Since the average Spanish party manifesto contained about 2,557 quasi-sentences, each of which had to be screened on its regionalist character first and subsequently coded manually according to its position, we had to limit the analysis in time, and, in the Spanish case, also in the number of selected SWPs and regions. For Spain, we only considered (state-wide and regional) election manifestos in the period between 2000 and 2003 for the two largest SWPs, i.e. the PSOE and

the PP. For the UK, we considered state-wide and regional elections between 1997 and 2003 for the three largest SWPs: the Conservatives, the Liberal-Democrats and the Labour Party. In Spain, we selected eight regions with the aim of maximizing the variance on some of the key explanatory variables identified above: the nature of the regional party system (and especially the strength of regionalist parties therein) and the relative position of the SWP on the Left–Right divide vis-à-vis the regionalist parties. For the UK, we can offer a more 'complete' case selection, since we include both regions with an elected regional chamber and state-wide party presence, i.e. Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland and London were not included. In Northern Ireland, devolution was recurrently suspended in the period under consideration. The first elections of the London assembly did not take place until 2000 and its powers were deemed too weak to be included.

The relative strength of regionalist parties

Next to Scotland and Wales, the selection of 8 out of 17 Spanish regions is primarily based on the relative strength of the regionalist party or parties therein.[4] A first group contains three regions with strong regionalist parties, obtaining at least about half of the votes (listed as Type I regions in Table 2). Seven regions have medium-sized regionalist parties, with an average electoral support from just below 20 percent to 33 percent (Type II regions in Table 2). Six regions have significant, but small, regionalist parties which generally poll less than 10 percent of the vote (Type III regions in Table 2). In three remaining regions, there is no significant regionalist party (Type IV regions in Table 2). Our analysis includes regions from each type of regional party system: the Basque Country and Catalonia from Group I; the Canary Isles and Cantabria from Group II; La Rioja, Asturias, Castile and Leon from Group III;[5] and, finally, Murcia from Group IV.[6]

Location of the regionalist parties on the Left–Right scale

The selection of eight Spanish regions also allows us to maximize variance on a second key independent variable: the position of the regionalist parties on the Left–Right axis. In Scotland and Wales, on the other hand, all ethno-regionalist parties are situated to the Left. Table 2 summarizes where the SWPs (and the regionalist parties against which they compete) stand on the Left–Right scale.

Column 1, Table 3 summarizes the *predicted* strategies of the SWPs based on the case-specific information and the first three hypotheses formulated above. In four cases we expect the SWPs to dismiss the regionalist issue for lack of a significant regionalist threat (as put forward in H1). In 17 cases (out of 28) we expect the SWPs to adopt an accommodative strategy because it is threatened by a regionalist party that is positioned in the centre or at *its* side of the Left–Right spectrum (as predicted by H2). Finally, in seven cases we expect the SWPs to opt for an adversarial strategy because their mainstream opponents are faced with a significant regionalist threat (as put forward in H3).

Table 2. Position of regionalist parties in eight Spanish and two UK regions and percentage of the vote for regionalist and SWPs in the last regional election before the analysed election

	Left/centre left	Centrist	Right/centre-right
Basque Country (Type I)	*EA (8.7%)* HB (17.9%) PSE-EE/PSOE (17.6%)		*PNV (28%)* PP (20.1%)
Catalonia (Type I)	*ERC (8.8%)* PSC-CIPC (38.2%)	*CiU (38%)*	PP (9.6%)
Canary Islands (Type II)	PSOE (24.4%)	*CC (37.5%)* FNC (4.9%)	PP (27.6%)
Cantabria (Type II)	PSOE-Progresistas (33.9%)		*PRC (13.8%)* UPCA (3.1%) PP (43.6%)
Scotland* (Type II)	Labour Lib-Dem *SNP*		Conservative Party
Wales* (Type II)	Labour Lib-Dem *PC*		Conservative Party
La Rioja (Type III)	PSOE (36.1%)	*PR (6.4%)*	PP (52.4%)
Asturias (Type III)	*PAS (2.6%)* PSOE (46.7%)		*URAS (7.3%)* PP (32.8%)
Castile and Leon (Type III)	PSOE (33.9%)		PP (52%)
Murcia (Type IV)	PSOE (36%)		PP (53.6%)

Boldface type: Regionalist parties.
*Unlike for Spain, we cannot add the election results for previous regional elections since the 1999 elections were the first regional elections held.
Source: The positioning of the above SWPs and NSWPs on the Left–Right scale is based on secondary literature resources (see Libbrecht, 2009: 180–3, Fabre and Méndez-Lago, 2009: 102–19, Newell, 1998: 105–24 and Christiansen, 1998: 125–43 for a detailed analysis).

Influence of the SWP strategy

The strategy of a regional party branch is affected not only by the strength and location of the regionalist niche party, but also by the chosen strategy and ideology of the SWPs. In Spain, the PP has traditionally been the strongest defender of Spanish unity, a consequence of its Francoist roots and conservative ideology. By comparison, the PSOE has always been more accommodative of regionalist demands (Fabre, 2008; Fabre and Méndez-Lago, 2009; Van Biezen and Hopkin, 2006). For instance, in its 2008 electoral manifesto, the party explicitly referred to Spain as a 'plural state' (PSOE, 2008: Article 1.7.2). Thus, according to H4 we expect the PP to remain ambiguous in those regions where an accommodative strategy would be most appropriate. This is the case for five of the selected Spanish regions (as indicated in the first column of Table 3). Similarly, we expect the PSOE to remain ambiguous in those regions where an adversarial strategy would be most appropriate, a circumstance which applies to two Spanish regions (see Table 3).

Table 3. Expected strategies and values for salience and directional certainty on the regionalist issue for selected Spanish and British SWPs

Expected strategy		Campaign	Institutional	
			Salience	Certainty
Accommodative	Unambiguous	PSOE Basque Country 2001	4.57	−0.07
		PSOE Catalonia 2003	5.71	0.73
		PSOE Canaries 2003	4.82	0.62
		PSOE La Rioja 2003	3.59	0.42
		Labour Scotland 1999	5.38	0.14
		LibDems Scotland 1999	4.42	0.48
		Labour Wales 1999	5.33	0.44
		LibDems Wales 1999	1.46	0.63
		Labour Scotland 2003	3.60	0.46
		LibDems Scotland 2003	1.60	0.63
		Labour Wales 2003	3.07	0.32
		LibDems Wales 2003	4.50	0.91
		Mean accommodative	***4.00***	***0.48***
	Ambiguous	PP Catalonia 2003	5.13	0.28
		PP Canaries 2003	3.50	0.07
		PP Cantabria 2003	3.15	0.25
		PP La Rioja 2003	2.97	0.38
		PP Asturias 2003	3.16	0.30
		Mean accommodative-ambiguous	***3.58***	***0.26***
		Mean accommodative total	***3.88***	***0.41***
Adversarial	Unambiguous	PP Basque Country 2001	10.72	−0.02
		Cons. Scotland 1999	2.45	−0.13
		Cons. Wales 1999	4.39	−0.50
		Cons Scotland 2003	4.11	−0.04
		Cons.Wales 2003	1.72	0.33
		Mean adversarial	***4.68***	***−0.07***
	Ambiguous	PSOE Cantabria 2003	5.32	0.40
		PSOE Asturias 2003	5.03	0.39
		Mean adversarial-ambiguous	***5.17***	***0.39***
		Mean adversarial total	***4.82***	***0.06***
Dismissive		PP Castile and Leon 2003	2.37	0.25
		PSOE Castile and Leon 2003	3.11	0.44
		PP Murcia 2003	4.07	0.31
		PSOE Murcia 2003	1.89	0.51
		Mean dismissive	***2.86***	***0.38***
Mean regional campaigns			***4.00***	***0.32***
State elections		PSOE 2000	5.32	0.08
		PP 2000	4.86	−0.07
		Labour 1997	2.47	0.69
		Labour 2001	1.39	0.35
		Cons. 1997	1.50	−0.37
		Cons. 2001	0.59	−0.30
		LibDems 1997	0.55	1.00
		LibDems 2001	1.68	0.84
Mean state election campaigns			***2.30***	***0.28***

By comparison, in the UK, the Conservative Party initially dismissed devolution, but more recently adopted a more pro-regionalist stance. The state-wide Conservatives defend the existence of the union but 'problematize' the asymmetric nature of devolution, especially the right of Scottish or Northern Irish MPs to co-determine UK primary legislation in devolved matters (the so-called West Lothian question) (Hazell, 2006; Keating, 1998). As for the Labour Party, in the period under investigation the state-wide Labour Party branch supported the institutional status quo and perceived devolution (after all a Labour policy) as a step to save the union. By comparison, the state-wide and regional party branches of the Liberal Democrats consider devolution as a first step towards a federal UK. Summarizing, and in contrast with Spain, for the UK the hypothesized strategies of the regional party branches are all in line with the chosen strategy of the SWPs and thus we expect their stances to be unambiguous.

Analysis

Table 3 presents the values of salience and the directional certainty for each of the state-wide and regionalist parties included in this exploratory study. The Table specifies the values for the regionalist issue in regional elections and the comparable figures for state-wide elections.

What does Table 3 tell us about the validity of our hypotheses? We first consider H1–H3, which apply the PSO framework to regional elections, *without* considering how they may be influenced by the multi-layered character of the state. As a preliminary remark, we notice that in these regional elections the SWPs attribute a relatively low salience to the regionalist issue. They devote on average 4 percent of their manifesto to this issue (against 7 percent for the regionalist parties) (not shown in this Table).

However, confirming our first hypothesis, we observe a positive relationship between regionalist party strength and salience. This can be seen if we compute the average salience of the SWPs in the region for the regionalist issues and relate this to the strength of the regionalist party in the region. The Pearson correlation between these variables is 0.85. The mean salience for the SWPs varies between 2.98 percent and 2.74 percent in Murcia and Castile and Leon, respectively (both regions without significant regionalist parties) to 5.42 percent and 7.65 percent in Catalonia and the Basque Country (with significant regionalist parties). Since there is an apparent relation with the strength of the regionalist party, H1 is confirmed: the smaller the size of the regionalist party, the less the SWPs will emphasize the regionalist issue, i.e. the more dismissive its strategy with regard to the issue will be.

Under H2 and H3, we assumed that SWPs that are forced into taking a more salient stance on the regionalist issue (due to the success of one or several regionalist parties) are more likely to opt for an accommodative strategy when they are directly threatened by a regionalist party, and for an adversarial strategy when their main state-wide competitor is directly threatened. As can be seen from Table 3, all the parties which were hypothesized to adopt an accommodative strategy (with the exception of the PSOE in the Basque Country) have positive directional certainty coefficients, with an overall mean value of 0.41. However, among the parties which we expected to adopt an adversarial strategy, only a few have directional certainty values that are substantially below 0. In fact, only

the Conservative Party in the 1999 Welsh elections opted for an adversarial strategy (with a directional certainty value of −0.50), but the party reversed this strategy in an accommodative sense (with a certainty value of 0.33) four years on. In general, the SWPs which could be expected to benefit from an adversarial strategy (by harming their state-wide competitor) opt for an ambiguous strategy instead. These parties have an overall mean directional certainty of 0.06.

This said, the salience of the regionalist issue for the parties adopting an 'accommodative' and 'adversarial' SWP varies considerably. Arguably, H2 and H3 should be tested on the basis of only those parties which adopt a relatively salient profile. Profiles are considered as such when they record above average salience values for the parties with an expected non-dismissive strategy, i.e. higher than 4.15. When we limit the analysis to these 12 salient profiles the results remain the same. The salient parties that are expected to opt for an accommodative strategy have an average directional certainty value of 0.44. By comparison, salient parties which we would expect to opt for an adversarial strategy have an average directional certainty value of 0.07. Thus, parties which in theory we would expect to take an adversarial stand generally opt for ambiguity. Hence, while the evidence supports H2, we must reject H3.

The previous analysis considered regional elections in their own right. In contrast, H4 and H5 assume that the profile of SWPs in regional elections will be co-determined by the specific needs and constraints of the multi-layered environment in which they compete. In order to test these hypotheses, we also require data on the profile of SWPs on the regionalist issue for state-wide elections. These are provided at the bottom of Table 3. H4 suggests a clear top-down logic, since the SWP profile in state-wide elections is expected to constrain the strategies of regional party branches in regional elections; for instance, by forcing them to adopt an ambiguous strategy when an adversarial stance would make more sense from a mono-level perspective or vice versa. Hence, the party will emphasize the issue, but will refrain from giving clear cues with respect to its preferred policy direction.

As can be observed from the bottom rows in Table 3, the data concerning the preferred direction in state-wide elections are generally in line with the assumptions made above. The socialist (Labour, PSOE) parties and the Liberal-Democrats tend towards a regionalist stance, whereas the Conservative parties (PP, British Conservatives) opt for a centrist stance.

As shown in Table 3, there are five cases where the SWP should opt for an accommodative strategy if only the regional arena is taken into account, but where we expect this stance to be watered down to an accommodative ambiguous stance as a result of a more adversarial stance of the party at the state-wide level. Each of these cases involves the Spanish PP (Catalonia, Canaries, Cantabria, La Rioja and Asturias), which in the preceding state-wide election (2000) took a slightly centrist stand (−0.07). Thus, an accommodative strategy at the regional level would require the party to cross over to the regionalist side. H4 assumed that regional party branches will resolve this dilemma by generating an ambiguously salient profile instead. The data partially bear this out. The PP regional branches in the 'accommodative ambiguous' category record a certainty coefficient (0.26) that is on average below that for the group of 'accommodative' parties (0.48), confirming their more ambiguous profile, as expected. However, the difference is not extreme.

Table 3 also identifies two cases of regional party branches that should opt for an adversarial strategy if only the regional level is taken into consideration (Cantabria and Asturias), but are expected to water this down to an 'adversarial ambiguous' stance given the more regionalist stance of the party at the state-wide level. Both cases concern the PSOE, which in the preceding state-wide election (2000) took a slightly regionalist stance (0.08). However, our expectations are not confirmed, because the certainty score of these two PSOE branches is too high to be considered 'ambiguous', i.e. 0.39 (well above the average -0.07 for the 'adversarial' parties). In other words, the PSOE branches have opted for an accommodative strategy instead, possibly due to a perceived need to bring the regional profile into line with the overall party profile.

Taken together these two PSOE-cases show that the influence of the SWP strategy on that of the regional party branches could be even larger than anticipated. Rather than watering down their party profiles to make them less contradictory to the party profile in state-wide elections, regional party branches may not even cross over to the other side at all.

If the evidence above supports the hypothesis that SWP profiles 'guide' regional party campaigns, we also found evidence to support H5 according to which the specific character of regional elections will compel SWPs to put more emphasis on the regionalist issue and take a more regionalist stance compared with state-wide elections. Indeed, on average, parties pay less attention to the regionalist issue in state-wide elections than in regional elections (the bottom rows of Table 3 record an average salience of 2.3 percent in state-wide elections compared with an average salience of 4 percent in regional elections). However, there is hardly any difference in the position of these parties on the regionalist issue between regional and state-wide elections. The recorded institutional certainty values are 0.32 and 0.28, respectively.

At the same time, there are some noticeable exceptions to this trend. In the Basque regional elections, the PSOE takes a more centrist stand than in the state-wide elections and is positioned close to the PP. Basque party elites and voters cannot readily be persuaded to 'accommodate' autonomist concerns since the issues of Basque self-rule, language, culture and identity constitute the single most important cleavage in the regional party landscape. In this regard, the Basque Country is different from the other Spanish regions where 'accommodative' strategies are more plausible. Similarly, in Britain, there have been a few occasions of SWPs adopting a less regionalist position in regional than in state-wide elections. For instance, the 1997 Labour state-wide election manifesto was clearly more supportive of devolution than subsequent Labour manifestos for Scottish elections. This could be easily explained, since Labour introduced devolution as one of its key constitutional policies in the 1997 state-wide election campaign. Furthermore, the more centrist (adversarial) position of the Conservatives in Wales (1999) can be attributed to that party's earlier mentioned attempt to harm the Welsh Labour Party branch. These are important exceptions, but they do not undermine the overall support for H5.

Conclusion

In this article, we have applied Meguid's PSO theory to analyse the strategies of Spanish and British SWPs on the regionalist issue in regional and state-wide elections. We

assumed these strategies to be influenced by particular features of the regional party systems in which they compete (especially the strength of regional parties therein). Furthermore, we expected the location of the SWP on the Left–Right axis, relative to that of other SWPs and the regionalist party, to tilt the SWP strategy in an accommodative or adversarial direction.

We provide a much more sophisticated measurement of an SWP regionalist strategy than the centralization/decentralization codes of the Comparative manifesto analysis. However, we have applied the CMP methodology in so far as party manifestos were split into quasi-sentences. Where the latter relate to the regionalist issue we recorded its salience as well as position (certainty).

We first tested the validity of the PSO for analysing the strategies of SWP in regional elections, irrespective of how said strategies may be affected by the multi-level context in which these parties operate. Generally, our findings support H1 and H2. SWPs will prefer a dismissive strategy with regard to the regionalist issue if the regionalist party is small, and they are most likely to adopt an accommodative strategy when faced with a sizeable regionalist competitor. However, H3 (that SWPs not directly threatened by a sizeable regionalist party, but whose competitor is, will opt for an adversarial strategy) was not confirmed: with the exception of the Conservatives in Wales (at least for the 1999 elections), parties that could be expected to adopt an adversarial strategy often opted for an ambiguous strategy instead.

A possible explanation for the latter may be in the multi-layered institutional context within which regional elections take place. Party strategies of SWPs in state-wide elections may constrain their parallel strategies in regional elections. Deviant regional campaigns, while potentially benefiting the party at the regional level, may harm its performance in state-wide elections. Therefore, we anticipated (H4) that SWPs may adopt regional strategies that contradict their strategies at the state-wide level, but, instead of making that contradiction very *explicit*, they may make it *implicit* by adopting an ambiguous position on the regionalist issue. The evidence does not bear this out: in some cases regional party branches *do not (even) cross* positions between state-wide and regional elections. Hence, instead of adapting strategies that are implicit (ambiguous) but contradictory to that of the party in state-wide elections they opt for implicit (ambiguous) strategies that are compatible with the party strategy in state-wide elections. Our findings show that SWP strategies on the regionalist issue in state-wide elections influence their strategies on the same issue in regional elections. However, this does not mean that the latter lack distinctive properties. Confirming H5, we demonstrated that the regionalist issue features more prominently in regional than in state-wide elections and that most SWPs adopt a more accommodative strategy at the regional level. Additional research (potentially covering a larger time span) could seek to probe the extent to which the strategies of regional party branches are influenced by (a) pressure from the state-wide party organization on the regional branches (where we expect SWPs with a more centralized party organization to tolerate less divergence in regional campaign strategies), and (b) the presence of the SWPs in state-wide and/or regional government (where the latitude of the regional branches to divert from the campaign of the party at the state-wide level is expected to be smaller when the SWP is in central government).

By and large, our analysis reveals that the key assumptions of the PSO stack up quite well when applied to regional elections, *except* for one, but important, condition. SWPs are not likely to adopt the most logical strategy according to the PSO theory at the regional level if this runs counter to the prevailing strategy at the state-wide level. In other words, an illogical strategy from a *mono-level* perspective may turn out to be a very logical one from a *multi-level* perspective. SWPs do not want to contradict themselves: they may attach more salience to the regionalist issue and somewhat adapt their position, but *not* to the extent of contradicting their strategy in state-wide elections.

Obviously, in this exploratory study we tested the PSO on the basis of a relatively small number of cases covering a relatively short time span. As explained above, the manual coding of party manifestos on the regionalist issue is a highly labour-intensive endeavour for which no software is sufficiently sophisticated. Therefore, what we offer here are trends that confirm or go against prevailing assumptions, *not* rock-hard statistical evidence. For this, we need a larger sample of party manifestos collected over a longer time period, something that only a large international research team can accomplish, but for which, hopefully, we have set the stage.

Notes

1. We use the term 'region' or 'regional' to denote the first level of government below that of the state. We accept that the term 'region' can be contested (since citizens may refer to the region as a nation), but it is widely used among the scholarly community, especially in Europe (Greer, 2006; Hooghe et al., 2008; Keating, 2001; Swenden, 2006).
2. More information on the coding scheme, together with some examples, can be found in Libbrecht (2009: appendix 2: 309–24).
3. Analytically, it makes sense to distinguish between ambiguous and status quo strategies even if they both generate similar values on our dependent variable (see below). An ambiguous strategy implies that pro-autonomist statements cancel out pro-centralist statements; in the case of a status quo strategy, recorded values on our dependent variable will always approximate zero.
4. For an overview of the support for regionalist parties in regional elections in all Spanish regions between 1980 and 2003 and in Scottish parliamentary and Welsh assembly elections between 1999 and 2003, see Maddens and Libbrecht (2009: 210–11); Fabre and Martínez-Herrera (2009: 233).
5. We did not select the important region of Andalusia from this group, since the analysis is limited to regions with regional elections that do not concur with state-wide elections
6. Given its atypical status as state capital Madrid was not included from within this group. Furthermore, Castile-La Mancha was excluded because the regional PSOE branch did not have a manifesto for the 2003 election.

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