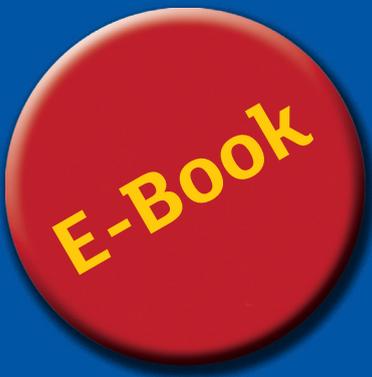Anwen Elias / Filippo Tronconi (Eds.)

From Protest to Power

Autonomist Parties
and the Challenges of Representation

E-Book

nap new academic press

Anwen Elias / Filippo Tronconi (Eds.)

From Protest to Power

Autonomist parties and the challenges of representation

Studien zur politischen Wirklichkeit

Herausgegeben von Anton Pelinka

Band 26

Anwen Elias / Filippo Tronconi (Eds.)

From Protest to Power

Autonomist parties
and the challenges of representation

BRAUMÜLLER

Printed in Hungary

Contents

Michael Keating

Preface

Political science has traditionally studied party systems and party competition within the framework of the nation-state. Sometimes this is explicit, as in the literature on political integration and the nationalization of party systems. More often it is implicit, as the state-wide arena is taken as the unquestioned level of analysis and researchers seek for explanations of voting and party competition of general application. The search for parsimonious explanations and the focus on context-free explanations of behaviour also led to a neglect of territory, while modernist sociology often saw spatial distinctiveness as a feature of pre-modern societies doomed to disappear.

State-centrism in political science has more recently been challenged by European integration and the persistence or revival of sub-state and transnational forms of politics. The supranational and sub-state levels have often been linked as policy issues, institutions and political movements have emerged cutting across the traditional territorial divides. There has, notably, been an increased interest in territorial political movements focused either on pursuing a territorially-defined interest in social, economic or cultural policies, or on securing territorial autonomy.

Political science in the English-speaking world has sought over the years to accommodate these tendencies and to contain them in various ways. The 'second-order election' thesis seeks to reduce the significance of territorial arguments, arguing that voting in non-state-wide elections reflects state-wide issues, being used to punish or reward state governments rather than express a view on territorial matters. This has been subject to increasing criticism in the face of empirical evidence. Other scholars have long sought to marginalize territorial politics and voting on the ground that it only affects a few 'special' regions. This assumes that, outwith these regions, there are non-territorial places in which spatial factors do not matter. In fact, of course, there are no such places and what counts as 'normal' or non-territorial voting is usually just the behaviour of the largest territory, which defines the norm. A related tendency has been to assume that places where 'territorial' voting occurs require a special explanation since they somehow violate normal rules. Finally, the politics of nationality or territorial autonomy is often seen as somehow special or different, a form of zero-sum politics unamenable to the normal process of political exchange.

This collection is part of a new wave of work that treats territorial politics as part of ordinary politics, bringing it back to the mainstream. The territorial dimension is a permanent part of the political structure and

nap new academic press

competitive field. Like other forms of politics, it is subject to competition, bargaining, brokerage and compromise.

This is not to say that territorial politics does not require a particular approach. Introducing territory puts context at the centre of analysis, since all territories are *ex hypothesi* different. A political science based on conventional analysis of variables cannot easily handle this – another reason for the neglect of territory in the past. On the other hand, idiographic case studies do not get us very far in understanding or explanation. Hence the best mode of approaching the politics of territory is often through the comparative case study. This book is an exemplary case of how to do this. The editors have set out a clear and rigorous framework of comparison, identifying the issues at stake and the trajectories of autonomist territorial parties and the ways in which they play into state-wide systems. The case studies follow through in detail, examining context, political dynamics, party strategies and the contingencies of political life. The result is a valuable contribution not just to the understanding of territory as a distinct field of study, but to political science as a whole.

Grenoble, March 2011

List of Acronyms

AB	Abertzaleen Batasuna
aCN	a Cuncolta Naziunalista
ACN	A Chjama Naziunale
AG	Aukera Guztiak
AGALEV	Anders Gaan Leven
AHB	Andreas Hofer Bund
AM	Assembly Member
AMG	Allied Military Government
AN	Alleanza Nazionale
ANC	Accolta Naziunale Corsa
ANV	Acción Nacionalista Vasca
AP	Alianza Popular
ARC	Action Régionaliste Corse
ASGB	Autonomer Südtiroler Gewerkschaftsbund
AuB	Autodeterminaziorako Bilgunea
BNG	Bloque Nacionalista Galego
BN-PG	Bloque Nacional-Popular Galego
CC	Centre Català
CCN	Cunsulta di i Cumitati Naziunalisti
CDC	Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya
CDS	Centro Democrático y Social
CD&V	Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams
CG	Coalición Galega
ChA	Chunta Aragonesista
CI	Cuncolta Indipendenza
CiU	Convergència i Unió
CLN	Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale
CN	Corsica Nazione
CNV	Comunión Nacionalista Vasca
CSD	Corse Social-Démocrate
CVP	Christelijke Volkspartij
CVV	Christelijke Vlaamse Volksunie
DC	Democrazia Cristiana
DP	Democratici Popolari
DS	Democratici di Sinistra
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
EA	Eusko Alkartasuna
EA-I	Eusko Alkartasuna-Iparralde

EB	Euskal Batasuna
EC	European Community
EE	Euskadiko Ezkerra
EHAK	Euskal Herrialdeetako Alderdi Komunista
EHBai	Euskal Herria Bai
EFA	European Free Alliance
EG	Esquerda Galega
EH	Euskal Herritarrok
EHAK	Euskal Herrialdeetako Alderdi Komunista
EMA	Ezkerreko Mugimendu Abertzalea
EN	Esquerda Nacionalista
ERC	Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya
ESB	Euskal Sozialista Biltzarrea
ETA	Euskadi Ta Askatasuna
FDF	Front Démocratique des Francophones
FI	Forza Italia
FLNC	Front de Libération Nationale de la Corse
FPCL	Fronte Paesanu Corsu di Liberazione
FPTP	First-past-the-post
FRC	Front Régionaliste Corse
HB	Herri Batasuna
HZ	Herritarren Zerrenda
ICN	Independenza-Corsica Nazione
ICV	Iniciativa per Catalunya-Verds
IIS	Iniciativa Internacionalista-La Solidaridad entre los Pueblos
IPC	Inseme per a Corsica
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IU	Izquierda Unida
IVC	I Verdi Corsi
LAIA	Langile Abertzale Iraultzaileen Alderdia
LCR	Liga Comunista Revolucionaria
LL	Lega Lombarda
LN	Lega Nord
LP	Liberale Partij
LV	Liga Veneta

nap new academic press

MC	Movimiento Comunista	PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español
MCA	Movimentu Corsu per l'Autodeterminazione	PSUC	Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya
MEP	Member of European Parliament	PVV	Partij voor Vrijheid en Vooruitgang
MP	Member of Parliament		
MPA	Mouvement Pour l'Autodeterminazione	RV	Rassemblement Valdôtain
		RnV	Renouveau Valdôtain
MSI	Movimento Sociale Italiano	RW	Rassemblement Wallon
MSP	Member of the Scottish Parliament	SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
NaBai	Nafarroa Bai	SFP	Soziale Fortschrittspartei Südtirols
NAW	National Assembly for Wales		
NPS	National Party of Scotland	SNP	Scottish National Party
N-VA	Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie	SP	Socialistische Partij
PC	Plaid Cymru	sp.a	Socialistische Partij.Anders
PCE	Partido Comunista de España	SPS	Sozialdemokratische Partei Südtirols
PCI	Partito Comunista Italiano	SVP	Südtiroler Volkspartei
PCTV	Partido Comunista de las Tierras Vascas	THP	Tiroler Heimatpartei
		UA	Unidad Alavesa
PDL	Popolo della Libertà	UCD	Unión del Centro Democrático
PD	Partito Democratico		
PDC	Pacte Democràtic per Catalunya	UDC	Unió Democràtica de Catalunya
PDL	Popolo della Libertà	UDF	Union pour la Démocratie Française
PDS	Partito Democratico della Sinistra		
		UF	Union des Francophones
PLI	Partito Liberale Italiano	UG	Unidade Galega
PNB	Parti Nationaliste Basque	UK	United Kingdom
PNC	Partitu di a Nazione Corsa	UMP	Union pour un Mouvement Populaire
PNG-PG	Partido Nacionalista Galego-Partido Galeguista		
		UPC	Unione di u Populu Corsu
PNV	Partido Nacionalista Vasco	UPD	Unión Progreso y Democracia
PP	Partido Popular		
PPdeG	Partido Popular de Galicia	UPG	Unión Popular Galega
PPI	Partito Popolare Italiano	UPN	Unión del Pueblo Navarro
PR	Proportional representation	UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
PRD	Partido Reformista Democrático	UV	Union Valdôtaine
		UVP	Union Valdôtaine Progressiste
PRI	Partito Repubblicano Italiano		
		VC	Vlaamse Concentratie
PS	Parti Socialiste	VB	Vlaams Blok
PSC	Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya	VBel	Vlaams Belang
		VLD	Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten
PSDI	Partito Socialista Democratico Italiano		
		VNV	Vlaamsch Nationaal Verbond
PSdAz	Partito Sardo d'Azione		
PSdeG	Partido Socialista de Galicia	VU	Volksunie
PSG	Partido Socialista Galego	VVP	Vlaamse Volkspartij
PSI	Partito Socialista Italiano		

nap new academic press

Notes on Contributors

Jordi Argelaguet is a Lecturer in the Department of Political Science of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB). His publications include *El procés d'elaboració de la llei de política lingüística* (Barcelona: Mediterrània, 1998), *Partits, llengua i escola: Anàlisi de la política lingüística de la Generalitat de Catalunya en l'ensenyament obligatori (1980–1995)* (Barcelona: Mediterrània, 1999), and several articles and book chapters about Catalan political parties, Catalan nationalism and language policy in Catalonia.

Oscar Barberà is a Lecturer at the Universitat de València. Previously, he was a Visiting Fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and a Lecturer at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. His PhD thesis was awarded the 2007 Spanish Political Science Association Prize. His research focuses on political parties, political elites, party members and activists, and processes of decentralisation.

Astrid Barrio is a Lecturer at the Universitat de València. She gained a Masters from Sciences-Po (Paris, 1999) and has taught or undertaken research at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Sciences-Po in Paris, and the Université Montpellier. She was awarded the 2008 Spanish Political Science Association Prize for the best PhD thesis. Her research interests include political parties, party members, political elites, Spanish politics, and devolution.

Jo Buelens is a Researcher in the Department of Political Science at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. His main research areas are new/protest parties, elections and electoral systems and local democracy. He also teaches in the Department of Journalism, at the Erasmus Hogeschool in Brussels.

Giorgia Bulli is a Research Fellow in Political Science at the University of Florence, where she also teaches in the areas of political communication and the analysis of political language. Her research interests include political parties, political extremism and political communication. Her recent publications have analysed the political discourse of the Lega Nord and the 2009 German federal election campaign.

Lieven De Winter is a Senior Professor at the Université Catholique de Louvain. He has edited several volumes of comparative analyses of regionalist parties in Western Europe. His other research interests include coalition formation, territorial identities and community conflicts, and electoral behaviour in regional, national and European elections.

Anwen Elias is a Lecturer in Comparative Politics at the Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University. She is the author of *Minority Nationalist Parties and European Integration* (London: Routledge, 2008), and is currently undertaking research on party competition in regional elections funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

nap new academic press

Elise Féron is Senior Lecturer in International Conflict Analysis at the Brussels School of International Studies (University of Kent), where she is also a researcher at the Conflict Analysis Research Centre. Her research focuses on conflict studies, with particular reference to Northern Ireland. Her most recent publications include *Abandonner la Violence? Comment l'Irlande du Nord Sort du Conflit* (Paris: Payot, 2011).

Margarita Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro is a Professor of Political Science at UNED. Her research interests include nationalist parties in Europe and the new radical right. She has published as author and editor several works on nationalist parties in Europe and the politics of Euroskepticism.

Jean-Marie Izquierdo teaches at the Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour. His research focuses on nation-state building, nationalism, political parties, transborder studies and European politics. He is the author of *La Question Basque* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 2000) and *Le Pays Basque de France* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001).

Peter Lynch is a Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Stirling. He is the author of *SNP: The History of the SNP* (Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press, 2002) and co-editor of *Autonomist Parties in Europe* (Barcelona: ICPS, 2006). He writes and researches on political parties, devolution and Scottish politics and is currently involved in developing material for the Scottish Political Archive at the University of Stirling.

Günther Pallaver is a Professor of Political Science at the University of Innsbruck, Austria. He has also been a Visiting Professor at the Universities of Trento and Bolzano/Bozen. He is currently President of the South Tyrolean Political Science Association.

Santiago Pérez-Nievas is a Lecturer in the Department of Political Science at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. His research interests include parties and electoral behavior with a particular focus on multilevel contexts, particularly in relation to the Basque Country and Catalonia. He is currently conducting research on the political and electoral behavior of migrant groups in Spain.

Christophe Roux is a Senior Lecturer in Political Science at the University of Montpellier I, and a member of the South European Centre for Political Studies (CEPEL-CNRS). His research focuses on European minority nationalism and South European politics. He is co-editor (along with N. Conti and F. Tronconi) of the Special Issue *Parties and Voters in Italy: The Challenges of Multi-Level Competition* in the journal *Modern Italy* (Vol. 14, No. 2). He is a member of the editorial board of the journal *Pôle Sud*.

Giulia Sandri is a PhD candidate at the Université Libre de Bruxelles and a member of the CEVIPOL research centre. Her research interests include party membership, intra-party democracy, ethno-regional parties and regionalism. Her research has recently been published in the journals *Politics and Policy* and *Cultures et Conflits*.

Filippo Tronconi is a Lecturer in the Department of Political Science at the University of Bologna. His main research interests are in the fields of political parties, political elites and electoral systems. His publications include *I partiti etnoregionalisti. La politica dell'identità territoriale in Europa occidentale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009).

Acknowledgements

nap new academic press

Anwen Elias and Filippo Tronconi[1]

Introduction: Autonomist Parties and the Challenges of Political Representation

1.1. Introduction

The emergence of several "new" parties in Western Europe (Harmel 1985) has generated a new scholarly interest in the nature and impact of the political representation of what have also been referred to as "small" and "minor" parties (Herzog 1987; Müller-Rommel and Pridham 1991). In particular, the emergence of Green parties from the early 1980s onwards, and the success of many of these parties in entering government from the mid 1990s onwards, generated a large body of literature that examined their organisational structures and programmatic profiles, and changes in these features as parties adapted to being coalition partners (Müller-Rommel 1989; Poguntke 1993; Rihoux 2001; Rüdig 2001; Müller-Rommel 2002; Poguntke 2002; Rihoux and Rüdig 2006). Similar, albeit less extensive, research has been conducted on extreme-right parties (for example, Heinisch 2003), whilst others have examined what happens to political parties when they enter government for the first time (Deschouwer 2008).

This growing interest in the experiences of new political parties within political institutions and public office has, however, largely overlooked autonomist parties in Western Europe. This is in spite of the fact that, in many places, autonomist parties have become major electoral and political players. In Catalonia and the Basque Country, autonomist parties boast a long record of government incumbency at the regional level and have periodically been key actors in securing governing majorities at the state level (Elias and Tronconi 2011). The electoral breakthrough of the Italian Lega Nord (LN) in the 1990s, its participation in Berlusconi's right-wing coalition government briefly in 1994, again from 2001–2006 and from 2008 to the present, has had a significant impact on Italian politics (Giordano 2003; Ruzza 2006). After the creation of devolved institutions in Scotland and Wales in 1999, the Scottish National Party (SNP) and Plaid Cymru (PC) were the main opposition parties within their respective territories; after the 2007 elections to these bodies, they became parties of government, either alone (SNP) or as part of a coalition (PC) (Elias and Tronconi 2011).

---

[1] This chapter has been jointly authored. The final draft of sections 2, 4 and 6 can be attributed to A. Elias, the final draft of sections 1, 3 and 5 to F. Tronconi. Section 7 has been written jointly.

Even in cases where autonomist parties have been less electorally successful, the fact that they choose to contest elections has impacted on the party systems within which these parties exist, both in terms of their core structures – such as the number and relative strength of parties – and the nature of the interaction between parties (Mair 1990: 171). The presence of one or more autonomist party in a party system has led to changes in the direction of party competition (between polarised centrifugal competition and centripetal competition for the median voter), the degree of competitiveness within the party system, and the formulation of party strategies, including the patterns of coalitions between parties. This is the case not only at the regional level where autonomist parties mobilise, but also at the state level of party competition, where in many cases (and as the examples of Convergència i Unió (CiU), the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV) and the LN above attest), the presence of autonomist parties has impacted on the structure and dynamics of party competition. In this way, autonomist parties have contributed to the increasing inter-linking of state and sub-state systems of party competition (Thorlakson 2006: 39), a dimension of multi-level electoral politics that has hitherto received very little academic attention.

Given the significance of autonomist parties within political systems across Western Europe, an analysis of the ways in which political representation has impacted upon the autonomist party family is long overdue. This volume undertakes such an analysis. Firstly, it maps the ways in which autonomist parties have evolved within their respective political and institutional arenas. In particular, the empirical contributions examine the degree to which autonomist parties have succeeded in passing different thresholds associated with different stages of political party development, from declaring their intention to participate in elections, to getting representatives elected to democratic institutions, to being parties of government. Secondly, the volume examines the ways in which passing different thresholds have impacted upon autonomist parties, both in terms of their internal organisation, and the goals that they pursue within different political arenas. Thirdly, the volume addresses the question of the degree to which autonomist parties "matter" within their respective political systems, in the sense that they have successfully pushed for the territorial reorganisation of the state in a way that increases the autonomy of the minority nation. This is an important question, since such successes can have major implications for the constitutional integrity of states.

In order to meet these aims, this introductory chapter proposes a framework for analysing the lifespans of autonomist parties, and the ways in which autonomist parties change as they evolve from being parties of protest, to being parties in power in many cases. The next section outlines a model for distinguishing between different stages in an autonomist party's development, and formulates hypotheses about the factors that impact

nap new academic press

upon a party's ability to move from one stage to the next. The chapter then turns to an examination of how autonomist parties are expected to change their organisations and goals as a consequence of crossing different thresholds. It concludes by specifying criteria for measuring the success of autonomist parties in meeting their core goal of territorial reform.

1.2. The lifespan of political parties

Pedersen (1982) uses the notion of "party lifespan" to describe the ways in which political parties evolve and change over time. It is based upon an assumption that parties as organisations are not frozen components in the political system, but change over time. Different stages in a party's evolution can be identified, each characterised by its own dominant and different quality (*ibid*.: 8). Pedersen's model thus lends itself well to the disaggregation of qualitatively different phases of party development. Other authors have adopted a similar approach to analyse new parties to good effect (Rihoux 2001; Müller-Rommel 2002; Deschouwer 2008), and it is an appropriate tool for understanding the ways in which autonomist parties have developed and changed over time.

The model starts from the assumption that the aim of any party is to gain representation, and thus participate in electoral competition. As parties grow old, they will pass (or step back over) some important *thresholds*, depending on their own electoral fortunes as well as the peculiarities of the party system in which they operate. These thresholds constitute the critical passages between different phases in the party's lifespan, and are categorised by Pedersen as follows:

i)   *Threshold of declaration*: a group declares that it will participate in elections;
ii) *Threshold of authorisation*: the party fulfils the legal regulations and other requirements in order to be able to participate in elections;
iii) *Threshold of representation*: the party is able to gain seats in parliament;
iv) *Threshold of relevance*: the presence of the party in the party system affects existing patterns of party competition, either due to impact on government policy output or government formation.

Deschouwer (2008), following the framework introduced by Sartori (1976/2005), proposes adapting Pedersen's model by distinguishing more clearly between two aspects of relevance, and adding a new fifth threshold, as follows:

nap new academic press

iv-a) *blackmail potential*: when a party forces other political parties to respond to it;

iv-b) *coalition potential*: a party is seen as possible governing coalition partner;

v) *Threshold of governance:* when a party enters government.

The literature cited thus far takes as its level of analysis that of the state, where the passing of thresholds is conceptualised as something that happens to state-wide parties at the state level. Such an approach is typical of the academic literature on party behaviour in general, which is overwhelmingly single-level in nature. This reflects the fact that contemporary parties and party systems came about as the result of a process of state-formation that closed territorial borders and 'froze' patterns of societal conflict within national systems of party-political competition (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Bartolini 1998; Deschouwer 2003).

For the majority of political party families, state-level party competition is indeed the most important. For autonomist parties, however, it is the regional level that constitutes what Deschouwer (2003: 216) calls the "core-level". Firstly, autonomist parties have no organisation at a higher territorial level, and only seek to mobilise electoral support within the minority nation they claim to represent. Secondly, the ultimate goal of autonomist parties is to re-organise political authority in such a way as to secure self-determination for the minority nation (although self-determination may be defined in different ways by different autonomist parties). Since this is the defining characteristic of the autonomist party family (De Winter 1998: 241), the regional level is intrinsically the most important level for the autonomist political project.

This does not mean that autonomist parties confine party behaviour to the regional level. On the contrary, autonomist parties frequently seek representation at several different political levels: local, regional, state and European. In some cases, the absence of a regional level of government means that the only chance for gaining representation is to compete in elections on other political levels. This was the case for PC and the SNP until 1999, where for many years general elections to Westminster were the only game in town (Wyn Jones and Scully 2006). In other cases, even when a regional level of representation exists, gaining representation at the state level remains an important goal, since this can serve as a platform for securing further rights for the minority nation. In Spain, for example, the Basque PNV and the Catalan CiU have successfully used their strong representative base within the Spanish Cortes to extract further rights for their respective territories (Pérez-Nievas 2006; Barberà and Barrio 2006). After all, given that the main policy objective of autonomist parties is the reorganisation of the state power structure in order to increase the degree of regional self-government, and given that only legislative bodies at the state level are competent to approve

such a reorganisation, the state level will always be an important focus for autonomist political activity (De Winter 1998: 211–12). Deschouwer (2003: 221) notes that particularly within federal systems, where the regional level has a formal role in federal decision-making, securing representation at the state level is crucial, since doing so equates to a direct say in federal decision-making processes that may affect the regional level.

While the regional and state levels are likely to be the most important for autonomist parties, one cannot discount the importance of the European and local level of political activity, although the way in which these levels matter may differ from regional and state levels. Thus, for example, European elections may be less important in the sense that the European Parliament does not have a direct impact on the re-distribution of political authority within the minority nation. However, representation within the European Parliament may nevertheless be symbolically important, since it enables autonomist parties to claim that they can by-pass the state and represent their nation's interests directly on the supranational level (Elias 2008). Having an MEP may be particularly important if the party is excluded from institutional arenas on the regional and state levels. Similarly, securing a presence within local institutions may also be a priority if other levels of representation are closed off.

For autonomist parties, therefore, the reality of party competition is very often that of competing at multiple political levels simultaneously. How do multi-level political systems impact upon the analysis of autonomist party lifespans and the crossing of different thresholds? As Deschouwer (2003: 214) notes, "at this moment in time, we do not possess well-developed conceptual language that allows us to set refined research questions that might enable us to systematically analyse political parties in a multi-layered political system". Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, it is necessary to develop hypotheses on how the lifespan of autonomist parties is likely to be shaped by the reality of multi-level politics, and how party organisation and party goals may be affected by crossing different thresholds at different territorial levels. The framework presented below is primarily concerned with regional, state and European levels of representation, although some of the case studies that follow also consider the local level if it is of particular importance for a given autonomist party.

1.3. Mapping the lifespans of autonomist parties in multi-level political systems

1.3.1. Threshold of declaration

In most cases, political parties can be said to pass this threshold when they decide to participate in elections. This usually involves a formal decision, taken by a structured body and according to more or less for-

malised rules and procedures. In such a situation, the point at which the threshold of declaration is passed should be relatively straightforward to identify. In some cases, a political party may take this decision if it emerges out of, or splits from, an existing one; equally it may be the case that an existing organisation (such as a pressure group) decides to directly participate in electoral competition. Many autonomist parties, for example, have emerged out of social movements. When this is the case, however, identifying the precise moment when the threshold of declaration is passed may be more problematic. Such movements may choose to participate in elections irregularly for instrumental reasons (for example, to gain political visibility), or may place candidates on other parties' electoral lists, thus gaining political representation without being directly involved in the electoral process as a party political organisation. In such situations, there is a grey area that makes it difficult to judge whether the threshold has been passed or not. It may even be the case that a movement passes the threshold of authorisation – and possibly even the threshold of representation – without first having passed the threshold of declaration.

1.3.2. Threshold of authorisation

Two types of systemic factors may condition the ability of an autonomist party to cross the threshold of authorisation. *Organisational constraints* refer to the set of formal requirements parties have to respect to be allowed to compete in elections. Electoral laws usually require parties to present a minimum number of signatures supporting each list or candidate; in some cases a deposit is also required. In other words, parties must demonstrate *ex ante* that they have a minimum level of organisation and support in order to participate in an election. *Political constraints*, on the other hand, aim at excluding certain parties that are (perceived as) threats to the democratic order or to the integrity of the state from the electoral process. Communist and/or Fascist parties are, or have been, excluded from the political system in this way in many Western European countries. This can happen by way of a general decision (all parties agreeing that certain ideological positions are banned) or through *ad hoc* court decisions that exclude parties from electoral contests. An example of the first kind was the Italian law passed in 1952 forbidding the reconstruction of the Fascist party (the so called *Legge Scelba*). The second method was employed in Belgium, when the Vlaams Blok (VB) was forced to change its name into Vlaams Belang (VBel), after a decision of the Court of Cassation on the 9th November 2004 found three of the associations affiliated with the VB to be violating legislation on racism and xenophobia (Erk 2005).

nap new academic press

1.3.3. Threshold of representation

Once authorised to compete in elections, autonomist parties will pass the threshold of representation when they get enough votes to win one or more seats in an elected institution. But the definition of "enough votes" varies from one political system to another, and from one territorial level to another. The criteria for passing the threshold of representation are determined, first and foremost, by the electoral rules in place for each election. In other words, the kind of electoral system – first-past-the-post (FPTP), proportional representation (PR) or any of the variants in between – will affect the ability of autonomist parties to elect representatives in different ways.

Since Duverger's (1954) pioneering study, it has been widely accepted that FPTP systems tend to produce highly disproportional results which reward the political party with a plurality of the votes generously, whilst punishing all others who come in second or third place, regardless of how many votes the 'losers' have gained. When applied to homogeneously structured party systems, this kind of electoral rule makes it difficult for small parties to challenge the hegemony of dominant state-wide parties within single constituencies. However, the territorial concentration of the support base for autonomist parties may reduce, or even eliminate, these negative effects (Sartori 1986), as a party that is electorally irrelevant at the state level may be a very competitive party in a number of constituencies within that specific territory. For this reason, the shape of constituencies can be crucial. For example, if constituencies are demarcated in such a way as to overlap with the territorial distribution of the minority party's core electorate, an autonomist party will increase its chances of being a majority within the constituency and, thus, of getting representation. The converse also holds; when constituency boundaries cut across the territorial distribution of an autonomist party's support base, then it will be much more difficult to secure a sufficient majority to pass the threshold of representation.

With PR systems, in contrast, in principle each party (regardless of size) gets a share of the seats that corresponds to its share of votes. In practice, however, at least two modifications to this principle can affect the actual distribution of seats, and therefore the ability of autonomist parties to pass the threshold of representation. The first constraint is the existence of a legal threshold that determines the minimum percentage of votes required by a party before it is eligible for representation. Even a low threshold at the state level may represent an insurmountable hurdle for an autonomist party. The second constraint that can impact upon seat allocation within PR systems is district magnitude. Small constituencies (that is, constituencies electing a small number of representatives) produce a disproportional

nap new academic press

effect that tends to penalise smaller parties. However, and similarly to what happens with FPTP electoral systems, a territorially concentrated electorate may counterbalance this effect, and may boost autonomist party prospects for passing the threshold of representation.

It is not only electoral rules that can affect an autonomist party's ability to pass the threshold of representation on different territorial levels. There is considerable evidence, for example, that electorates vote in different ways, depending on the nature of the election. In elections that are considered to be 'second-order' (Reif and Schmitt 1980) – when there is less at stake that in 'first-order' (state-wide) elections – voters may be more willing to 'experiment' by voting for smaller or new parties that may be closer to their preferences but for which they would not vote in more significant first-order elections. Thus, there is evidence that autonomist parties fare better in European Parliament elections than in other, first-order elections, directly as a result of this second-order effect (De Winter 2001; Raunio 2003; Elias 2008). Heath *et al.* (1999) have argued that whilst local elections may give rise to similar second-order effects, they are less second-order than European Parliament elections – due to the perception that there is slightly more at stake than in the latter – and perhaps are best characterised as "one and three quarters order" elections. However, in regions where there is a very strong territorial dimension to party competition, voters tend to follow a "regional parties for regional issues" rationale; autonomist parties are often perceived as better able to represent the interests of the national territory (Hough and Jeffery 2003; Pallarés and Keating 2003; Wyn Jones and Scully 2006). This electoral advantage should make it easier for autonomist parties to pass the threshold of representation at this level.

The timing of elections is a further factor that can affect a party's ability to pass the threshold of representation (Thorlakson 2006: 42-45). In cases where elections for representative institutions on different levels occur at the same time, elections are expected to be dominated by political dynamics at the level where there is most at stake. Thus, for example, when regional elections coincide with state-wide general elections, then state-wide election issues are expected to dominate at both levels. In such a scenario, one can assume that voting patterns will also reflect state-level dynamics of party competition, which may not necessarily favour territorially concentrated parties such as autonomist parties. In contrast, where regional elections are held at different times to other elections, region-specific issues are more likely to dominate, with autonomist parties likely to benefit for the reasons suggested above.

Finally, specific rules may be created to assist autonomist parties to pass the threshold of representation at a given territorial level, especially if this cultural or linguistic group is deemed to be under-represented within

nap new academic press

representative institutions. Such provisions could include rules to increase the number of autonomist candidates standing for election (such as have been adopted for other minority groups such as women or ethnic minorities), or a re-definition of constituency boundaries in such a way that would boost the chances of autonomist party candidates in satisfying the criteria for passing the threshold of representation.

1.3.4. Threshold of relevance

It is by now widely accepted that the weight of a party, in terms of parliamentary seats, is not sufficient to determine whether it is relevant or not. Thus, passing the threshold of relevance implies that the party plays a role in *i)* affecting the composition of government and/or *ii)* shaping the policy agenda. Following Sartori (1976/2005: 107–8), a party is relevant either when it has "coalition potential" or "blackmail potential". For the sake of analytical clarity, as suggested above, it is worth considering these two dimensions of party relevance separately.

4a – Blackmail potential. A party may also be relevant, however, because its mere existence affects the patterns of competition between other parties. For Sartori (1976/2005: 109), this is a category that is "mainly connected to the notion of anti-system party". These are parties that *cannot* enter government because they lack legitimacy in the eyes of would-be coalition partners. Though the parliamentary weight of anti-system parties is sometimes far from negligible, their bargaining power is virtually reduced to zero. Nonetheless, they affect the structure of party competition because their *a priori* exclusion reduces the number of available coalition options, thus contributing to making the pattern of competition between political parties a closed one (Mair 2002). In order to possess blackmail potential, an autonomist party would thus first have to mobilise significant support for the idea that the existing boundaries of the state are illegitimate, and that a new independent political entity should be established out of a portion of its territory. Other political parties would then be required to decide whether to accept or reject the autonomist party as a possible coalition partner; in the event that the autonomist party is not considered a legitimate governing partner, its mere presence can be said to affect the shape of political competition.

But autonomist parties may also be relevant even though they do not adopt an anti-system strategy. This is the case when parties are able to bring issues onto the policy agenda that would otherwise be excluded. A party may bring the issue of the restructuring of the territorial distribution of political authority to the attention of decision makers simply by attracting votes on the basis of this kind of political proposal. Work by Meguid (2008) leads us to expect that political parties are most likely to adopt such an accommodative strategy – whereby they co-opt an autonomist party's

nap new academic press

issues – the greater the direct electoral threat posed by the latter. Autonomist parties will also be able to exercise blackmail potential when they are in a position to extract policy commitments from other parties because they hold the balance of power between different possible governing coalitions. It should be noted that this definition of "blackmail" is broader than that proposed by Sartori. However it is justified since autonomist parties that can shape the direction of political competition and determine political outcomes in such a direct way cannot be considered irrelevant.

4b – Coalition potential. A party has coalition potential when it is "in a position to determine, over time, and at some point in time, at least one of the possible governmental majorities" (Sartori 1976/2005: 108). This enables us to discriminate not only between governing and opposition parties, but also between parties that are either in temporary or permanent opposition, the latter being a characteristic of many anti-system parties (for the reason stated below).

1.3.5. Threshold of government

Legitimisation is a necessary but still not a sufficient condition for passing the last threshold, namely government participation. A party passes this threshold either when it gains a clear majority of seats in the legislature and is thus able to govern alone, or when it forms part of a governing coalition along with other parties. In this latter scenario, however, legitimate potential coalition parties may choose not to enter a governing coalition if given the opportunity. The party may consider that doing so could have a negative effect on its political programme or its popularity among its core electorate. Moreover, establishing a coalition with state-wide parties (either at regional or state level) is likely to require difficult negotiations and compromises on core autonomist issues such as centre-periphery relations, regional autonomy and cultural protection. More is said on the dilemmas of government office in the discussion of changing party goals below. In short, therefore, whilst parties may qualify to cross the threshold of government (because they have an electoral majority or as a possible coalition partner), they may not always choose to cross this thresholds as doing so might entail consequences that are deemed to be too costly in comparison to the benefits of being in government office.

1.3.6. Summary: Evaluating the lifespans of autonomist parties

This basic model, anchored in the notion of different thresholds that characterise a political party's lifespan, raises several specific research questions that the empirical contributions in this volume can begin to answer. Firstly, to what extent have autonomist parties succeeded in crossing thresholds at different territorial levels? Secondly, is there a uniform pattern of crossing thresholds at different levels (for example, at the regional level first, then the

nap new academic press

state level, followed by the European level), or have individual parties crossed different thresholds at different levels at different points in time? Thirdly, how long does it take different parties to achieve each threshold? The lifespan of a party may span a few election periods, but equally it may range over many decades; moreover whilst some thresholds may be passed in quick succession, it may take considerably longer to pass other thresholds. Fourthly, are there examples of a party going backwards, as well as forwards, over thresholds (for example, as a consequence of fluctuating electoral fortunes)? Finally, what are the systemic and internal factors facilitating or hampering the achievement of each threshold, and how do these factors differ between different territorial levels?

1.4. The consequences of threshold crossing: Change in party organisation

A substantial body of theoretical and empirical literature has argued that important changes in a party's electoral fortunes or status equate to an external shock that require a party to respond. In other words, each time a party crosses a threshold, it will be under pressure to adapt to its new political and institutional environment. Failing to do so risks the party's survival (Panebianco 1988). The notion of party change usually refers to two distinct phenomena: change in party *organisation* and change in party *goals.* The various ways in which autonomist parties are expected to change their organisational structures and political goals as a result of passing different thresholds at different territorial levels are set out in the remainder of this chapter.

Crossing different thresholds will require parties to change their internal organisations in order to carry out the new functions expected of them efficiently. Two distinct approaches to studying organisational change can be identified in the academic literature, although they are complementary, rather than competing, attempts to understand different types or aspects of organisational change (Harmel 2002: 128).

Firstly, several authors have identified gradual changes in party type as parties pass from one threshold to the next (Krouwel 2006). Some have identified patterns of organisational change closely linked to a party's life-cycle, with political parties assuming specific organisational features as they evolve (Harmel 2002: 121). Others have focused on general processes of organisational development as a response to changes in parties' organisational environments (*ibid.*: 122–125). One such trend is for parties to de-emphasise the role of members on the ground while strengthening the role of professional politicians and non-elected bureaucrats within the party organisation over time. Mair (1994) presents this shift in intra-party power as a result of the changing relationship between three distinct 'faces' of any party organisation: the party on the

nap new academic press

ground (the membership), the party in central office and the party in public office (the party in parliament and the party in government). Over time, and particularly as parties become established agents of political representation, the relationship between these three 'faces' changes. The general trend is for the party on the ground to become weaker, while the party in public office becomes more important. The role of the central party organisation also evolves, from representing and defending the interests of party members to supporting the concerns and activities of the party in public office. The shifting balance of power between different faces of the party may lead to new tensions, as different groups either attempt to re-claim lost influence, or try to retain a grip on newly-acquired authority within the party organisation as a whole.

A second approach to party change emphasises the importance of more abrupt stimuli for party change (Harmel and Janda 1994; Harmel *et al.* 1995). On the one hand, these stimuli can be external to the party. Events such as electoral success or failure, or the establishment of a new institutional setting, require parties to adapt quickly to these external changes. On the other hand, the stimulus for organisational change can come from inside the party itself. Thus a change of leadership and/or the emergence of new factions within a party, may also lead a party to change its organisational structures.

Table 1.1 identifies several indicators for the two different dimensions of party change identified above.

Table 1.1. *Dimensions and indicators of organisational change*

Concept: *change in organisational ...*	Indicators: *change in ...*
Complexity	– number of levels
	– number of units/committees with different functions/responsibilities
	– organisational boundaries (who can participate when?)
	– number and variety of tasks performed, specialisation (who performs what administrative tasks?)
Magnitude	– the number of staff involved in executing tasks
Control:	
Distribution of power	– the distribution of authority among units and between levels
	– the degree to which the membership is directly involved in decision-making
Representation	– the representation of different groups or interests within decision-making bodies

Source: Adapted from Harmel (2002: 138).

This table provides a general guide for identifying and measuring organisational change within autonomist parties as they pass different thresholds during their lifespan. However, the pressures on parties to change their party organisation is unlikely to be uniform across all thresholds and across all territorial levels.

Firstly, different thresholds are expected to generate different pressures on autonomist parties to change their party organisations. Thus, for example, when a party crosses the threshold of declaration (by declaring its intention to compete in elections), a whole new set of organisational challenges arise related to the task of competing in elections. Procedures will need to be formulated for candidate selection, but these may not necessarily be uniform for all electoral contests on all territorial levels. Where candidates are selected to represent local constituencies, local party organisations are likely to have a greater say in who they want to represent them; for larger constituencies (such as state-wide constituencies in European Parliament elections in some countries like Spain, for example), the central party organisation will have more of a say in selecting candidates (Van Biezen and Hopkin 2006: 16). Moreover, parties will need to devote human and financial resources to the elaboration of electoral strategies. These will also need to vary depending on the nature and level of the electoral contest, as electoral programmes need to be tailored to the needs of the electorate (*ibid*.: 17). The pressure for organisational change generated by passing the threshold of declaration, therefore, is likely to be substantial.

Passing the threshold of authorisation, in contrast, will exert considerably less pressure for organisational change. Whilst autonomist parties may have to prove a certain degree of organisational stability in order to pass this threshold in the first place, or collect a certain number of signatures or financial deposit in order to contest an election (see above), once these criteria of authorisation have been met, no additional pressures for organisational change *directly* related to passing this threshold are envisaged.

Of all the thresholds that an autonomist party will strive to pass during its lifetime, it is expected that the threshold of representation will generate the greatest pressure for organisational change. This pressure arises from the necessity of adapting from being a party of protest outside the institutional arena – often with a limited political agenda defined by the party's territorial project – to being a party able to compete on the wide range of political issues beyond its "core business". In the first instance, therefore, crossing the threshold of representation will require autonomist parties to broaden their policy repertoire (Müller-Rommel 2002: 10). This usually requires a substantial re-allocation (and often increase) in financial and human resources to undertake these new policy development functions.

nap new academic press

New internal *fora* may also have to be created within which policy-development can take place. In addition, the demands of the day-to-day activities of elected party representatives may also necessitate further organisational change, such as the appointment of secretarial and research support staff. In the event that a party has representatives on several different levels, vertical structures of co-ordination are required, between representatives and the party in central office as well as between representatives in different institutional arenas (Poguntke *et al.* 2003). These pragmatic adjustments may also be paralleled by a significant permutation in the distribution of political authority among units and across levels within the party (Harmel 2002: 138; Mair 1994). New pressures for the centralisation of policy-making and co-ordination, and the new locus of activity centred on the party's representatives, may well translate into a shift in power away from the party membership and towards the party in central office and in public office.

The increasing complexity and magnitude of an autonomist party's internal organisational structure may become more pronounced if the party crosses the threshold of government, since the capacity to formulate and implement policy efficiently and respond swiftly to new political situations becomes a priority. Similarly, achieving government office, either alone or in coalition, may create a new power-base within the party, thus leading to a further re-distribution of authority between the different faces of the party in favour of the former. This may not only disadvantage the party on the ground and in central office; if a party is in government on two levels simultaneously, then there may well be a struggle between different manifestations of the "party in office" as to whom has the most legitimate claim to shape party policy and strategy (Van Biezen and Hopkin 2006: 18-19).

Thus far, the assumption has been that parties will progress from threshold to threshold in a unilinear fashion. However, this is not necessarily the case. A decline in electoral fortunes may lead to a party crossing back over a threshold (for example, failing to re-elect representatives to a given institution or leaving government). This raises the question of the extent to which party organisational change is reversible**.** In other words, once a party has adapted its organisational structure to its new operating environment, does a decline in electoral fortunes or a change in its status lead to a simple reversal of these changes, taking the party back to what it originally was? Such a straightforward pattern of organisational reversibility is very unlikely since, as Panebianco (1988: 42–44) argues, political parties tend to be very conservative organisations; the concept of the institutionalisation of political parties suggests that their organisations become independent from their surrounding environment and are increasingly less responsive to external threats. In other words,

nap new academic press

once an organisational structure has been created, it is difficult to change its form, redefine its role and functions, and is even more difficult to remove it altogether. And yet, the challenge of facing a different institutional arena arises when the threshold is crossed upwards as well as in the opposite direction. If a return to the previous organisational stage is improbable, some kind of organisational change is nevertheless to be expected. Thus, for example, in the event that a party steps down from government or no longer has parliamentary representation, some of the selective incentives – to use Panebianco's terminology – are no longer available, and this is likely to threaten the legitimacy and stability of the party's dominant coalition. The emergence of new alliances within the party leadership and possibly the replacement of the incumbent leading group are likely outcomes of this organisational crisis, changes that usually lead to a redefinition of the party's goals and identity (*ibid.*: 243).

Secondly, it is also possible that passing the same threshold at a different level will exert different degrees of pressure for organisational change. Thus, for example, whilst gaining representation on the European level may be symbolically important for autonomist parties, it is unlikely to lead to a far-reaching re-structuring of party organisation. For one thing, individual autonomist parties can at best hope to have a relatively small number of MEPs in the European Parliament, and thus organisational change to support the work of these representatives will be limited. More importantly, however, given that there is less at stake on the supranational level than, for example, on the regional or state level, passing the supranational level of representation is less likely to lead to the kind of far-reaching organisational change that gaining representation on these latter levels may trigger.

In contrast, passing the threshold of representation on regional and state levels is expected to be a much higher priority for autonomist parties, for reasons outlined above. It follows from this that the need for an autonomist party to adapt to its new regional/state institutional and political environment will be more urgent than at other levels, if it is to carry out its new representative functions effectively. For similar reasons, passing the threshold of government at the regional and state levels may also exert a stronger pressure for organisational change than, for example, would entering into government on the local level (this is not a possibility at the European level).

## 1.5. The consequences of threshold crossing: Change in goals

The second aspect of party change involves the articulation of goals. Strøm (1990) describes three types of political parties, depending on what their main goal is. Vote-seeking parties are those which aim "to maximise their electoral support for the purpose of controlling government" (*ibid.*: 566). Office-seeking parties in turn "seek to maximise, not their votes, but their control over political office…Office benefits refer to private goods bestowed on recipients of politically discretionary governmental and subgovernmental appointments. Office-seeking behavior consists of the pursuit of such goods, over and above their electoral and policy value" (*ibid.*: 567). Finally, an office-seeking party becomes policy-seeking when it "maximizes its effects on public policy" (*ibid.*: 567). Such a party will always behave in ways that are consistent with, and will benefit, its policy agenda. The three types of party goals are ideal-typical. In practice, there are no parties that can be described as purely vote-seeking, office-seeking or policy-seeking. Instead, Strøm argues that the three concepts should be seen as the three points of a triangle that define the space of competitive party behaviour; parties are located within the triangle, closer to one point or to another, but normally combining a mixture of all three goals (votes, office, policy).

It is arguable, however, that Strøm's conceptualisation of the inter-relationship between these three types of goals is too rigid, since in pragmatic terms, the three goals are more likely to be conceived in sequence than at the same level. Thus, for example, a party needs to get at least some degree of electoral success before attempting to gain office and to influence policy outcomes, while parties that have already got representation or government access can actually trade-off between the three types of goals.

Moreover, a party's goals are not static; they change depending on the political and institutional setting a party finds itself in. Thus, as a party passes the different thresholds outlined above, its goals will also change. Parties that have passed the threshold of representation operate within a different opportunity structure to parties who are not represented in the legislature, and therefore will have very different goals (office-seeking and policy-seeking, as opposed to a party outside of parliament who will be vote-seeking). Similarly, parties who are in government will behave differently from parties in opposition, whilst parties in opposition (but legitimated to govern) behave differently from parties in permanent opposition. Strøm's schematic summary of the institutional framework that affects party goals (electoral, legislative and governmental) closely mirrors the three thresholds of representation, relevance and government participation discussed above (see Figure 1.1). Crossing a threshold implies moving from

one institutional setting to another, and this is likely to affect parties' preferences over their own goals.

Figure 1.1. *Institutional settings and party goals*

Note: *t* and *t* + 1 denote successive electoral terms.
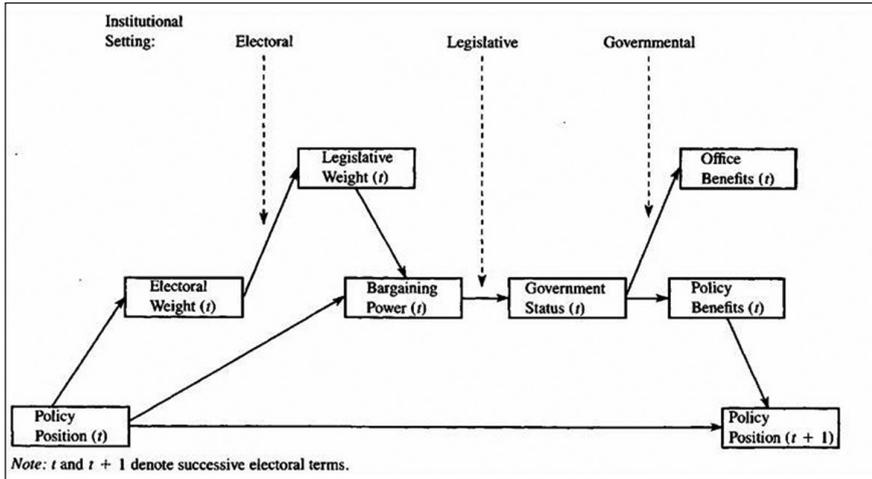
Source: Strøm (1990: 580).

A party's political and electoral performance – and hence the goals it prioritises – is dynamic; crossing a threshold must always be considered a temporary move. The new institutional setting, with its new set of opportunities and constraints, modifies the way the party prioritises its goals. In turn, this decision about party goals generates a new set of opportunities and constraints, which will similarly affect a party's chances of successfully crossing subsequent thresholds.

If parties are likely to pursue all three types of goals to a greater or lesser degree, it is not necessarily the case, however, that they will always be mutually beneficial and reinforcing. One can certainly imagine a situation where the three types of goals are indeed compatible. Thus, for example, a party's preferred policy position is also the one that guarantees the best chances of electoral success and the best chances of gaining office. But this is not always the case. Sometimes it is not possible to maximise the three goals at the same time, and a decision has to be taken as to which of the three goals should be prioritised.

Strøm recalls two kinds of dilemmas parties frequently have to face. Firstly, there may be a trade-off between policy and office. In government coalitions or legislative coalitions (that is, support of a minority government in parliament) parties may trade public office for policy influence, or vice versa. Thus, for example, a party may choose to exercise policy influence by refusing to enter government with another party that lacks a gover-

ning majority, preferring instead to provide legislative support in exchange for policy concessions. In such a situation, a party considers policy gains to be more important than being in government office.

Secondly, there may be a trade-off between office/policy and votes. In other words, participating in government coalitions or legislative bargaining (that is, policy influence) may be costly in electoral terms in subsequent contests. The experience of several green parties in government is illustrative of such a dilemma, as they were required to compromise on their policy agenda once in coalition government, only to be punished in subsequent elections by their core electorate for having abandoned what were deemed to be fundamental green values for the short-term gains of being in public office (Mair 2001; Rihoux and Rüdig 2006). Parties may also be punished by their core electorate for moderating their policy programmes in order to gain office in the first place.

These trade-offs become even more complex in a multi-level political system, where party strategies and goals in one political arena may have consequences for party strategy and goal pursuit in another arena. Thus, for example, autonomist parties that decide to enter government at one territorial level may risk jeopardising its electoral support in subsequent elections to institutions at other territorial levels. But achieving public office may not only mean a trade-off in electoral terms; it may also facilitate meeting other goals on different levels of party competition. Downs (1998) argues that entering into coalition government at the regional level may serve as a testing ground for co-operation with new parties such as autonomist parties, and may lead to the formation of similar coalitions on the state level. The opposite may also be true, in that coalitional experiments at the state level may, if they go well, lead to the formation of similar coalitions at the regional level. Of course, this assumes that the coalition partners are the same in all cases. A very different scenario can be imagined if an autonomist party is in coalition government at both regional and state levels with different political parties; in such a situation, it may well be the case that compromises in one governing context may undermine the compromises made in another, giving rise to very difficult decisions about which goals the party will prioritise in different political arenas. Similarly, if a party is in coalition government at one level, and is a party in opposition at another level, a similar conflict between party strategies may force autonomist parties to decide which goals are the most important.

One cannot talk of party goals without considering how successful autonomist parties are in meeting their stated goals at any point in time. If parties consistently fail to meet their goals, serious questions will inevitably be raised by party members about the purpose of the party organisation and the nature of a party's political strategy. This, in turn, may produce splits in the party's leadership and to the emergence of alternative alliances

contesting the legitimacy of the dominant coalition within the party. Internal divisions are rarely seen as advantageous. On the contrary, "being seen as divided undermines the degree of certainty that electors have about parties' trajectories" (Taggart 1998: 373) and is, therefore, something that political parties will normally try to avoid. In a worst case scenario, failure to meet party goals over the long-term may lead to the eventual "death" of the party (Pedersen 1982). Paradoxically, policy success can also be problematic for parties; for example, if autonomist parties are not able to re-define themselves and their policy agenda once their core demands have been accomplished, then they may risk their survival.

Assessing the degree to which autonomist parties meet their vote-seeking and office-seeking goals is straightforward, based on an analysis of electoral performance in different elections and on the simple fact of whether they have ever been in government or not on any political level. However, it is arguable that it is the policy-impact of autonomist parties that it is of greatest significance. After all, autonomist parties can be said to matter in a political system only if they can be seen to have a direct effect on policy outputs and outcomes. Electoral salience and government incumbency, whilst valuable goals in and of themselves, will not deliver what these political parties want, namely the re-organisation of the territory in such a way that delivers self-determination for the nation and secures policy-making autonomy within the 'national' territory. The next section thus considers how to assess the success of autonomist parties in securing the key goal of territorial reform.

1.6. Policy success

As noted above, the degree to which an autonomous party succeeds in adapting to its new operating environment will influence the extent to which it is able to meet its central policy goal, namely to change the territorial structure of the state and to acquire greater autonomy for the minority nation. Whether or not autonomist parties are successful in this respect can have major implications for the constitutional structure and integrity of states.

A substantial literature has been developed on the issue of the policy impact of political parties, most of which focuses on the left-right orientation that characterise most political parties' projects. In this literature, determining policy impact has usually meant analysing dimensions such as the degree of state intervention in the economy or investment in welfare and so forth, with the amount of public expenditure being the usual indicator for the dependent variable (Keman 2002). However, this kind of approach is not appropriate for assessing the policy impact of autonomist parties, since the historical origins of this party family are to be found in

the opposition between centres and peripheries in the process of state building, with the latter having mobilised in an attempt to resist to the political and cultural homogenising forces of the former (Rokkan and Urwin 1983; Seiler 1997). What defines this party family, therefore, is their shared advocacy of the reform of the territorial structure of the state in which they operate, in the direction of restoring some degree of autonomy to the periphery, although the precise nature and extent of the reform demanded varies from party to party (De Winter 1998: 204–208; 241).

First and foremost, therefore, the policy impact of autonomist parties must relate to the degree to which they succeed in increasing the autonomy of their territories *vis-à-vis* the central government. In other words, in order to evaluate the policy impact of autonomist parties, one needs to answer the following question: to what extent have autonomist parties been able to push for the transformation of centre-periphery relations in their respective states? Successful policy impact requires, firstly, putting the territorial issue on the governmental agenda; secondly, it requires an agreement to be reached (in the parliamentary and/or the governmental arena) on the nature and extent of devolved powers. This is probably the riskiest passage in the life of an autonomist party, since a low profile agreement may be judged as insufficient by more hard-line supporters and members of the party, while an excessively ambitious and uncompromising position may result in failure to reach any agreement at all.

In order to bring further analytical rigour to the assessment of the policy impact of autonomist parties, the following questions seek to probe the source, degree and consequences of autonomist policy impact.

i. *How does policy impact came about?* Are autonomist parties influential indirectly, by pushing the issue of territorial re-organisation onto the policy agenda of governmental parties, or are they able to exert direct influence, through governmental participation or by providing legislative support to minority governments?

ii. *Where does policy impact come from?* Here, of interest is the most relevant level of government for implementing the necessary institutional changes. A major reorganisation of competencies between state and regions usually require a legislative act at state level; this implies that participation in – or influence over – state government is the key to effective policy influence. Nonetheless, pressure from the regional level may also be important, in the sense of creating a bottom-up demand for an increase in territorial autonomy. This is especially the case when a certain degree of autonomy has already been granted to the minority nation, and regional elected legislative and executive bodies can exploit their legitimisation to extend the range of their own powers.

iii. *How much autonomy are autonomist parties able to bring to the peripheral territory?* Answering this question requires a comparison of the situ-

nap new academic press

ation before and after an autonomist party passes the threshold of relevance – that is, the threshold a party needs to cross in order to affect the way the party system works and the decisions it takes. Measuring the degree of regional autonomy is by no means easy (Keman 2000; Baldi 2003), not least because the diversity of territorial reforms that have been adopted in many European states over several decades have rendered the traditional and clear-cut distinction between unitary and federal states to a large extent outdated. This said, a broad distinction may be made between reforms leading to increased autonomy for a single region, and reforms leading to an overall reorganisation of the territorial distribution of power (the latter representing a more encompassing form of transformation). Beyond this, however, a more detailed evaluation is required of the actual degree of autonomy granted to different territorial units below the state, and the specific policy areas devolved to these territorial institutions.

iv. *At what cost is policy impact achieved?* The implications of the trade-off between policy benefits and votes are discussed above, but it is a dilemma that is particularly relevant when one considers what the consequences are for autonomist parties of achieving their policy goals. Policy influence may be achieved through costly agreements with other political actors; alternatively, a fulfilment of the party's goals may be followed by rapid electoral decline, as the electorate perceives the party's function to have been exhausted. The response of an autonomist party to this risk may be to radicalise its demands for further devolution of powers.

1.7. Conclusion

The framework of analysis set out in this chapter provides a basis for structuring the case studies of individual autonomist parties that follow. By identifying the different thresholds that autonomist parties strive to pass during their lifespan, and hypothesising the possible changes that crossing thresholds may trigger in party organisation and goal prioritisation, the framework of analysis proposed here enables a systematic comparison of the ways in which autonomist parties across Western Europe have responded and adapted to the challenges of political representation. Importantly, the framework also provides criteria for measuring the impact of autonomist parties on the broader institutional and constitutional contexts within which they operate.

The case studies that follow are organised according to a common template. The chapters begin by outlining the general patterns of each autonomist party's lifespan, based on their success or failure in passing the different thresholds identified above. This description is followed by an analysis of the internal and external factors that have facilitated or constrained autonomist parties in crossing different thresholds. The chapters then turn

to consider the consequences of threshold crossing, from the point of view of party organisation and goals. With respect to the latter, each chapter also evaluates the degree to which each autonomist party has succeeded in meeting the primary goal espoused by these parties, namely the territorial re-organisation of the state within which they have mobilised. This, after all, is the *raison d'être* of this party family, and the primary impetus for seeking political representation.

The ordering of the chapters reflects a continuum of autonomist party achievement. The first case study is that of the Flemish Volksunie, the only party to have completed its life cycle: from birth to parliament and government incumbency, to "death" in 2001. Subsequent chapters examine autonomist parties that have experienced different degrees of success in passing the thresholds of representation, relevance and government. The case studies conclude with a consideration of autonomist parties that have experienced most difficulty in advancing beyond the initial thresholds of party development, namely the radical Corsican nationalist parties and the "*Abertzale* left" in the Basque Country. The final chapter will draw more general conclusions about the different ways in which autonomist parties have responded to, and sought to overcome, the challenges of mobilising in defence of their territories, and the ways in which crossing different thresholds has impacted upon party organisation and party goals.

References

Baldi, Brunetta (2003) *Stato e territorio. Federalismo e decentramento nelle democrazie contemporanee.* Roma-Bari: Laterza.

Barberà, Òscar and Astrid Barrio (2006) 'Convergència i Unió: From Stability to Decline?', in: Lieven De Winter, Marga Gómez-Reino and Peter Lynch (eds.), *Autonomist Parties in Europe: Identity Politics and the Revival of the Territorial Cleavage – Vol. I.* Barcelona: ICPS, pp. 101–142.

Bartolini, Stefano (1998) 'Exit Options, Boundary Building, Political Structuring', *EUI – SPS Working Paper*, No. 98/1.

Deschouwer, Kris (2003) 'Political Parties in Multi-Layered Systems', *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 10: 2, 213–226.

Deschouwer, Kris (ed.) (2008) *New Parties in Government*. London: Routledge.

De Winter, Lieven (1998) 'Conclusion: A Comparative Analysis of the Electoral, Office and Policy Success of Ethnoregionalist Parties', in: Lieven De Winter and Huri Türsan (eds.), *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe*. London: Routledge, pp. 190–235.

De Winter, Lieven (2001) 'The Impact of European Integration on Ethnoregionalist Parties.' *Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials Working Paper*, No. 196.

Downs, William M. (1998) *Coalition Government, Subnational Style. Multiparty Politics in Europe's Regional Parliaments.* Columbus, OH, Ohio State University Press.

Duverger, Maurice (1954) *Political Parties: Their Organisation and Activity in the Modern State*. London: Meuthen.

Elias, Anwen (2008) *Minority Nationalist Parties and European Integration: A Comparative Study*. London: Routledge.

Elias, Anwen and Filippo Tronconi (2011) 'From Protest to Power: Autonomist Parties in Government', *Party Politics*, forthcoming.

Erk, Jan (2005) 'From Vlaams Blok to Vlaams Belang: The Belgian Far Right Renames Itself', *West European Politics*, 28: 3, 493–502.

Giordano, Benito (2003) 'The Continuing Transformation of Italian Politics and the Contradictory Fortunes of the Lega Nord', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 8: 2, 216–230.

Harmel, Robert (1985) 'On the Study of New Parties', *International Political Science Review*, 6: 4, 403–418.

Harmel, Robert (2002) 'Party Organizational Change: Competing Explanations?', in: Kurt Richard Luther and Ferdinand Müller-Rommel (eds.), *Political Parties in the New Europe. Political and Analytical Challenges*. Oxford: Oxford Univesity Press, pp. 119–142.

Harmel, Robert and Kenneth Janda (1994) 'An Integrated Theory of Party Goals and Party Change', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 6: 3, 259–287.

Harmel, Robert, Uk Heo, Alexander Tan and Kenneth Janda (1995) 'Performance, Leadership, Factions and Party Change: An Empirical Analysis', *West European Politics*, 18, 1–33.

Heath, Anthony, Iain McLean, Bridget Taylor and John Curtice (1999) 'Between First and Second Order: A Comparison of Voting Behaviour in European and Local Elections in Britain', *European Journal of Political Research*, 35: 3, 389–414.

Heinisch, Reinhard (2003) 'Success in Opposition–Failure in Government: Explaining the Performance of Right-Wing Populist Parties in Public Office', *West European Politics*, 26: 3, 91–130.

Herzog, Hanna (1987) 'Minor Parties: The Relevancy Perspective', *Comparative Politics*, 19: 3, 317–29.

Hough, Dan and Charlie Jeffery (2003) 'Elections in Multi-Level Systems: Lessons for the UK from Abroad', in: Robert Hazell (ed.), *The State of the Nations 2003: The Third Year of Devolution in the UK*, Exeter: Imprint Academic Press, pp. 239–262.

Keman, Hans (2000) 'Federalism and Policy Performance. A Conceptual and Empirical Inquiry', in: Ute Wachendorfer-Schmidt (ed.), *Federalism and Political Performance*. London: Routledge, pp. 196–227.

Keman, Hans (2002) 'Policy-Making Capacities of European Party Government', in: Kurt Richard Luther and Ferdinand Müller-Rommel (eds.), *Political Parties in the New Europe. Political and Analytical Challenges*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 207–245.

Krouwel, André (2006) 'Party Models', in: Richard Katz and William J. Crotty (eds), *Handbook of Party Politics*. London: Sage, pp. 249–269.

Lipset, Seymor Martin and Stein Rokkan (eds.) (1967) *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-national Perspectives*. New York: Free Press.

Mair, Peter (1990) 'Continuity, Change and the Vulnerability of Party', in: Peter Mair and Gordon Smith (eds.), *Understanding Party System Change in Western Europe*. London: Frank Cass, pp. 169–187.

Mair, Peter (1994) 'Party Organisation: From Civil Society to the State', in: Richard Katz and Peter Mair (eds.), *How Parties Organise*. London: Sage, pp. 1–22.

Mair, Peter (2001) 'The Green Challenge and Political Competition: How Typical is the German Experience?', *German Politics*, 10: 2, 99–116.

nap new academic press

Mair, Peter (2002) 'Comparing Party Systems', in: Lawrence LeDuc, Richard Niemi and Pippa Norris (eds.), *Comparing Democracies 2*. London: Sage, pp. 88–107.

Meguid, Bonnie (2008) *Party Competition between Unequals. Strategies and Electoral Fortunes in Western Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Müller-Rommel, Ferdinand (ed.) (1989) *New Politics in Western Europe: The Rise and Success of Green Parties and Alternative Lists.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Müller-Rommel, Ferdinand (2002) 'The Lifespan and the Political Performance of Green Parties in Western Europe', *Environmental Politics,* 11: 1, 1–13.

Müller-Rommel, Ferdinand and Geoffrey Pridham (eds.) (1991) *Small Parties in Western Europe*. London: Sage.

Pallarés, Francesc and Michael Keating (2003) 'Multi-Level Electoral Competition: Regional Elections and Party Systems in Spain', *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 10: 3, 239–255.

Panebianco, Angelo (1988) *Political Parties: Organization and Power.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pedersen, Mogens (1982) 'Towards a New Typology of Party Life-Spans and Minor Parties', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 5: 1, 1–16.

Pérez-Nievas, Santiago (2006) 'The PartidoNacionalista Vasco: Redefining Political Goals at the Turn of the Century', in: Lieven De Winter, Marga Gómez-Reino and Peter Lynch (eds.), *Autonomist Parties in Europe: Identity Politics and the Revival of the Territorial Cleavage – Vol. II.* Barcelona: ICPS, pp. 31–64.

Poguntke, Thomas (1993) *Alternative Politics: The German Green Party*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Poguntke, Thomas (2002) 'Green Parties in National Governments: From Protest to Acquiescence?', *Environmental Politics*,11: 1, 133–145.

Poguntke, Thomas, Nicholas Aylott, Robert Ladrech and Kurt Richard Luther (2003) 'The Europeanisation of National Political Parties: A Framework for Analysis'. Paper presented at the ECPR General Conference, Marburg, 18–21 September.

Raunio, Tapio (2003) 'Relationships Between MEPs and Domestic Parties: A Comparative Analysis of Regionalist Parties', Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Edinburgh, 28 March – 2 April.

Reif, Karlheinz and Hermann Schmitt (1980) 'Nine Second-Order National Elections: A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results', *European Journal of Political Research,* 8: 1, 3–44.

Rihoux, Benoit (2001) *Les Partis Politiques: Organisations en Changement. Le Test des Écologistes.* Paris: L'Harmattan.

Rihoux, Benoit and Wolfgang Rüdig (2006) 'Analyzing Greens in Power: Setting the Agenda', *European Journal of Political Research*, 45: s1, S1–S33.

Rokkan, Stein and Urwin, Derek (1983) *Economy, Territory, Identity: Politics of West European Peripheries.* London: Sage.

Rüdig, Wolfgang (2001) 'The Electoral Effects of Green Government Participation: A Comparative Analysis'. Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Grenoble, 6-11 April.

Ruzza, Carlo (2006) 'The Lega Nord: Towards Electoral Stability and Modest Success', in: Lieven De Winter, Marga Gómez-Reino and Peter Lynch (eds.), *Autonomist Parties in Europe: Identity Politics and the Revival of the Territorial Cleavage – Vol. II.* Barcelona: ICPS, pp. 219–246.

Sartori, Giovanni (1976/2005) *Parties and Party Systems. A Framework for Analysis.* Essex: ECPR Press.

Sartori, Giovanni (1986) 'The Influence of Electoral Systems: Faulty Laws or Faulty Methods?' in: Bernard Grofman and Arendt Lijphart (eds.), *Electoral Laws and Their Political Consequences.* New York: Agathon Press, pp. 43–68.

Seiler, Daniel-Louis (1997) 'La nassiance des formations indépendentistes en Europe Occidentale', in: Christian Bidégaray (ed.), *Europe occidentale. Le mirage séparatiste*. Paris: Economica, pp. 47–73.

Strøm, Kaare (1990) 'A Behavioral Theory of Competitive Political Parties', *American Journal of Political Science,* 34: 2, 565–598.

Taggart, Paul (1998) 'A Touchstone of Dissent: Euroscepticism in Contemporary West European Party Systems'. *European Journal of Political Research*, 33: 3, 363–388.

Thorlakson, Lori (2006) 'Party Systems in Multi-Level Contexts', in: Dan Hough and Charlie Jeffery (eds.), *Devolution and Electoral Politics*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 37–52.

Van Biezen, Ingrid and Jonathan Hopkin (2006) 'Party Organisation in Multi-Level Contexts', in: Dan Hough and Charlie Jeffery (eds.), *Devolution and Electoral Politics.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 14–36.

Wyn Jones, Richard and Roger Scully (2006) 'Devolution and Electoral Politics in Wales', *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 36: 1, 115–134.

nap new academic press

Lieven De Winter

The Volksunie

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Amongst European autonomist parties, the Volksunie (VU) is one of the most relevant for comparative research (De Winter, Gómez-Reino and Lynch 2006). The party represents the political expression of the oldest autonomist movement in Belgium, and one of the first to be successful in electoral and office terms in Western Europe. Of the three Belgian "federalist" parties, the VU has also possibly had the largest impact on the territorial re-organisation of the political system. Finally, the VU is an example of a "mature" autonomist party that has become a victim of its own success. Its second period in state-level government (1988-1991) triggered a decade of death throws, whilst its final governing experience (1999–2003) lead the party to split in 2001 into the left-liberal post-nationalist SPIRIT and the independentist-conservative Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA).

The chapter demonstrates how the rapid passing of the thresholds of declaration, authorisation, representation and relevance did not pose major problems for the VU in terms of policy and organisational adaptation. However, passing of the threshold of government too frequently and with meager policy results, placed major pressure on the party's organisational structure and policy goals, and contributed to the eventual death of the VU.

2.2. THE LIFESPAN OF THE VOLKSUNIE

The lifespan of the VU is summarised in table 2.1, and is discussed in greater detail below. From its first electoral participation in the general election of 1958, it took the party only thirteen years to reach its electoral peak (1973). Three years later, the party was considered a potential coalition partner at the state-level, and crossed the threshold of government at the state-level in 1977. Within just under two decades, therefore, the VU had passed all the thresholds defining a party's lifespan, as outlined in the Introduction to this volume. This was followed by numerous spells in regional government during the 1980s and 1990s. The VU can thus be considered to be a very successful autonomist party, at least until the end of the 1990s when the pressures associated with threshold-crossing led to the party's terminal demise.

nap new academic press

Table 2.1. *The lifespan of the VU (1954–2001)*

a) Regional level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1974					VU	
1977					VU	
1978					VU	
1981						VU
1985					VU	
1988						VU
1991					VU	
1995					VU	
1999						VU

b) State level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1954			VU[1]			
1958			VU			
1961			VU			
1965			VU			
1968			VU			
1971					VU	
1974					VU	
1977						VU
1978					VU	
1981					VU	
1985					VU	
1988						VU
1991					VU	
1995					VU	
1999					VU	

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

Note:
[1]   As Christelijke Vlaamse Volksunie

2.2.1. The thresholds of declaration and authorisation

Flemish nationalism was articulated for the first time by a genuine autonomist party after the introduction of universal male suffrage under a system of proportional representation (PR) in 1919, when the Frontpartij won five seats in the Chamber of Representatives with 5.2% of the Flemish vote. Its programme became more radical-nationalist during the 1920s and 1930s. This caused more moderate nationalists to abandon the party and push the Flemish cause – with some success – within established state-wide parties. In the 1930s, the radical nationalists established the Vlaamsch Nationaal-Verbond (VNV), a separatist and explicitly Catholic party that sympathised with national-socialism. In the 1936 general election, it captured 10% of the Flemish vote, although its electoral share was already in decline by the subsequent election in 1939. The VNV eventually cooperated with the Nazis, who recognised it as the only representative of the Flemish people. This open collaboration with the German occupants would seriously compromise the political re-emergence of Flemish nationalism in the post-war period. Not only were Nazi collaborators imprisoned (and a few hundred executed), but a large number of sympathisers with the pre-war movement were also subjected to judicial repression. Thus, in the first post-war elections (the local and general elections of 1946) no Flemish nationalist lists were presented. This was due to the stigma of Nazi collaboration and the fact that many pre-war Flemish nationalists were prohibited from participating in these contests, rather than any difficulties in being authorised to contest these elections.[1]

In 1949, two Flemish-nationalist parties were established, namely the Vlaamse Concentratie (VC) and the VU (although the latter disappeared within a year). At the 1949 general and provincial elections, the VC presented electoral lists but did not obtain any parliamentary seats, and only two provincial councillors. It also participated in the 1952 local election, winning two seats. The VC was predominantly an "anti-repression" party, calling for amnesty for the victims of political repression and without a genuine Flemish nationalist programme.

In 1954, the Christelijke Vlaamse Volksunie (CVV) was founded and succeeded in getting one parliamentary representative (Herman Wagemans) in the general election of that year; the party was an electoral cartel

---

[1]   Belgian electoral law did not pose important limitations on the founding a new party. A maximum of 500 signatures (depending on the size of the constituency) was needed to introduce a list of candidates for any particular Chamber of Representatives constituency, and there was no deposit to be paid. A PR electoral system slightly favoured larger parties, whilst the second tier (provincial) allocation system (until 1993) cost small parties a few additional seats (for example, the VU lost out on one parliamentary seat in the 1954, 1958 and 1965 elections.)

of Flemish nationalists, farmers and middle class organisations. Finally, on 15 December 1954, the CVV's Wagemans and six other Flemish nationalist personalities untainted with the stigma of Nazi collaboration[2] established the VU. Representatives from farmer and middle-class organisations were also represented on the party's first internal bodies. The new party could thus count on skilled political personnel, voluntary party workers and the financial support of a broad sector of the Flemish nationalist movement. In Wagemans, the VU also had it first Member of Parliament (MP), elected before the party was formally founded. The VU's first Chairman was Professor Couvreur, who resigned in 1955 due to a dispute over starting a party newspaper; he was replaced by Frans Van der Elst, another of the VU's founding fathers.

2.2.2. The threshold of representation

The VU's first genuine electoral participation was in the 1958 general election. It obtained 3.4% of the Flemish vote for the Chamber of Representatives (see table 2.1); this was less than the VC in 1949 (3.6%) or the CVV in 1954 (3.9%). Only party leader Van der Elst was elected. In the 1960s, the VU's electoral fortunes at the state-level improved, peaking in 1971 with 19.4% of the Flemish vote (see tables 2.2 and 2.3).[3] This was followed by a period of slight electoral decline in the 1974 and 1977 general elections. The VU first participated in government as part of the Tindemans IV coalition (1977–1978); this cost the party approximately one third of its voters at the subsequent general election in 1978. Surprisingly, however, these losses had been largely recuperated by the 1981 general election. Since then, however, the VU suffered a decline in its vote-share; in the last general election in which the party participated (1999), it captured only 8.9% of the Flemish vote.

---

2   Most of these had been active after the Second World War in the Vlaams Comité voor Federalisme. This was a study group that saw federalism as a solution to the dangers posed by European integration to small language and cultural communities. In 1952, they published a manifesto in cooperation with Walloon federalists, which promoted federalism as the solution to inter-community conflicts in Belgium; they also drafted a federalist constitution for the country.

3   As the VU did not contest elections in Belgium's French-speaking constituencies, its vote-share of the Flemish target electorate gives a more accurate picture of its electoral performance.

nap new academic press

Table 2.2. *Results for Flemish parties in elections to the Chamber of Representatives, 1958–2010 (% of votes)[1]*

Year	CVP/ CD&V[2]	SP/ sp.a[3]	LP/PVV/ VLD[4]	VU/ N-VA	AGALEV/ Groen![5]	VB/ VBel[6]	Others[7]
1958	56.6	29.1	10.7	3.4			
1961	51.0	29.7	11.6	6.0			
1965	44.3	25.2	16.5	12.0			
1968	39.0	26.4	16.1	17.0			
1971	37.9	24.3	16.1	19.4			
1974	40.1	21.8	17.2	17.4			
1977	43.9	21.9	14.3	16.8			
1978	43.7	20.7	17.3	11.7	0.3	2.3	
1981	32.0	20.5	21.3	16.2	3.9	1.8	
1985	34.7	23.7	17.5	12.8	6.1	2.3	
1987	31.4	24.0	18.6	13.0	7.3	3.1	
1991	26.7	19.0	19.2	9.4	8.5	10.4	5.1
1995	28.7	21.0	22.0	7.8	7.4	13.1	
1999	22.7	15.4	23.0	8.9	11.2	15.9	
2003	21.2	23.9[8]	24.6	4.9	3.9	18.5	
2007	30.4	16.8[8]	19.4	- [9]	6.5	19.7	6.6
2010	17.7	15.0	14.1	28.3	7.1	12.6	

Notes:

[1] Figures before 1971 only include the purely Flemish-speaking constituencies, and not the large semi-bilingual constituency of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde. Since 1971, most major parties have presented separate lists in the latter constituency. From this date, votes cast in the entire country can be divided accurately between those cast for Flemish lists and those for Franco-phone lists, and serve to calculate more accurately the regional strength of each party.

[2] The Belgian Christian Democratic party Christelijke Volkspartij (CVP) divided into separate French-speaking and Flemish organisations in 1968; the latter re-named itself Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams (CD&V) in 2001.

[3] Until 1978, the Flemish socialist party (Socialistische Partij (SP)) formed part of a single Belgian organisation. It subsequently renamed itself Socialistische Partij.Anders (sp.a) in 2001.

[4] The state-wide Liberale Partij (LP) split in 1972 into separate Flemish and French-spea-king organisations. In Flanders, the party was known as the Partij voor Vrijheid en Vooruitgang (PVV) from 1972 to 1992; it renamed itself Vlaamse Liberalen en Democra-ten (VLD) in 1992.

[5] The Flemish ecological party Anders Gaan Leven (AGALEV) renamed itself Groen! in 2003.

[6] The Vlaams Blok (VB) changed its name to the Vlaams Belang (VBel) in 2004.

[7] *Others* include only the % of votes for parties that gained more than one seat in the Chamber of Representatives. This only occurred with the ROSSEM list (three seats in 1991) and the Lijst De Decker (5 seats in 2007, 1 in 2010).

[8] sp.a in electoral alliance with *ID21*.

[9] With CD&V.

nap new academic press

At the regional level, regional parliaments have been directly elected since 1995; previously, regional and community legislative assemblies were composed of the parliamentary representatives and senators of their respective communities/regions. In contrast to many other autonomist parties examined in this volume, the VU's electoral performance does not vary substantially between regional and general elections, with a better performance in the latter; neither do state-wide parties suffer from trends such patterns of multi-level voting. When elections to the Chamber of Representatives and regional parliaments are compared (using similar constituencies and electoral rules), the differences in parties' electoral scores in 1995 and 1999 – when regional and general elections coincided – were less than 1% (see tables 2.2 and 2.3).

Table 2.3. *Results for Flemish parties in elections to the Flemish Parliament, 1995–2010 (% of votes, seats in brackets)*

Year	CVP/ CD&V	SP/ sp.a	VLD	VU/ N-VA	AGALEV/ Groen!	VB/ VBel	UF[1]
1995	26.8 (37)	19.4(26)	20.2(27)	9.0(9)	7.1(7)	12.3(17)	1.2(1)
1999	22.1(28)	15.0(19)	22.0(27)	9.3(11)	11.6(12)	15.5(20)	0.9(1)
2004	26.1(35)[2]	19.7(25)[3]	19.8(25)	26.1(6)[2]	7.6(6)	24.2(32)	1.1(1)
2009	22.9(31)	15.3(19)	15.0(21)	13.1 (16)	6.8(7)	15.3(21)	1.2(1)

Notes:
[1]   The Union des Francophones (UF) competes in Flemish elections in the province of Flemish Brabant, where it targets French-speaking voters.
[2]   Combined vote-share for CD&V and N-VA.
[3]   In coalition with SPIRIT.

In the first European election held in 1979, 14 seats were allocated to the Flemish-speaking constituency. Given that nearly one in five Flemish voters supported the VU during the 1970s, the party had no problem in securing one Member of the European Parliament (MEP), thus crossing the threshold of representation at the European level. The party also elected one MEP during the 1984–89, 1994–99 and 2004–09 legislatures, as well as during the current legislature (2009–2014); this representation increased to two MEPs between 1989–1994 and 1999–2004. Contrary to most autonomist parties, however, the VU has usually obtained worse result in European elections than in preceding general elections (with the exception of 1999) (De Winter and Gómez-Reino 2009). This underperformance was due in part to the party's gradual decline since the 1980s; this downward trend automatically made results in previous elections better (De Winter 2005). Another contributing factor, however, was the low profile of the VU's candidates in European elections. Contrary to most traditional par-

nap new academic press

ties, the VU's list has always been headed by its incumbent MEPs rather than the party's figureheads in state-wide politics. Nevertheless, the VU's European presence had a major impact on the formation of a trans-national autonomist party family, in the form of the European Free Alliance (EFA) (Lynch 1996; De Winter and Gómez Reino 2002; De Winter and Lynch 2008). In fact, for over two decades the VU was the driving force within the EFA, in terms of providing the group's MEPs, party personnel and developing its political programme.

2.2.3. The threshold of relevance

The VU, along with other autonomist parties in Belgium, has had a major influence on the evolution of the country's party system, not least in terms of forcing state-wide parties to respond to the growing salience of the linguistic issues raised by these parties. In spite of its rapid electoral breakthrough and strong performance during the 1970s (winning close to 20% of the Flemish vote), the VU was originally considered a menace to the existing system by the Belgian political establishment. Martens (2006: 140) notes, for example, that "for decades, the VU was considered by the ruling circles of the country – including the CVP – to be an extremist party that disguised its fascist heritage behind the flag of federalism". This stigmatisation of the VU declined from the late 1960s onwards, as the linguistic and regional cleavage on which its electoral success was based grew in salience. This cleavage divided the main state-wide parties, with each splitting into two organisationally and programmatically independent Flemish and French-speaking branches (the CVP in 1968, the LP in 1972 and the SP in 1978). This was the result of increasing tensions between Flemings and Francophones within the parties. Internal policy compromises reached with regard to regional and linguistic issues also did not satisfy their respective electorates in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels, as autonomist parties in each region offered more attractive political alternatives. The presence of autonomist parties, and the politicisation of the territorial cleavage, thus had a far-reaching effect on the Belgian party system, and contributed to its fragmentation into two separate and strongly autonomous political arenas (Deschouwer 2009; De Winter *et al.* 2009).

The VU's electoral growth by the 1970s also gave the party coalition potential, at least in the eyes of the CVP and LP/PVV. The VU had already been invited to inter-party talks about granting cultural autonomy to Flanders in 1969, although the party left this forum before it concluded its discussions in opposition to the veto powers to be granted to the French-speaking minority. Within the Chamber of Representatives, the VU rejected the first wave of successful constitutional reform granting regional cultural autonomy (approved in 1970). In 1972, the party also refused to sign the

Cultuurpact, a consensual agreement between the three state-wide parties on the implementation of the cultural autonomy provisions.

Behind the scenes, however, there were frequent informal contacts between the VU and leaders of the Flemish Liberals and Christian-Democrats. In November 1973, the VU declared that it was prepared to join a Belgian government. This was in spite of the fact that a substantial number of members favoured remaining a party of opposition at the state-level. The VU's co-leader at the time, Hugo Schiltz, started talks with the leader of the PVV, Grootjans; when a new government was being formed in 1974, the latter invited the VU to participate. Two other autonomist parties were also given the opportunity to enter government, namely Rassemblement Wallon (RW) and the Front Démocratique des Francophones (FDF). The support of these parties was necessary for the successful reform of the constitution proposed by the Catholic-Liberal minority government, which required a two-thirds majority in the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate. When a first round of coalition formation talks failed, chief-negotiator Tindemans decided to form a Christian-Democrat/Liberal minority coalition, promising the autonomist parties that negotiations on their inclusion in government would still continue. The minority government was eventually installed in office after the autonomist parties abstained from the investiture vote. However, the FDF and RW withdrew from subsequent talks, the latter refusing to join a government in which the VU would also participate. In the end, only RW joined the Tindemans I government.

By 1976, Schiltz had also made his party coalitionable in the eyes of the Belgian Socialists, the main defenders of the unitary state and the last state-wide party family to split up along linguistic lines (see above). Coalition talks after the 1977 election between five parties (CVP, the Parti Social-Chrétien, PSB/BSP, FDF and VU) were difficult and tiresome, and only after 46 days was an ambitious coalition agreement on institutional reform (the so-called Egmont Pact) concluded. However, a third of the VU's National Council voted against the coalition deal, whilst many of the party's members protested against the concessions their party had been willing to make. Over the next year, opponents to the coalition from within the Flemish nationalist movement mobilised public opinion against the Egmont Pact, with their criticism directed in particular at the VU and the CVP. When the government fell after only 16 months in office, the VU lost 30% of its electoral support in the new election held in December 1978.

It should be noted that the Egmont coalition was not the only possible coalition formula for passing constitutional reforms requiring a two-thirds majority in both chambers of the Belgian parliament. Two of the four major constitutional reforms in Belgium (in 1970 and 1980) were passed

without autonomist parties in government, and with only the support of the three main state-wide parties. A repeat of this "tripartite" coalition was also possible in the 1970s. The VU, like the FDF and RW, gained government office only when state-wide parties judged that their inclusion would create the coalition formula best placed to deliver constitutional reform. In 1974, autonomist parties were preferred as coalition partners over the Socialists because they were less demanding with regard to other salient issues, such as socio-economic policy.

2.2.4. The threshold of government

As noted above, the VU passed the threshold of government at the state-level for the first time in 1977, when it joined the Tindemans IV government. The party obtained two ministerial portfolios – Foreign Trade and Science (De Bruyne) – and the post of Secretary of State for Dutch Culture and Social Affairs. Although the VU did not appoint a Deputy Prime Minister, the party was represented in the powerful *Kerncabinet* (an inner cabinet composed of the Prime Minister and his deputies) by De Bruyne. However, the government was heavily controlled by extra-parliamentary and extra-cabinet party leader summits; this resulted in a shift of decision-making authority away from the cabinet to these summits (where the VU was represented by its President, Schiltz). In the 1988-1991 government, the VU did obtain a Deputy Prime Minister (Schiltz) who combined this portfolio with the important post of Minister of Finance (as well as Scientific Policy). The VU was also responsible for the Ministry of Foreign Aid, and held the post of Secretary of State for the Brussels region.

The VU also participated in government at the regional level. After constitutional reforms in 1980 and 1988, the VU passed the threshold of government because of specific requirements to distribute governmental posts proportionally among all Flemish parties. Thus between 1981 and 1985 (whilst in opposition at the state-level), the VU was responsible for the Finance Ministry. In 1988 it obtained the portfolios of Public Works and Transport (whilst also participating in government at the state-level). Between 1991 and 1995, the VU participated in the Flemish executive, after protracted political manouvering led to the formation of a centre-left (CVP-SP) Flemish government. Although the VU's participation in the coalition was not necessary to obtain a governing majority, this was acceptable to its state-wide partners because of their desire to ensure sufficient support for their own programme of constitutional reform in the future.[4] The VU was responsible for the following portfolios: Transport, Foreign

---

[4]   The VU provided this support from the opposition benches at the state-level when the reforms were approved in 1994.

nap new academic press

Trade and Institutional Reform. Finally, in the 1999 Flemish executive, party President Bert Anciaux was responsible for the portfolios of Culture, Youth, Urban and Brussels Affairs, and Housing; other party representatives were responsible for Internal Affairs, the Civil Service and Sport. From 1989 to 1997 the VU also participated in the Brussels regional executive, where it was in charge of Energy, Urgent Medical Assistance and the Fire Services.

2.3. Changes in party organisation

As a general consequence of passing different thresholds, the VU's party organisation expanded rapidly and became substantially more complex. The pressures for organisational change were most pronounced as a consequence of acquiring coalition potential and entering government at the state-level (see table 2.4). In contrast, the VU's presence at the European level was not a catalyst for changes of equal magnitude. Whilst the party did invest considerable financial and human resources in developing the EFA as a trans-national party group, this level of political activity was less important for the party. Overall, it is arguable that the VU's nature as a "modern cadre party" (Koole 1992: 407–8) facilitated the party's rapid expansion and the passing of successive thresholds, and enabled it to adapt effectively to new operating environments. It also enabled the VU to meet its vote-seeking and office-seeking objectives (see below). However, the party was not immune from internal tensions, with differences of opinion on governmental participation ultimately proving fatal for the party. The VU can thus be best understood as a factionalised or competitive version of a modern cadre party.

Within many political parties, the national congress is an important body in intra-party decision-making, as it represents the party's members and determines broad programmatic, organisational and strategic priorities. Within the VU, however, these decisions were (until 1988) taken by the Party Council, a more restricted arena than a party congress (Deschouwer 1992). The body included the chairpersons and delegates from constituency and provincial party bodies, parliamentary representatives, national party officers and delegates from auxiliary functional bodies[5] (a total of approximately 150 members). From 1989 onwards, all members of the party executive also sat on this body. The Party Council would meet on a monthly basis, and had the following responsibilities: electing the party's leadership, amending party statutes, setting the agenda for

---

[5]   Auxiliary organisations included the party's youth organisation, research centre, a training centre for party officers, the association of public office holders, and the institutes responsible for the party's newspaper, television and radio programmes.

nap new academic press

the party's congress and appointing its chair, defining the party's programme and strategy, approving governmental participation and all legislative initiatives not dealt with by congress or in the party programme (1970–1988) and deciding on all important matters not discussed by congress.[6] In particular, parliamentary groups were subject to strong control by the Party Council (De Winter and Dumont 2000).

Prior to 1966, the party's executive (composed of approximately 20 members) was elected by the party congress. From that date on, it was appointed by Party Council, whilst some members were elected by the bodies that had statutory representation on the executive (such as the VU's parliamentary party and youth organisation). Others were *ex officio* members (leaders of parliamentary parties, the VU's founding President and Secretary, the party's Treasurer, the previous party President and Secretary, the General Manager and, since 1988, all Ministers and junior Ministers). In order to avoid office-holders becoming too powerful, the 1976 party statutes stipulated that a maximum of half of the members of the executive could be parliamentary representatives or be paid by the party (Deschouwer 1992: 163). These statutes also established a Daily Board (rebaptised the Bureau in 1982), consisting of senior members of the executive. Meeting every week, this supplementary body was responsible for day-to-day decision-making; although abolished in 1988, it was informally resurrected in 1995.

As noted above, the VU's leader – the President – is also elected by the Party Council for a term of three years. In its fifty years of history, nine people have held this post. From 1955 until 1975, Van der Elst's charismatic personality was crucial in maintaining internal cohesion at a time when the VU grew rapidly and crossed several important thresholds. Subsequent leaders not only held this post for a much shorter period, but were also less successful in overcoming factional tensions; all later Presidents faced serious challenges at the time of their election. It should also be noted, however, that there were important constraints on the President's autonomy within the VU. For example, the party's statutes state that the President cannot also be a member of government, nor can he assume such a responsibility within two years of completing this role. This provision is designed to stop Presidents with ministerial ambitions from accepting invitations to participate in government on the basis of purely personal office ambitions.[7]

---

6 In addition, an informal meeting of all presidents and secretaries of the constituency parties would prepare the agenda for the Party Council. They constituted the link between the national party and constituency and local office holders.

7 An exception was made to this rule in 1999 for then President Bert Anciaux; he had resigned from this post in 1998 in order to lead the alliance with the left-liberal ID21. This led to the VU's participation in the Flemish executive.

nap new academic press

Since its creation, the VU also expanded its staff in central office. In 1991, the VU had 3,500 party officers. According to Moors (1993), nearly all active party members also occupied party offices. The few members not occupying such posts exerted minimal influence on party decision-making; their role was mainly confined to selecting officers for their local branches and delegates to participate in the party's congress (Deschouwer 1992). Nevertheless, the VU's membership was substantial. It increased from 2,500 in 1960 to a peak of 53,000 in 1978, before slowly declining to 43,000 in 1989 (Maes 1988). In its period of electoral strength (1971–1987), about 10% of VU voters were also party members; this ratio approximated the average for all Flemish parties. However, the troublesome period of the 1990s caused a decline in membership (De Winter 2006); the ratio of voters to members also halved to 5%.

One of the most important changes in the VU's internal organisation occurred after the party entered the Martens VIII government in May 1988, and resulted in the empowerment of the party congress. Prior to 1988, the main function of this body was to discuss current social, political, economic and cultural issues. Statute reform in 1988, however, designated this to be the party's highest decision-making body and expanded its powers considerably (even if in practice the Party Council retained a predominant role). Since then, the party congress has had the authority to take final decisions on governmental participation and fundamental ideological principles. In 1997, further reform ended with the system of delegate representation, and opened the party congress to all party members.

In organisational terms, therefore, the VU moved from the direct participation of the party membership, to the empowerment of the Party Council, shifting back again in the 1980s and 1990s to a renewed role for the rank-and-file. The first of these shifts can be explained as a consequence of evolving from a party with a single parliamentary representative, to a party with more substantial representation and governing responsibilities at different territorial levels. The latter shift, however, is more puzzling, especially since government participation has always been a divisive issue within the party; handing authority over such decisions to party members could severely constrain the leadership's autonomy in this area. However, given the predominant role of the Party Council within the VU up until the 1980s, it is arguable that empowering the party membership was a move designed to by-pass the former, thus undermining its political authority whilst also enhancing the party leadership's autonomy. A congress of party members could be "manipulated" more easily by charismatic leaders such as Schiltz and, more recently, Bert Anciaux.

Table 2.4. *Pressure for organisational change upon crossing thresholds*

Threshold	Sub-regional[1] level	State level	European[2] level
V	**Medium (1988)** **Lethal (2001)**	**Medium (1988)** **Lethal (2001)**	
IV-B			
IV-A			
III			
II			
I			

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

Notes:

[1] As there are no longer any state-wide parties in Belgium, the "state" level in the table refers to the organisation of the party within the Flemish Community, as this is identical to the organisation at the Belgian level. The regional level should be interpreted as the party levels below the Flemish regional level, that is at the constituency level.

[2] The VU passed the thresholds of relevance and government before the first direct election to the European Parliament in 1979.

2.4. Changes in party goals

From the VU's foundation until the mid-60s, the party advocated the federal reorganisation of Belgium whereby the country's linguistic communities would acquire far-reaching autonomy.[8] The party was considered by its competitors to be an anti-system party due to its opposition to the unitary state. The VU recruiting predominantly from among the Catholic sector of Flemish society, although it defended traditional Catholic values and interests less fiercely than the CVP.[9] To some extent, the VU was also anti-clerical, given the attitudes of the Belgian high clergy towards the Flemish

---

[8] These ideas had already been articulated by the Flemish nationalist movement in the 1930s. Demands were made for Flemish to be designated the official language of Flanders, for the reversal of the increased use of French in parts of the region (in particular Brussels and its surrounding communes), and for the linguistic border between Flemish and French-speaking territories to be fixed by law. The early Flemish nationalist movement was thus a protectionist movement (De Winter 1998). In the inter-war period, some nationalist groups called for the creation of a Greater Netherlands. In 1936, the Catholic leader and post-war Prime Minister Gaston Eyskens concluded an agreement with the VNV to promote federalism.

[9] The analysis of party manifestos by Hearl (1987) indicates that the VU was formed as a morally conservative party, shifted to a progressist position in the early 1970s, and returned to a moderate conservative position by the end of the 1970s.

nap new academic press

movement.[10] The party also criticised pillarisation,[11] the main basis of power of its main competitor, the CVP.

Whilst advocating "work in one's own region" from 1962 onwards, the VU also sought to position itself on the left-right ideological axis. The party was predominantly right-wing in its orientation;[12] in 1965, a faction that tried to establish links with workers' movements was expelled. However, the party also supported strikes following the announcement of the closure of some coal mines in the Flemish province of Limburg; this allowed it to expand its political agenda to include new social themes. In 1966, there were efforts to curtail militant extreme-right activism within the party (specifically the neo-fascist Vlaamse Militanten Orde that served as the VU's security service). However, the party's expansion after the 1965 general election allowed many members of the VNV – the pre-war Flemish movement that collaborated with the Nazis – to re-enter the party.

By the early 1970s, therefore, three ideological factions of approximately equal strength existed within the VU. The oldest faction represented traditional hard-core nationalists, for whom the party should remain true to its original linguistic-federalist values and reject opportunities for governmental participation. On other issues, these members were largely situated on the right of the political spectrum. Secondly, those in favour of government participation believed that the VU's uncompromising strategy of opposition had ceased to deliver policy benefits, and that acquiring coalition potential was essential in order to implement the party's programme. On other issues, these pragmatists could be qualified as "left-liberal". A third progressive tendency preferred the creation of a non-conformist "radical" party that would give salience to post-materialist issues, as well Flemish issues. Most of these actors were situated on the left of the political spectrum.

From the early 1970s onwards, the VU sought to broaden its issue agenda, under the new leadership of Schiltz (1973–1979). As a supporter of the second position noted above, programmatic change was clearly intended to facilitate the VU's entry into government. In particular, Schiltz sought to position the VU on issues that went beyond the core autonomist agenda. In 1975, he managed to bring a majority of his supporters onto the

---

[10] In 1958, the Bishop of Bruges declared that voting for the VU was a grave sin.

[11] Pillarisation refers to the denominational segregation of Belgian society. Society was divided "vertically" into different segments according to religious belief; each pillar had its own social institutions (such as political parties, trade unions, mutual health organisations, schools, newspapers and so forth).

[12] The location of the VU on the socio-economic left-right dimension fluctuated around the centre. The analysis of manifesto data presented by Hearl (1987) indicates that until the mid-1960s, the VU tended more towards the centre-right. After 1968, it moved to the centre-left for a decade, to arrive at a more central position by the end of the 1970s. At the end of the 1980s, the VU adopted a 'left-liberal' position.

party's executive bodies, which facilitated the task of preparing the party for government. The growing dominance of the Schiltz faction led some traditional nationalist and right-wing personalities to abandon the party in the 1970s.

The VU's substantial electoral decline in the 1978 general election did not alter the party's office-seeking goal, even though Schiltz resigned from the party leadership. His replacement, Vic Anciaux, proved to be a weak party manager, and after further electoral defeat in the 1985 general election, he was replaced by Gabriels (who held the post until 1992). During this period of leadership change, the most outspoken independentists, right-wingers and opponents to being in government either abandoned the VU to join the VB or kept a low profile within the party. When the VU was invited to join the Martens VIII government in 1988, therefore, there was little opposition to accepting the offer, not least due to the ambitious constitutional reforms envisaged by the new coalition.

However, defeat at the 1991 general election once again raised questions about the VU's programmatic identity; these would not be fully answered until ten years later and in a dramatic way. The constitutional reforms of 1993, in which Schiltz played a prominent role, created a new period of doubt about the VU's viability.[13] During this period, a new faction emerged within the party. Led by the acting-President Gabriels, it favoured a merger between the VU and the PVV/VLD. Gabriels initiated talks with the latter, but abandoned these on the request of senior party members.[14] Secret talks were also conducted with the CVP, whilst the VB launched a "Welcome Home" campaign that sought to encourage right-wing and nationalist members of the VU to defect. Left-wing parties were also courted; Coppieters, the VU's left-wing *eminence grise*, together with the most pro-Flemish leader of the SP, launched a platform for a radical democratic project that aimed to integrate socialist, ecologist and democratic-nationalist principles.

Bert Anciaux, the VU's new President from 1992, launched a proposal to redefine his party's political programme, and this was agreed at a national congress held on 12–13 September 1993. Most observers, and several members of the centre and right-wing factions of the party, considered the new programme to be a definite move towards the left-ecological side of the political spectrum, locating the VU between the ecologist party AGALEV

---

[13]   In 1993, Raskin, a former VU Vice-President, launched the idea that all VU members and politicians should be allowed to redefine their adherence to the party, and eventually be free to join other parties. Schiltz responded by calling for a re-evaluation of the new party line; if opinion polls did not indicate a recovery in the VU's popularity, he believed the party should decide collectively whether to continue, disappear or merge with another party.

[14]   When the PVV reformed itself in November 1992 and formed a new party, the VLD, a considerable number of the VU's mid-level elite (including Gabriels) abandoned the party to join the new organisation.

and the SP. The VU extended its autonomist agenda to demand the devolution of elements of the social security system, the representation of Flanders in European and international organisations, and Flemish independence within a confederal Belgium (with Flanders and Wallonia jointly administering the bilingual Brussels region). This radicalisation, especially with regard to non-autonomist issues, was symptomatic of the VU's desperate search for a new *raison d'être*. It was also an attempt to resist internal disintegration or external take-over attempts by other parties.

The result of the 1995 general election secured the VU's future, albeit temporarily. Prior to the election, President Anciaux declared that the VU needed to win at least 300,000 votes (equivalent to 82% of the votes received in 1991) for the party to survive as an independent actor. As this objective was reached, discussions about possible mergers or major programmatic change were put aside. Anciaux was supported by the progressists within the party and, due to his anti-participationist rhetoric,[15] also by the remaining hard-line nationalists.

A final attempt at reformulating the party's ideology was triggered by a series of scandals during the second half of the 1990s. Demands for a new political culture led to the creation of a radical left-liberal movement in 1998, known as ID21. Anciaux took leave from his role as leader of the VU to chair this initiative launched by personalities who held weak or no Flemish nationalist political objectives. Gradually, Anciaux became the figurehead of a post-nationalist faction that wanted the VU to focus on issues other than Flemish autonomy. He became the President of a new VU-ID21 alliance ahead of the 1999 general election. When the initiative failed to deliver significant electoral gain, many VU leaders questioned the utility of their party's cooperation with ID21.[16]

When Anciaux tried to force the re-election to the Presidency of one of his followers, Van Krunkelsven, nationalist hardliners rallied around their favoured candidate, Bourgeois. In the first direct election of the VU's President by party members, the latter eventually won, securing 54% of all votes cast (compared to Van Krunkelsven's 46%). The contest revealed the party's rank-and-file to be split into two distinct wings, with post-materialist post-nationalists increasingly opposed to conservative independentists.

The VU thus gradually lost electoral support as its main policy objective – the federalisation of Belgium – was implemented. At times, policy

---

[15] After 1988, the strategy of governmental participation was no longer questioned by any faction. Hence, when the VU joined the government in 1988, only 7.7% of congress delegates voted against the move, a substantially smaller number than in 1977. Tensions remained, however, over the price to be paid in terms of policy concessions and votes.

[16] As a result of growing tensions between nationalists and post-nationalists within the alliance, co-operation came to an end in March 2001, with combined membership of VU and ID21 executive bodies being prohibited.

nap new academic press

success was directly related to the VU's position as a party in state-level government; other constitutional reforms were carried through by the traditional state-wide parties. However, the electoral price paid for office incumbency and policy success was always high. For example, at the 1978 elections, the party lost 30.4% of its votes, and 27.7% in 1991. The VU sought to halt its electoral decline by finding a niche in the electoral market where it could survive. As part of this effort, it looked for cartel partners on the left as well as the right. Organisationally, as noted above, the party also devolved a certain degree of decision-making authority to the rank-and-file, although simultaneously becoming increasingly dependent on the charismatic leadership of Bert Anciaux.

2.5. The VU's policy impact

The VU's main policy achievement clearly lies in the transformation of Belgium from a unitary into a strongly federalised state. However, the VU also exerted policy influence within Belgian politics in many other policy areas. Research on the effect of party programme on governmental policies indicated that the policy success of the VU in terms of manifesto pledges acted upon was considerable, despite the fact that the period examined (1965–71) was prior to the VU's first period in government (Dewachter *et al.* 1977). The authors attribute this success to the VU's blackmail capacity, arising out of its role as a "whip party". In other words, the VU posed a threat to the electoral standing of larger parties; a substantial faction within state-wide parties sympathetic to the VU's ideas pushed for these to be incorporated into their own party's programme. The VU's electoral peak during the 1970s thus forced other political parties to radicalise their Flemish programme; all Flemish parties except for the Greens made polarising proposals in that period in a variety of policy fields. In this way, they sought to outbid each other in order to undermine the VU's electoral appeal.

It is also clear that the oft-cited factor explaining policy success – government participation – cannot explain the VU's policy impact. Only on two occasions did the party participate in federal government. The first of these periods resulted in minimal success in achieving the core goal of territorial reform; indeed, the experience backfired badly (see above). This can be explained by the fact that the VU did not hold any strategic portfolios, vital to its interests, in this government; strategic portfolio holding has been identified as a key variable in determining policy success (Budge and Keman 1990).

Having learnt from this first failure in policy and electoral terms, the VU adopted a different strategy during its second period of government incumbency (1988–1991). Although the party only obtained two ministerial portfolios, one of them – that of Deputy Prime Minister with responsibility

for the budget – was crucial, and held by the party's most able politician and tactician, Hugo Schiltz. On this occasion, the impact of the VU on cabinet decision-making was more significant. The VU's policy influence was thus exercised almost exclusively through the position and skills of this individual.[17] Moreover, as a result of Schiltz's policy responsibilities within the government and the collective nature of the Belgian cabinet, he had a say in any policy matter relevant to his party. Hence, not occupying ministerial portfolios central to the party's policy programme did not prevent it from exercising considerable influence on federal decision-making.

2.6. Crossing the final raison d'être threshold: the death and reincarnation of the VU

After a decade of discussions about the future of the VU once federalism had been achieved, the party eventually split over the support it was called to give to the so-called Lambermont negotiations on new territorial reforms.[18] VU leaders had been actively involved in these discussions. However, party hardliners were opposed to the concessions the VU (and other Flemish parties) had made, and repeatedly refused to agree to the proposals. The VU was thus forced to reopen negotiations and obtain more concessions.[19] However, these new policy successes were insufficient to stave off the party's terminal demise.

The hard-line nationalists were led by the VU's new President, Bourgeois (2000), in opposition to the party's left-liberal participationist wing led by Anciaux. After prolonged clashes (De Winter 2006) the quarreling factions eventually agreed on a divorce strategy. By 16 July 2001, three teams presented their programme for the future of the VU: VlaamsNationaal, presented by Bourgeois, Anciaux's radical–liberal Toekomst groep (led by the veteran Van Grembergen) and a "middle of the road" group opposed to a split, Niet Splitsen (led by former Flemish Minister Sauwens). All three claimed to be the genuine inheritors of the VU's historical project. In

---

17 Research on the reputations of Belgian political elites during the 1988-1990 period showed that Schiltz was perceived to be the sixth most influential decision-maker in Belgian politics, after the Prime Minister, the President of the SP, the Minister of Finance and two other Deputy Prime Ministers (Dewachter and Das 1991). The next influential VU politician was the party's President, ranked in 38th position and substantially behind other party Presidents.

18 These proposed the decentralisation of policy areas including agriculture, developmental aid, foreign trade, and the organisation of local and provincial institutions; the proposals also included measures for weak fiscal autonomy and a number of guarantees for the Flemish minority in Brussels.

19 As a result, a series of new bargaining rounds were launched, leading to a number of partial or temporary agreements such as those of St-Elooi (1 December 1999), Hermes (5 April 2000), Lambermont (15 October 2000), Lambermont-bis (22 January 2001), St. Lombard (29 April 2001) and St-Boniface (12 July 2001).

nap new academic press

a referendum to decide the party's future held on 15 September 2001, 9,801 members participated, representing 64% of the party's total membership. 47.2% voted for Vlaams Nationaal, 30.2% for Niet-Splitsen, and only 22.6% for Toekomstgroep.

As the divorce rules stipulated, Vlaams Nationaal took over the VU's organisational structures, formed a new executive and started negotiations with the Niet Splitsen group for a collective take-over. Approximately half of the latter's members participated in such a move, and a new party – N-VA – was formed. On 2 December 2001, N-VA held its first general congress, attended by approximately 1,400 members. The party claimed, however, that its membership had already reached 4,000, 700 of which had not previously belonged to the VU (this number had increased to 10,000 by 2007 according to the party). N-VA stressed its pursuit of the "Flemish general interest" and its direct inheritance of forty-seven years of VU activism. It presented itself as a democratic, modern nationalist party that was open to migrants, and criticised the Walloon "profitariat" and the grip of the French-speaking Parti Socialiste (PS) on government. Programmatically, N-VA differed from the VU on a number of key issues: it saw itself as the "syndicate of the Flemish common good", called for full independence for a Flemish Republic within a federally integrated Europe, made stronger demands regarding the return of Brussels to Flanders, favoured less direct democracy, sought the enforced assimilation of migrants, advocated greater economic entrepreneurialism and stronger law and order, and a reduction in gay rights. N-VA thus sought to occupy a niche between the Liberals, Christian-Democrats and the VB.

As N-VA inherited most of the VU's party resources, it secured a continuous presence on the internet and in parliamentary and media debates. In contrast, Toekomstgroep was scarcely visible for several months as it sought to define a new party programme and organisational structures. It established itself as a new left-liberal "post-Belgian" party, maintaining the alliance with ID21. At its first party congress on 10 November 2001, attended by some 800 supporters, the party also renamed itself SPIRIT. Annemie Van De Casteele, an MP in the Chamber of Representatives, was elected to the post of President. The party also adopted a charter of basic principles and new party statutes. By 2007, SPIRIT claimed to have over 5,700 members.

Ideologically, SPIRIT defined itself as the "left-liberal" option and sought to position itself between the Flemish Greens, Socialists, and Liberals; in this respect, the party sought to emulate the Dutch party D66. Programmatically, SPIRIT also differed from the VU on a number of key issues. For example, the party ceased to make references to Flemish nationalism, preferring instead to talk about "open and European regionalism"

and integral federalism.[20] It also demanded further competences for the Flemish region, a constitution for Flanders and a confederal constitutional model. Furthermore, the party espoused a more anti-globalist position, demanded more radical political reforms (such as direct democracy and direct non-conformist action), supported greater multiculturalism, and placed more emphasis on liberal rights and freedoms (in relation to gay rights, soft-drugs, abortion and euthanasia).[21]

In subsequent years, the VU's successor parties pursued one of two reincarnation strategies. The first saw numerous defections to the traditional parties. Such defections had occurred since the VU's unexpected electoral defeat and identity crisis during the early 1990s. The Liberals in particular provided a safe haven for ex-VU members. Three former VU presidents (Gabriels, Van Krunkelsven and Borginon) and the first President of SPIRIT (Van De Casteele) thus joined the VLD and were re-elected as VLD MPs. Former VU MPs managed to become president of the liberal party, of the parliamentary party in the House and Senate as well as federal minister.

A second strategy involved forming cartels with traditional parties. The split of the VU into two separate parties, the defection of many MPs and mid-level elites to the traditional parties, and the introduction of a 5% electoral threshold at the provincial level in 2003, made the electoral perspectives of the N-VA and SPIRIT very bleak. Indeed, in the 2003 general election, N-VA only obtained 4.9% of the Flemish vote and one parliamentary seat (Bourgeois). For its part, and in anticipation of the difficulties of passing the threshold of representation, SPIRIT's Anciaux took the decision (without consulting his party) to form an electoral cartel with sp.a; as part of this alliance, SPIRIT was offered six safe parliamentary seats and a portfolio in the federal and Flemish governments. As other party members had been negotiating possible electoral alliances with the Greens and the Liberals, Anciaux's strategy led to the defection of several MPs to these other parties.

Having learned its lesson the hard way in 2003, NV-A soon afterwards concluded an electoral cartel with CD&V, the party that had traditionally been closest to the VU in terms of centre-periphery demands. The alliance faced its first electoral test in the June 2004 regional election; N-VA obtained six seats in the Flemish Parliament. In addition, it joined the new Flemish coalition government led by CD&V, with the party's President

---

[20] Flemish nationalism was perceived to have gained a negative connotation due to its association with the right-wing nationalism of the VB.

[21] The party was also more Europhile than its predecessor. Through careful manouvering, SPIRIT MEPs managed to win the support of most of the EFA parties and their MEPs; the party formally joined the EFA in May 2010 and sought to act as the sole representative of Flemish nationalism within this organisation.

Bourgeois being made Minister for Civil Service, Foreign Policy, Media and Tourism. The CD&V/N-VA cartel was also presented in the 2007 general election, winning 30 out of 150 seats in the Chamber of Representatives and 9 out of 40 seats in the Senate. In the 2009 regional election, however, N-VA ran on its own, and won an unexpected 13% of the Flemish vote. N-VA joined the government alongside CD&V and sp.a. When a new general election was called in June 2010, N-VA once again presented itself alone to the electorate; the party emerged as the largest political force in Flanders (with 29% of votes in the region) and held the largest number of seats in the Chamber of Representatives (27 seats); the second political force, the French-speaking socialists, won 26 seats. This made the N-VA pivotal in negotiations to form a coalition government, although at the time of writing, difficulties in agreeing a common programme continue to frustrate coalition negotiations. Many of the N-VA's opponents fear that it will use its dominant position to push for the final break-up of Belgium into its regional components.

Ironically, therefore, since 2004 there are more parliamentary representatives with a VU pedigree than during the party's peak during the 1970s. The willingness of the Flemish traditional parties to embrace former sectors and personalities of the VU can be explained by the extreme fragmentation of the Belgian party system. With the three traditional parties and the VB regularly polling between 15% and 25% of votes, gaining just a few percentage points in electoral contests – even with the help of a minor cartel party – can be significant. For example, in the 2004 Flemish election, the CD&V/N-VA cartel became the largest party on the basis of their combined parliamentary performance (35 seats, compared to the 32 seats won by the VB, the second political force within the parliament). This allowed the CD&V to take the lead in forming the new regional government. But cartelisation and the infusion of ex-VU political personnel into the traditional parties also radicalised the latter's Flemish programme.

2.7. Conclusion

When considering the lifespan of the VU in comparison to other autonomist parties, the party's relatively short existence (from its birth in 1954 to its death in 2001) contrasts with the longevity of many of the other cases considered in this volume. Electorally, the VU can also not be considered to be an overwhelming success; despite good electoral performances during the 1970s and becoming the most voted Flemish political party, it was far from constituting an enduring hegemonic force in Flemish and Belgian politics. Moreover, the VU also had limited success as an office-seeking party; this was limited to occasional participation in state and regional level coalitions during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

And yet, in policy terms, it is arguable that the VU was en extremely successful party. As an organisation that advocated the federalisation of the Belgian unitary state, it was instrumental in pushing for these territorial reforms to be adopted. The result has been the fundamental transformation of Belgium, with the decentralisation of far-reaching competencies to its linguistic regions. As this chapter has argued, this policy impact was not always the result of the VU's direct participation in government; equally as important was the blackmail capacity exercised by the party vis-à-vis its state-wide rivals. In an effort to undermine the VU's electoral appeal, state-wide parties enhanced their Flemish credentials and adopted many of the VU's proposals.

However, the case of the VU also demonstrates clearly the biggest danger facing autonomist parties who meet their core territorial goals, namely ensuring their survival once their *raison d'être* has been achieved. Throughout the late 1990s, the VU struggled to find a new political purpose, with different factions pushing for very different ideological projects. Crossing different thresholds – and particularly the threshold of government – exacerbated internal tensions over the VU's identity. This was in large part due to the trade-off often associated with undertaking such a responsibility, namely between office and votes. Poor policy results led to the VU being punished by its supporters for failing to deliver in the Flemish interest. These tensions ultimately led to the party's terminal demise.

As noted above, however, the VU's legacy is still evident within Flemish and Belgian politics. The presence of the party's ex-members within many of the traditional parties, and the key position currently held by the VU's successor, N-VA, in negotiations to form a state government, mean that Flemish nationalism remains a potent political force. In particular, the latter may well try to capitalise on its pivotal position to push for the final end of the Belgian state, although N-VA will have to form agreements with other parties in order for a stable government to be formed. The politics and bargaining involved in coalition formation may frustrate the party's achievement of its territorial goal, in which case it may well face the same dilemmas arising out of vote, office and policy pursuit as its predecessor.

References

Budge, Ian and Hans Keman (1990) *Parties and Democracy: Coalition Formation and Government Functioning in 22 Democracies.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Deschouwer, Kris (1992) 'Belgium', in: Richard Katz and Peter Mair (eds.), *Party Organisations. A Data Handbook.* London: Sage, pp. 121–98.

Deschouwer, Kris (2009) *The Politics of Belgium. Governing a divided society.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dewachter, Wilfried and Erwin Das (1991) *Politiek in België. Geprofileerde Machtsverhoudingen.* Leuven: Acco.

Dewachter, Wilfried, Edith Lismont and Guy Tegenbos (1977) 'The Effect of Opposition on Government Policy. The Belgian Case from 1965 to 1971', *European Journal of Political Research*, 5: 3, 245–265.

De Winter, Lieven (2006) 'In Memoriam: The Volksunie 1954-2001. Death by Overdose of Success', in: Lieven De Winter, Marga Gómez-Reino and Peter Lynch (eds.), *Autonomist Parties in Europe: Identity Politics and the Revival of the Territorial Cleavage – Volume II.* Barcelona: ICPS, pp. 11–46.

De Winter, Lieven and Patrick Dumont (2000) 'PPGs in Belgium: Subjects of Partitocratic Dominion', in: Knut Heidar and Ruud Koole (eds.), *Behind Closed Doors: Parliamentary Party Groups in European Democracies.* London, Routledge, 2000, pp. 106–129.

De Winter, Lieven and Marga Gómez-Reino (2002) 'European Integration and Ethnoregionalist Parties', *Party Politics*, 8: 4, 483–503.

De Winter, Lieven and Marga Gómez-Reino (2009) 'Les partis autonomistes: vers la disparition de l'avantage des élections européennes', *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée*, 16: 4, 637–652.

De Winter, Lieven, Marga Gómez-Reino and Peter Lynch (eds.) (2006) *Autonomist Parties in Europe: Identity Politics and the Revival of the Territorial Cleavage – Two Volumes.* Barcelona: ICPS.

De Winter, Lieven, Marc Swyngedouw and Patrick Dumont (2009) 'Party System(s) and Electoral Behaviour in Belgium: From Stability to Balkanisation', in: Marleen Brans, Lieven De Winter and Wilfried Swenden (eds.), *The Politics of Belgium.* London: Routledge, pp. 71–94.

Hearl, Derek (1987) 'Belgium 1946–1981', in: Ian Budge, David Robertson and Derek Hearl (eds.), *Ideology, Strategy and Party Change: Spatial Analyses of Post-War Election Programmes in 19 Democracies.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 230–253.

Koole, Ruud (1992) *De opkomst van de moderne kaderpartij: veranderende partijorganisatie in Nederland 1960-1990.* Leiden: Leiden University Press.

Lynch, Peter (1996) *Minority Nations and European Integration.* Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Lynch, Peter and Lieven De Winter (2008) 'The Shrinking Political Space of Autonomist Parties in an Enlarged Europe of the Regions', *Regional and Federal Studies*, 18: 5, 583-606.

Maes, Marc (1988) *De ledenaantallen van de politieke partijen in België.* Leuven: Afdeling Politicologie.

Martens, Wilfred (2006) *De Memoires, Luctor et Emergo.* Tielt: Lannoo.

Moors, Steven (1993) *Het aandeel van de militant in het functioneren van de plaatselijke afdeling van de Volksunie. Een verkennen donder zoek.* Unpublished M.A. Thesis. Leuven: Departement Politieke Wetenschappen.

Giorgia Bulli and Filippo Tronconi[1]

The Lega Nord

3.1. Introduction

In the political history of Italy, the Lega Nord (LN) can be considered a newparty. Firstly, from a chronological perspective, the party's origins date from the late 1970s, some 80 years after the first party organisations appeared on the Italian political scene. The LN emerged as a result of the un-freezing of political cleavages, a process that has taken place across Western Europe since the beginning of the 1970s and which has eroded the electoral hold of traditional parties over society, stabilised (or frozen) since the 1920s. As far as Italy is concerned, in 1983 (the year when the Liga Veneta (LV) elected its first parliamentary representative), the main parties that emerged (or re-emerged) after the Second World War accounted for up to 93.1% of votes in Italian elections. The *leghe*,[2] together with ecological parties, were the first real shock to one of the most stable party systems in Europe.

The LN is also a new party in a second substantive sense. It forced the political system to deal with at least two issues that were virtually absent from political debate. The first was the "northern question" (Gómez-Reino 2002), namely the growing dissatisfaction of large areas of the most dynamic part of Italian society towards Rome, the political centre. Italy has a long tradition of localism, derived in large part from its late unification; however, this had never found clear political representation. Moreover, politicians had tended to focus on the Mezzogiorno and the problems associated with its delayed development. For these reasons, the rise of protest from the economically developed areas of North-east Italy – traditional strongholds of the Christian Democrats – came as a surprise to most observers of Italian politics and its long-term implications were largely underestimated.

The second issue introduced by the *leghe* was a clearly anti-political discourse. Dissatisfaction with politics and hostility towards the political oligarchies of parties and democratic institutions is well documented in Italian public opinion from the first years of the Republic (Morlino and

---

[1] This chapter is fruit of a joint work. The final draft of sections 2 and 4 can be attributed to G. Bulli; the final draft of sections 1 and 3 to F. Tronconi. Section 5 has been written jointly.

[2] Throughout the chapter we refer to the "leghe" as the original regional autonomist movements, which in 1989 merged into the LN; the term "Lega" is used to refer more broadly to the party's history, before and after this merger.

Tarchi 1996). However, the *leghe* (with increasing emphasis from the early 1990s onwards) were the first to exploit this general tendency for political gain. They were able to do so when public dissatisfaction with established politics was reaching unprecedented levels, which eventually led to a general crisis of legitimisation of the party system.

From the above, it is clear that a full understanding of the LN phenomenon requires taking these two aspects into account. The LN is both an autonomist *and* a populist party. Thus, from a comparative perspective, the LN can be situated at the intersection of two distinct historical processes. The first is the so-called "ethnic revival" (Smith 1981), which in the 1960s and the 1970s gave new voice to a number of actors representing the peripheries of states and allowed many autonomist parties to gain political representation. The second is the "silent counter-revolution" (Ignazi 1992), leading to the rise of new political parties (variously labelled as new right, new radical right or neo-populist) that articulated anti-establishment discourses and raised issues that were previously absent from political debate. These included opposition to immigration and, more recently, strong Euroscepticism.

Keeping in mind the LN's dual profile, the following section presents a summary of the LN's evolution through the achievement of several thresholds, as introduced in the Introduction to this volume. The chapter then turns to examine how passing different thresholds has impacted upon the LN's organisation and its pursuit of goals.

3.2. The lifespan of the LN

The historical evolution of the LN follows a rather complex pattern of diffused organisation-building. The party was formed as a result of a merger of six autonomist movements established in several regions in northern Italy from the late 1970s; these were the LV, LegaLombarda (LL), Piemont-Autonomista, Union Ligure, Lega Emiliana-Romagnola and Alleanza Toscana. As a consequence, a description of the origins and evolution of the LN must take into account the multiple paths followed by these organisations within different electoral arenas. The discussion that follows focuses in particular on the two most important organisations, namely the LL and the LV.

3.2.1. The thresholds of declaration and authorisation

The first regional autonomist movement was established in Veneto. In 1978, Franco Rocchetta created the Società Filologica Veneta, a voluntary association with the aim of defending and promoting the use of the Venetian dialect. A few months later, Bruno Salvadori, leader of the

nap new academic press

Union Valdôtaine (UV), contacted the group in order to find allies to build an autonomist coalition for the forthcoming European elections. Although the joint list was not successful in gaining representation, it prompted the transformation of the cultural organisation into a political movement, renamed the LV. During the same period, in Milan Salvadori became acquainted with a medicine student with vague leftist leanings, whom he convinced to support the autonomist cause. The name of this student was Umberto Bossi. A few years later, Bossi founded the journal *Lombardia Autonomista* in which he called for an autonomist movement to be built following the experiences of Valle d'Aosta, South Tyrol, Friuli and Veneto.

During the very first phase of party development, the LV presented itself as the protector of the linguistic and cultural specificities of the Veneto region. This autonomist strategy (Diamanti 1993: 19) was soon coupled with mobilisation against central political institutions and immigration from the south, a discourse that often assumed traits of intolerance and racism. From the very beginning, territorial identification was thus based on identification of the "enemy" to be opposed, rather than on the cultural traits that formed the basis for a homogenous community of belonging. This would become even more pronounced as the LV's discourse evolved from having a regional focus (the culture of the Veneti or Lombardi) to a supra-regional one later referred to as "Padania", whose territorial and cultural borders were much more difficult to define. For northern autonomist movements, Rome was conceptualised as the origin of all evil in two respects: firstly, as the centre of the unitary state and of an inefficient and oppressive government; secondly, as the headquarters of a distant and illegitimate party system. From these two perceptions derived the two political faces of the Lega: regionalism and populism.

The threshold of declaration was passed in 1979 and 1984 by the LV and the LL respectively (see table 3.1), with both organisations stating their intention to contest elections at all territorial levels. With regard to the European arena, 1979 was also the year when the second threshold (authorisation) was passed. The joint list with the UV enabled smaller parties (the LV among them) to contest the election without having to collect the necessary signatures; this would have been extremely difficult for such a young and weakly organised movement to achieve. In the 1980 regional election, the threshold of authorisation was passed by the LV, again without getting any representative elected, whilst the same threshold was passed by the LL in the following regional election (1985).

new academic press

Table 3.1. *The lifespan of the LV and LL (1979–1990), and LN (1991 onwards)*

a) Regional level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1979	LV					
1980		LV				
1984	LL					
1985		LL	LV			
1990			LV	LL		
1994						LN[1]
1995					LN	
2000						LN
2005						LN
2010						LN

Note:
[1] In 1994 LN participates to the regional executive in Veneto only.

b) State level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1979	LV					
1983			LV			
1984	LL					
1987		LV	LL			
1992				LN		
1994						LN
1995					LN	
1996				LN		
2000					LN	
2001						LN
2006					LN	
2008						LN

c) European level

	I	II	III
1979		LV	
1984		LV, LL	
1989			LL
1994			LN
1999			LN
2004			LN
2009			LN

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

3.2.2. The threshold of representation

In the 1983 and 1987 general elections, the LV and the LL both crossed the threshold of representation at the state-level for the first time. In its first participation in national elections, the LV was able to elect one representative to both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies; the party won an unprecedented 4.2% of the votes in Veneto, with a consequent sharp increase in its visibility.[3] Though this success was replicated at the regional level two years later, the electoral decline of the LV had already begun; this was confirmed when the party failed to retain its parliamentary representation in 1987. At the same time, the LL's electoral rise was just beginning. It did not contest the 1983 general election, and got only a negligible share of the vote in the 1985 regional election, but in 1987 it was able to elect its leader Umberto Bossi to the Senate, and Giuseppe Leoni to the Chamber of Deputies.

The following years were decisive for the institutionalisation of the LN. For the 1989 European election, an umbrella list of northern autonomist movements (called *Alleanza Nord*) was formed. The LL emerged as the dominant party, securing 8.1% of the vote and, for the first time, two seats in the European Parliament. The LV, in contrast, polled a meagre 1.7% of the vote, halving its level of support compared to five years previously. The LL, in which Umberto Bossi had already established himself as the uncontested leader, capitalised on its success by strengthening its control over

---

[3] Achille Tramarin, the elected candidate, tried to give his first speech as a Member of Parliament (MP) in Venetian, although he was swiftly reproached for doing so. This was widely reported in local and national newspapers.

nap new academic press

the other regional movements, and transforming the electoral alliance into a single organisation – the LN. The central role played by Bossi's party and by Bossi himself led to the constitution of the LN in 1991.

3.2.3. The threshold of relevance: from blackmail to coalition potential

Elections in the following years confirmed the LN's electoral rise. In the 1990 regional election, the LL became the second most voted party in Lombardy (18.9%), whilst the LV also increased its electoral share. In the 1992 general election, the LN achieved another unprecedented success. With 8.7% of the votes state-wide it emerged as the fourth party and a key player at the national level, even though traditional parties were reluctant to acknowledge the party's significance and considered it to be a transitory phenomenon. However, the LN was consolidating its position in the traditional strongholds of Veneto and Lombardy, whilst also expanding its presence to almost all other northern areas, from Piedmont to Friuli, from Liguria to Emilia-Romagna (Diamanti 1993: chapter 2). As a further indicator of the party's success and its peculiar position in the Italian political system, it was also able to attract voters from all the main parties, from the neofascist Movimento Sociale Italiano to Democrazia Cristiana, and from the parties of the left (Biorcio 1997: 65).

The years between 1992 and 1994 represented the final affirmation of the LN. By the party's second party congress in December 1993, it boasted 74 Mayors in Lombardy, 8 in Piedmont, 8 in Liguria, 27 in Veneto, 6 in Friuli and 2 in Emilia-Romagna. Among them, the party's success in Milan in 1993 was particularly significant; as the capital of the wealthiest area of Italy (and one of the richest in Europe), in the months prior to the election the city had also been at the heart of corruption scandals in Italy at the beginning of the decade. The LN's victory thus had a major symbolic significance.

Up until 1992, all the main Italian parties avoided establishing any sort of relationship with the LN, whilst simultaneously rejecting its violent political discourse and hoping it would disappear from the political landscape as quickly as it had appeared a few years previously. However, after the party's 1992 electoral breakthrough, and after the traditional parties had been implicated in a succession of corruption scandals, attitudes towards the party began to change. And yet the LN had little interest in cooperating with an illegitimate political class. The roles were reversed, as Bossi rejected any possibility of an alliance with what was portrayed as "old" and discredited politics. As a result, the LN remained below the threshold of coalition potential. This situation only changed with the birth of Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia (FI) in 1994. The new party launched by the television tycoon represented an attractive and competitive alternative for a

disillusioned and frustrated Italian electorate, not only in central and southern Italy, but also in the northern cities where the LN had its stronghold.

3.2.4. The threshold of governance

In the 1994 general election, having obtained a favourable distribution of candidates in pre-electoral negotiations with Berlusconi's FI, the LN's 8.4% of the vote translated into the largest parliamentary group (117 MPs, 18.6% of parliamentary seats). As a consequence, the party entered the first Berlusconi government with three important portfolios (Interior Affairs, the Budget and Industry), and a more minor portfolio (Institutional Reform). In the same year, the LN also crossed the threshold of government at the regional level, participating for a few months in the *giunta regionale* in Veneto as a minority coalition partner. In Lombardy, the party provided external support for a centre-right government from 1995. The LN's first direct participation in regional government would only take place in 2000.

Despite this institutional success, however, the party was not able to impose its own themes and issues. Moreover, as a consequence of cooperating with its state-wide rivals, the LN's image as a party fighting against the corrupted system of the "Roman" parties risked being undermined. Tensions among the governing allies at the state-level became so deep that, after only eight months, the LN announced its withdrawal from the coalition, thus condemning the first Berlusconi government to failure. This decision provoked a deep split within the party's leading group and the defection of many MPs. This tension will be considered in greater detail in the next section.

Following the collapse of the Berlusconi government, the LN supported a transitional cabinet under the leadership of Lamberto Dini. In the 1996 general election, the party competed alone, without joining any of the two main electoral alliances. Its treason made it impossible, at least in the short term, to form any agreement with its former right-wing ally. At the same time, the LN's behaviour (such as the adoption of an explicitly secessionist strategy, a "declaration of independence" in Venezia in September 1996 and the establishment of a Parliament of Padania in Mantova) made it an unacceptable partner for the centre-left coalition. Nevertheless, the LN had its best result ever (10.1% of the votes state-wide in the proportional element of the election). The decision to run alone, against both the centre-right and centre-left coalitions, was very successful; the party's performance was a testament to Bossi's political acumen and confirmed his position as charismatic leader of the LN.

In spite of this electoral outcome, however, the party's hopes of being a pivotal actor in the following legislature were frustrated. The centre-left coalition held a majority in both parliamentary chambers, and the LN was

nap new academic press

consigned to five years of opposition.[4] The political irrelevance of the LN was not without cost. The party had been unable to bring concrete benefits to its northern constituencies when it was in government in 1994, and was even less able to do so as a hard-line opposition party from 1996 onwards. For this reason, and after disappointing results in European and local elections,[5] in 1999 new talks took place between the LN and FI with the aim of cooperating in forthcoming regional and general elections.

An agreement was reached which saw the LN give up the issue of secession and promise loyalty to the centre-right coalition, in exchange for federal reforms to be approved in the legislature following the 2001 general election.[6] This brought the LN into government again, first at the regional level (in 2000 in Lombardy and Veneto), then at state level, in 2001. Once again, Bossi was able to extract more than could reasonably be expected out of negotiations with FI,[7] especially if one considers that in the 2001 general election, the party did not even pass the 4% threshold necessary to get seats under the proportional element of the electoral system. In the 2006 and 2008 general elections, the LN recovered a stable share of its electorate, reversing the downward trend witnessed at the regional level in the previous year; the party's position was consolidated in subsequent European and regional elections. Thus, after a short period in opposition, the LN regained access to state government and, for the first time, led centre-right coalition governments in two important northern regions, namely Piedmont and Veneto.

How can the LN's lifespan be explained? Firstly, the success of the *leghe* in the early 1980s was to a large extent due to their ability to intercept and give political representation to a diffused sense of discontent with the political system and its outputs, which was growing in northern Italy at a faster rate than elsewhere.[8] A traditional lack of confidence inpolitical parties – and in political institutions more generally – was combined with dissatisfaction

---

[4]   The same happened at the regional level. As a consequence of having abandoned government at the state-level the previous year, in 1995 the LN competed alone in regional elections, and remained in opposition in all northern regions for the subsequent legislature.

[5]   In the 1999 European election, the party polled 4.5% of the votes state-wide (with its number of seats declining from 6 to 4). In absolute numbers, this meant 1.4 million votes, compared to 3.8 million in 1996 general election. At the local level, the loss of the province of Bergamo, one of the LN's historical strongholds, had an even more traumatic impact on the party's leading group.

[6]   After prolonged discussion, these reforms were passed by the Italian Parliament at the end of the legislature, although they were rejected in a subsequent referendum in June 2006.

[7]   The LN obtained ministerial portfolios for Justice, Welfare and Institutional Reform (the latter post occupied by Bossi himself).

[8]   A number of public opinion surveys have revealed that confidence in political institutions is systematically lower in the northern regions than the Italian average, which is itself low compared to other European countries. Among LN voters, the degree of confidence is usually even lower. See, for instance, Diamanti (1996: 51).

from the most economically dynamic part of the country towards a centre that was unable to provide efficient services and modern infrastructure. Diamanti (1996) has referred to this phenomenon as "il male del Nord", or the Northern disease. The *leghe* gave voice to this dual disillusion through its anti-establishment and regionalist rhetoric, and did so ten years before the generalised crisis of legitimacy in Italian politics during the 1990s.

Secondly, the linkages between different territorial levels are also important in understanding the LN's lifespan. The party evolved rapidly from being a regional to a national political actor. After first establishing itself at the local level, the LN became an important player in state-level politics, and the moves and strategic decisions taken in Rome were decisive for the regional level of government. In other words, if in a first phase the regional level is dominant, after the end of the 1980s the strategies of the regional elites of the party are to a great extent subject to decisions taken at the state level. This is neither common nor obvious for an autonomist party. The European level, on the other hand, has never been considered a crucial one in organisational and electoral terms, even though at times European issues, such as Italy's adoption of the single currency or the admission of Turkey into the European Union, have been exploited symbolically.

Thirdly, the LN's lifespan has been shaped by the electoral rules in place at different territorial levels. After passing the first two thresholds (declaration and authorisation), electoral rules may hinder access to political representation for minor parties. The Italian case is interesting in this respect, having witnessed two major electoral reforms at the state level in less than 15 years, and having recently adopted different electoral systems for representative bodies at different territorial levels after almost 50 years of perfectly proportional systems at all levels. For the sake of simplicity, we only consider changes in electoral laws at the state level here. It is arguable that the LN has not been seriously affected by these changes. The shift from the almost perfect proportional system employed until 1992, to a mixed and mainly plurality system in 1994, did not cause the party any significant harm. Indeed, as noted above, the party scored its best ever result in the 1996 general election. There are two reasons why a change in the electoral system did not damage the party. The first relates to the territorial concentration of the LN's vote; this counteracts the reducing effect of plurality systems. The second explanation is more specific to the Italian case. The change from a proportional to a plurality system made it necessary to build broad and heterogeneous coalitions of parties to contest elections in single member districts. Leaving a potential partner aside has proved dangerous for both right and left-wing parties. Thus, in 1996 the right lost not because of a broad shift of voters towards the left, but because the LN was left out of the coalition. The inverse occurred in 2001, when the centre-left contested elections without Rifondazione Comunista. In other words, a small party contesting elections alone may not be able to win, but may well cause its

potential partners to lose, at least in a number of districts. For this reason, the LN was still considered a crucial ally in 2001, even though it was clear from pre-electoral surveys that it would lose some votes to FI.

In 2006 a new mixed electoral system was adopted, with proportional representation (albeit with a very low threshold) and a bonus awarded to the most voted party (or coalition of parties), so that it gets 54% of parliamentary seats whatever its vote-share.[9] The system thus has a proportional basis, but still works in a sense as a plurality system, making it necessary to build broad coalitions. Again, this made the LN a crucial ally for the centre-right coalition.

Finally, the manner in which the LN has crossed successive thresholds is clearly different from the trend in the party's electoral performance (See figure 3.1); this is especially evident since the mid 1990s. When in 1996 the party withdrew from state government, it secured its highest share of votes ever. In contrast, when the LN returned to coalition government in 2001, the party got the worst result since its creation. Some of these lost votes were recovered in 2006, although the party was forced back into opposition until 2008. Of course, this has to do with the mechanisms of multiparty competition, since participation in government depends more on being part of a winning coalition rather than simply increasing vote share. However, it is also a matter of taking some "hard decisions" between office and electoral success (Strøm and Müller 1999), as is discussed later in the chapter.

Figure 3.1. *LN electoral results in Lombardy and Veneto (regional, European and general elections)*
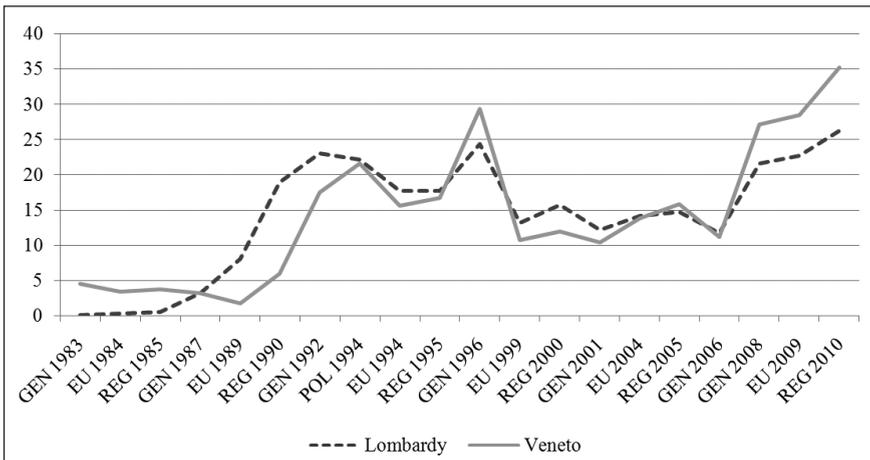
Source: Ministero dell'Interno (http://elezionistorico.interno.it/).

---

9   These rules apply to the Chamber of Deputies, while the Senate is elected on a regional basis, meaning that the 54% bonus is applied separately in each one of the regions.

3.3. Organisational change

The discussion above outlined the different paths followed by the LV and the LL during the first half of the 1980s. The latter evolved as a flash party: sudden emergence and a rapid growth; electoral success; failure to solve the problems inherent in institutional consolidation, not least maintaining cohesiveness within the party's dominant coalition; the emergence of divergent views (and potential splits) on political strategy and relations towards the other parties; rapid decline. In contrast, the LL was able to capitalise on its initial electoral success, not only avoiding the perils of internal factionalism, but also assuming the leadership of the northern autonomist movement and eventually leading the merger into a single organisation.

The difference between the two parties lies in the different solutions to the problem of institutionalisation adopted after achieving initial electoral success and access to institutional arenas. Institutionalisation is a fundamental step in the life of any organisation, and failing to achieve it may lead to the organisation's disappearance. In Panebianco's (1982: 50–56) differentiation between parties born through penetration and parties born through diffusion, the deviant case of a party led by a charismatic leader reflects the Lega experience accurately. The presence of a charismatic leader facilitated successful institutionalisation, and this in spite of being a party created through diffusion (that is, out of the merger of several different regional movements). This is because the LN adopted the organisational features of the LL; the latter was already a strongly centralised party, with access to membership rigidly controlled by a narrow elite and with all important decisions taken by the leader.

The necessity of maintaining a strong centre and avoiding the formation of factions that could divide the LL's dominant coalition was clearly understood, not least due to the LV's experience of such problems in the early 1980s.[10] The cohesiveness of the organisation's centre at a time when it was growing rapidly-was also deemed to be crucial. In the LN's founding congress, Bossi (1991a) explained this necessity as follows:

The statute I am proposing, in which I am placing all my energy and experience, should be the right instrument, because it reduces to a minimum the space for divergence and most of all discourages the creation of factions. In a strong project, this must be subjected to the superior will and necessity of victory of the autonomist cause, this is what the people want […]. I think […] the Lega Lombarda is strong enough to hurl out of its headquarters those who mean to bring into the movement the logic of factions, which in most cases are not even based on ideas, but only channels through which personal interests are defended.

---

[10]   As Bossi (1991b: 17) notes, "we have arrived here because we have won the battle to keep the movement united. For years we have acted in order to save the LL from the terrible splits that broke up the LV after the 1983 election. Having experienced electoral success too early compared to the coherence and stability of its organisation, the LV exploded from within."

nap new academic press

Achieving a strong, centralised organisational model *before* acquiring state-wide political relevance (in 1992 general election, see figure 3.2), together with the presence of an unchallenged charismatic leadership, were the key elements allowing the LN's growth, both in terms of its rootedness in society and its presence in representative institutions.

The LN's organisation was originally conceived as a federal structure, and this has remained largely unchanged since the party's creation. Thirteen "nations"[11] have their own organisations, overlaid by federal bodies. However, the flow of power within the party is clearly unidirectional – from the centre to the periphery – as the Federal Council and its secretariat have decision-making authority[12] over organisational issues, policy positions, party personnel and candidacies for public office candidacies at all levels (Cedroni 2007). Moreover, access to these central bodies and to top national positions has been strictly controlled by Bossi and elite of loyal lieutenants surrounding him. For this reason, some observers have referred to the LN as a "sectarian organisation" (Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001: 123). It is not unusual, for example, that the congress elects a member to a senior post "by acclaim", after Bossi himself has indicated his preference for this candidate in his speech (Tambini 2001: 94).

Control over membership is also carefully exerted by the party leadership, in order to allow only trusted people to access important positions. Members are divided into *soci sostenitori* and *soci ordinari – militanti*. Only the latter have voting rights and participate actively in the internal life of the party, and one can be admitted to this level only after six months of affiliation as a *socio sostenitore* and subject to the approval of territorial bodies. After becoming *socio ordinario*, a member can be proposed as a candidate to a national post only after three years, and a federal position after five years. Finally, the Federal Council has the power to suspend or expel anyone from the party and even to "reset" a territorial section, downgrading two-thirds of members from the status of *socio ordinario* to *sostenitore*.

The LN's electoral breakthrough in the 1992 and 1994 general elections and the acquisition of political relevance and government office (see table 3.1) impacted upon the party's organisation in several ways. The great care taken

---

[11] The LN's statutes note the existence of "national" sections from all the regions of central and northern Italy, with sub-regional sections dividing South Tyrol from Trentino and Emilia from Romagna.

[12] Within the Federal Council a particularly important position is that of the Coordinator of National Secretaries, in charge of overseeing national sections. The position of President, in contrast, has little real power; the post was created to provide a role for the LV's leader, Franco Rocchetta, at the time of its merger into the LN. Rocchetta was expelled from the party in 1994, but the position continued to be unofficially reserved for a representative of the Veneto component of the party, to counter-balance the dominance of the Lombardy component. The chapter considers the latent conflict between the Venetian and the Lombardian components of the party below.

by Bossi to protect his own leadership and create a party that could not be taken over by newcomers[13] was not enough to control the expansion of membership as well as elected personnel. Party membership rose by 50% between 1992 and 1994 (from 112,000 to 167,000), to decrease again in the following years and stabilise around 120,000 by the end of the decade. Membership has once again increased following more recent electoral success (see figure 3.2). The bureaucratic structures of the party in central office also grew, with new administrative staff being appointed within regional branches, and the staff supporting the work of central office also expanded considerably. In 1994, the party could count on approximately fifteen permanent staff in the federal structure, and about fifteen in each of the three bigger regional secretariats (Lombardy, Veneto and Piedmont). Whilst these numbers are not huge, they reflect substantial growth compared to previous years: "Until 1990 there were four or five secretaries who did a bit of everything. Then by about 1992 the total went up to ten" (Bossi, as quoted in Tambini, 2001: 90). The party's bureaucracy has continued to grow since, at least according to fragmentary data on financial expenditure: in 2003, 17.4% of the party's budget was spent on administrative personnel, compared to only 6.2% in 1997 (Cedroni 2007: 259).

Figure 3.2. *Membership of the Lega Nord (1992–2003)*
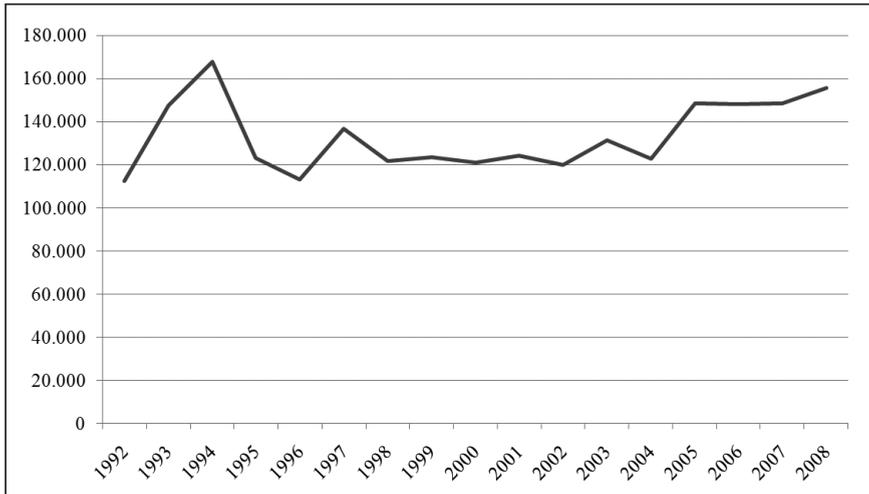
Source: Archivio dati sulle Elezioni e la Partecipazione Politica, Istituto Cattaneo (www.cattaneo.org); Biorcio (2010).

---

[13]   As Bossi recognised he explicitly: "In the first phase the main challenge that the League faced was to prevent external infiltration. For the Christian Democrats or the Socialists, it would have been enough to buy 100 members to buy the movement" (Bossi, as quoted by Tambini 2001: 95).

The most dramatic increase, however, concerned the party in public office, both quantitatively and in terms of the qualitative change in power relations that it potentially represented. The LN elected one Deputy and one Senator in the 1987 general election; this grew to 55 and 25 respectively five years later, and to 117 and 60 in 1994 when it was the biggest Italian party in terms of parliamentary groups. In the same year, the party enteredstate government (Berlusconi I) for the first time, holding key ministerial positions (see above). A similar increase was experienced at the regional level in both Lombardy and Veneto, with the LN gaining a prominent position in the relative Councils and accessing regional governments (in Veneto) or giving it external support (in Lombardy).

The first time the LN crossed back over a threshold – withdrawing from the Berlusconi I coalition in 1995 – had an even more dramatic impact. The trade-off between government participation (and thus policy influence) and electoral performance is a particularly hard one for populist parties (Heinisch, 2003), and the LN is no exception. Fearing the dilution of its distinctive profile, Bossi imposed a quick U-turn in the party's strategy, withdrawing from government and causing its collapse just a few months after it had been formed. From an organisational point of view, this had two consequences. Firstly, for the first time Bossiwas confronted with the problem of maintaining the cohesiveness of the party's dominant coalition. Deep divisions emerged between those willing to exploit the position acquired in government, and more hard-line party members willing to sacrifice government office in order to safeguard the party's electoral standing. The confrontation reflected the different office-seeking *vs.* vote-seeking preferences of different factions within the party. Bossi accused the former of betrayal and forced them to leave the party; about one third of the LN's MPs abandoned the party's parliamentary group (62 out of 177 MPs between the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate) between 1994 and 1995. From this conflict, the LN emerged with a reduced party in public office but an even stronger leadership. It was very clear that no internal opposition to the line dictated by the leader was acceptable within the movement, no matter how long the individual had been a member of the party or how important his/her position within the party. Furthermore, the inability of those expelled from the party to build a successful alternative autonomist movement was a demonstration that no political future was possible for LN politicians without or against Bossi.

A second line of conflict, only partially overlapping the first, followed territorial lines. One opponent of the LN's new strategy was Franco Rocchetta, founder of the LV and the LN's first President. The predominance of the Lombardy branch within the LN had been clear since the latter's formation. This was a consequence of the relative electoral weight of the two regions (Lombardy and Veneto) and the charismatic leadership of Umberto Bossi. Other autonomist movements were thus *de facto* incorporated into

the LL. Latent conflict between the regional groups persisted within the LN, with the minority Venetian component continually seeking to challenge Bossi's tyranny. This territorial tension has periodically evolved into open conflict; discontented local regional representatives have frequently split from the LN and a number of alternative Venetian lists have been presented at different times since the 1990s. Whilst some of these rival groups have been led by influential people,[14] none have managed to attract significant portions of the LN's electorate.

A third direction of organisational change was the establishment of a mass organisation, rooted in the northern territory. The reasoning behind this apparent paradox – emphasising the charismatic *and* the mass character of the party at the same time – was simple: being out of government for an unpredictable number of years had to be counterbalanced by a stronger link with voters and civil society. As noted above, the long march "from spontaneity to organisation" (De Luna 1994) had begun at the end of the 1980s. However, organisational consolidation was accelerated at this time out of fear that the party would be marginalised from government-formation in the future, and would be unable to draw on broad public support. The model adopted by the LN was that of the old Partito Comunista Italiano, with a number of ancillary organisations penetrating society whilst at the same time being closely controlled by the party. Thus women and youth Padanian organisations were established or reinforced, as well as a trade union; environmental, cultural and sport organisations, NGOs, and even organisations for farmers and immigrants, were also created. A presence in the mass media was also needed. The daily newspaper *La Padania* was founded in January 1997, together with *Radio Padania Libera*, whilst a television channel (*TelePadania*) broadcasting in the northern regions was established one year later. The result, at the turn of the century, was a party rediscovering several features of the mass model, at a time when the general trend was going in the opposite direction, towards the "virtual" party characterised by Berlusconi's FI.

These organisational features were not abandoned upon the LN's return to office as part of the Berlusconi II government in 2001. This time the relationship between LN and FI (frequently in opposition to the other parties within the coalition, Alleanza Nazionale (AN) and Unione di Centro)

---

[14] Apart from Rocchetta in 1994, in 1998 Fabrizio Comencini – Venetian National Secretary – abandoned the party together with seven out of the LN's nine representatives in the regional council; he created a movement allied with FI. In other cases, leading figures of the party's peripheral bodies were branded as dissidents and forced to leave the party; this demonstrated the difficult integration of regional branches into the LN's centralised structure. In 1989, Roberto Gremmo, leader of the Piedmont branch of the party, was expelled; in 1992, Franco Castellazzi, speaker of the LN group in the Lombard regional council left the party with five other councillors. In 1999, Franco Comino, the National Secretary of the Piedmont branch, was expelled.

endured for the entire legislature, constituting the most stable cabinet in the history of the Italian Republic. The cohesiveness of the leading group surrounding Bossi, and the stable structure of the mass party organisation, contrasted starkly with the frequent internal struggles experienced by the other major political parties. The LN's organisational solidity thus served the party very well in the competitive political arena.

Table 3.2 summarises the impact of passing each threshold on organisational change within the LN. The threshold of declaration led the *leghe* to create the first, still uncertain, organisational structures at the regional level at a time when a national organisational level was not yet conceived. Crossing subsequent thresholds led to the building of a strongly centralised organisation, with any internal reforms driven and strictly controlled by the centre (or more precisely, by the leader and his close circle of lieutenants). This was especially true at two crucial points in the evolution of the movement: firstly, when the LN passed the threshold of relevance (before and after the electoral breakthrough of 1992 with the creation of the LN and the electoral expansion during 1992–94); secondly, when the party stepped back from government into opposition during the period 1996–99.

Table 3.2. *Pressure for organisational change upon crossing thresholds*

Threshold	Regional level	State level	European level
V			
IV-B			
IV-A		**Strong** - merger into national movement - expansion of bureaucratic structure - creation of a mass party model of organisation.	
III		**Medium** - state funding	
II			
I	**Medium** - Creation of first organisational structures (LV and LL); also inter-regional coordination.		

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

nap new academic press

3.4. Changes in party goals

Throughout its history the LN has avoided the biggest risk to its survival: its development into a single-issue movement (Mannheimer 1991: 32). On the one hand, the LN's autonomist project has shifted from a general notion of localism to federalism, and from federalism to secessionism. In the last decade, the party has arrivedat a new stage of its political life, advocating Italian devolution. On the other hand, as a populist party, the LN has presented its opposition to traditional parties and the party-system in different ways. To a large extent, shifts in ideology and policy goals have been strategic answers to developments in the 'macro' Italian political system (as in the case of the party's coalition strategy) and in the 'micro' LN political system; these have been determined by Umberto Bossi as the LN's undisputed leader. The adaptation of party goals has responded to endogenous and exogenous incentives. These not only include significant institutional and constitutional reforms. The trade-off between policy, vote and office goals is also influenced by the 'political game' the party decides to play according to varying political scenarios at the state level. The LN's rapid goal changes have been facilitated by a vague interpretation of ideological goals, as well as the party's dominant leadership.

3.4.1. Thresholds of declaration and authorisation: localism and regionalism

At the time of passing the thresholds of declaration and authorisation, the party's initial goal at the local level was to give "voice" to opposition towards a delegitimated political system (Hirschman 1970). In doing so, the aim was to attract public opinion (and therefore votes) to the *leghismo*-phenomenon. With the birth of the LL, however, insistence on the use of dialect was soon abandoned and emphasis was placed on other issues. The 'region' was given greater prominence in Bossi's political discourse. He argued that the wealth produced in the northern regions should be used to promote the wellbeing of citizens in those territories, rather than be squandered on welfare policies benefitting corrupt regions in southern Italy. The LL's policy proposals at the regional level ranged from fiscal regulation on a territorial basis to the prioritisation of Lombard citizens in the allocation of jobs and public housing (De Luna 1994). However, given that the party lacked the institutional strength to realise these policies, its main goal during this period was maximising electoral support. Gaining office and policy influence thus depended on mobilising electoral support for the LL's political project. To this end, the party adopted anti-immigrant positions initially directed against workers from southern Italy settled in the north, and subsequently against migrant workers from outside the European

nap new academic press

Union. This rhetoric reflected the LL's nature as a party of protest, and it is on this basis that it sought to conquer the northern electorate.

3.4.2. Thresholds of representation and relevance: from regionalism to federalism

With the LL and LV having achieved representation at the regional and state levels, new challenges arose; these were recognised at the LN's founding congress in 1991. The first required reconciling the party's regional political project with the reality that territorial reform could only be achieved through state-level legislation. The introduction of a federalist perspective, initially proposed in the work of an eminent Italian political scientist and philosopher, Gianfranco Miglio, represented a first attempt in this direction. The LN's crude interpretation of Miglio's ideas led the party to propose the division of Italy into three macro-regions: the North (Padania), the Centre (Etruria) and the South (with no specific name). The macro-regions were imagined more on a socio-economic basis than on a cultural one (Diamanti 1993).

In order to give visibility to its new territorial project, the LN organised several public demonstrations. In June 1991, during a rally in Pontida,[15] Bossi declared the birth of the *Repubblica del Nord* (the Northern Republic). The growing anti-political and anti-party attitude of the LN was articulated clearly during the meeting.[16] Whilst there was no realistic prospect of achieving independence for northern Italy, the significance of this act lay in demonstrating the anti-system nature of the party against the background of a blocked Italian party system. The LN thus sought to exploit this situation for electoral gain. The party situated itself on the territorial dimension in order to distinguish itself from the left-right profiles of the traditional parties that it opposed. Vote-maximisation was thus the party's priority at this point in time. This strategy proved to be successful, as the results of the 1992 general election demonstrated; the party was able to present itself as a real alternative to the corrupt Italian political system. This situation only changed with the entry of FI into Italian politics; the latter adopted many of the themes articulated by the LN up until then. The LN responded by moderating its territorial rhetoric. Whilst federalism

---

[15]   Pontida is a sacred place for the LN, as it was here that the historical oath of the free cities of Padania was sworn in 1167. The free cities created the Lega Lombarda to oppose Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa.

[16]   Bossi (1991b) stated that "the [Italian] State is a Republic, but only formally, because it is in reality the kingdom of financial slavery at the hands of a minority who make use of the *partitocrazia*. [...] The Republic of the North is founded today, 16 June 1991, based on the conscience of the Lega people [...]. Centralised oppression will be replaced by federalism".

remained a key theme, it was no longer one exclusive to the LN.[17] The party's less aggressive discourse facilitated its entry into the right-wing governing coalition in 1994.

3.4.3. Crossing the threshold of governance and returning to opposition: From federalism to secession

In the Berlusconi I government, the LN was a coalition partner along with FI, Centro Cristiano Democratico, and AN; the latter party disagreed in principle with the idea of federalism. The LN's participation in this government provoked strong opposition among party members and supporters. Although withdrawal from the coalition was formally justified due to the impossibility of achieving the party's federalist ambitions, of greater concern to the party leadership was the perceived betrayal of the LN's function as a party of protest against the political establishment. Aware of the danger of losing the linkage to its core constituency, Bossi decided to sacrifice government office and policy influence. In the 1996 general election, the party sought to re-establish itself as challenger to the Italian political system and the hegemony of the traditional parties. The party leadership's choices in this period reflect the LN's pursuit of a long-term strategy whereby government participation was less important than regaining grassroots and electoral support.

As a further re-assertion of its anti-system image, the LN also employed the rhetoric of independence. The party's proclamation of the Parliament of the North was a symbolic act aimed at maximising the party's visibility. This institution met for the first time in June 1995.[18] In 1996, a demonstration organised by the party along the river Po was meant to constitute the symbolic apogee of the new secessionist strategy, with the party declaring the independence and sovereignty of Padania (although the event was only attended by approximately 200,000 people along the river and 30,000 in Venice). As noted above, this renewed strategy of protest contributed to the LN's good electoral performance in the 1996 general election. After the contest, the party continued with its use of secessionist language. For example, during one of the meetings of the Parliament of Mantova, Bossi declared the need to pass to an operative stage in the fight for independence and announced the creation of a *Comitato di Liberazione della*

---

[17] As Tarchi (1998: 149) notes, "in order to prevent the League from gaining a monopoly in exploiting centre-periphery tensions, almost all traditional parties agreed to integrate reforms towards federalism into their own programmes".

[18] The new parliament was composed of elected members from local institutions, organised into 12 different commissions. However, as noted by Tambini (2001: 130), it remained unclear "what kind of a role the "parliament" would have, since it met only once a month, and resembled a press conference more than a debating chamber".

nap new academic press

Padania (Committee for the Liberation of Padania). The *Camicie Verdi* (Green Shirts) were also established as a kind of army of volunteers that would fight for Padanian independence. During this period, the party also re-asserted its populist profile. Thus, in 1999, the party collected signatures in favour of a referendum in opposition to the centre-left government's immigration legislation that, according to the LN, would open Italian borders to illegal immigrants.

In spite of the aggressiveness of the LN's politics during the mid 1990s, the party's leadership was also aware that none of its policy goals could be achieved from political opposition. Moreover, the disappointing result of the 1999 European election signalled the danger facing the party of becoming a single-issue secessionist party.[19] Public opinion surveys also revealed the lack of popular support for the notion of Padania and the prospect of independence (Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001: 116-117). Padania was thus more of an imaginary, rather than an imagined, community (Albertazzi 2006: 23). These considerations aside, however, the LN's period in opposition and its re-assertion of its radical regionalist and populist messages was necessary in order to re-establish and bolster the party's electoral appeal.

Once electoral support had been re-gained, the party switched to consider office incumbency once again (see Table 3.2). At the beginning of 2000, new talks between Bossi and Berlusconi would provide the basis for the LN's re-entry into state government. The party retains this role at the time of writing (2010). The LN's return to government made it impossible to continue talking about secession. Albertazzi (2006: 24) noted that the "dream of independence was replaced by the more moderate, Scottish inspired, request for devolution". Under the slogan '*Lega di Lotta e di Governo'* (the League of Fighting and Governing), the party placed its emphasis instead on populist issues such as immigration, the centrality of Christian values in Western societies, law and order, and Euroscepticism. This platform, which is typical of European populist parties (Betz and Immerfall 1998; Taggart 2000; Tarchi 2003) once again revealed the LN's dual character, as identified at the beginning of this chapter. The party successfully pushed for a new and stricter law on immigration (the so-called Bossi-Fini law), although it failed to deliver on its goal of territorial reform.

This leads us to consider the LN's policy impact more generally, after fifteen years of being a major actor in regional and state politics. If the contemporary territorial organisation of political power in Italy is compared to that at the end of the 1980s, when the Lega was about to emerge as a

---

[19]   Bossi himself recognised this danger. After the election, he responded to a journalist's question about the future of the LN by stating that "Padania does not necessarily mean secession. In order not to die, the North will have to set itself free. Independence has to be reached. We will wait to see how" (Lega Nord 1999).

nap new academic press

significant political force, the scope and depth of institutional change is substantial. Prior to the 1990s, regionalism and federalism were not salient political issues. Moreover, a relatively weakly institutionalised tier of regional government (Baldi 2003) had not transformed the unitary nature of the Italian state significantly. In contrast, legislative innovation in the latter half of the 1990s, as well as the 2001 constitutional reforms, have accelerated the regionalisation of the Italian state. Regional governments have been granted autonomous legislative powers in a number of fields (such as local police, vocational training, social services, transport and tourism) and shared powers in others (including energy, health, welfare, the environment, research and culture). Moreover, beyond this formal re-distribution of power, regional party leaders have become prominent actors in state politics and have often been able to build broad alliances that have influenced governmental decisions in sensitive fields.

What has the LN's role been in this transformation? Paradoxically, although the LN has played a key role in promoting the issue of federalism and imposing this issue on the agendas of all other parties, institutional reform has been achieved in the face of opposition from the party. The example of the 2001 constitutional reform is a particularly instructive in this respect (Cento Bull 2002). The reform was passed by a centre-left government and approved in a subsequent referendum; however, the LN opposed the proposals within the Italian parliament and encouraged its supporters to vote against the left's "fake federalism". A different situation emerged five years later. Proposals for enhancing the federal structure of the state emanated from the LN, and were key to its governing agreement with the centre-right coalition. The Italian parliament's approval of the proposals was celebrated as a historical achievement, although they were eventually defeated in a popular referendum. The LN's federalising reforms thus failed to pass the hurdle of public consent.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the LN's lifespan over a period of thirty years from three perspectives: the passing of successive thresholds, organisational development, and changes in party goals and ideology. Here, we draw on these observations to answer the following two questions. Firstly, how stable is the LN's position as a governing (or coalitionable) party, and is a return to anti-system politics conceivable? Secondly, can the LN still be considered a party dominated by the charismatic leadership of Bossi?

Concerning the first question, it is unlikely that the LN will be a party out of state government in the near future, for two reasons. Firstly, since 1999 the party has put aside references to secession in favour of a more moderate and credible demand for federal reform. Fiscal federalism has

nap new academic press

come to be accepted by the entire centre-right coalition as part of the governing agreement; it has also been considered sympathetically by certain actors on the centre-left. Thus there is little incentive for the LN to return to the independentist language that failed to resonate with the electorate during the latter half of the 1990s. Secondly, the LN is stronger than ever in electoral terms. In the 2010 regional election it won 17,2% of the vote in the northern regions, was the most voted party in Veneto and the second largest party in Lombardia. Also, for the first time, it managed to win important support in Italy's central regions. Furthermore, an electoral system that requires parties to build pre-electoral coalitions (both at regional and state levels) makes the LN an indispensable ally for Berlusconi's Il Popolo della Libertà (successor party to FI and AN) in the north of Italy and helps build what is now perceived as a "diarchy able to dominate the entirety of national politics" (Biorcio 2010: 149).

The second question relates to the LN's organisational structure. From its origins, and especially during a delicate period of institutionalisation, the LN has been heavily dependent on its leader Umberto Bossi. Bossi has been responsible for all the major decisions made by the party, and has tightly controlled access to the inner circle of the dominant coalition. Moreover, loyalty to the leader has always been a necessary requirement to remain within the party elite. Those who, at different times, disagreed with Bossi's strategic choices or challenged his leadership, were forced out of the party. Until 2004, therefore, the LN without Bossi was unconceivable. On 11 March 2004, however, Bossi suffered a major stroke; his recovery was slow and left the LN without its charismatic leader.

At the time, some observers were quick to predict the death of the LN. However, this has not occurred. In part, this is due to Bossi's recovery. More importantly, however, the LN remained cohesive during Bossi's absence; the party had learnt the lesson of never publically showing internal divisions where these existed. This has been crucial for the party's survival. Also important has been the LN's organisational institutionalisation. As noted above, during the mid 1990s the party undertook to develop a mass party organisation characterised by a dense network of ancillary organisations. As a result, the LN has developed into a party with deep roots in northern Italian society. Bossi's forced absence served to make this feature more evident. This is not sufficient to de-classify the LN as a charismatic party, with the organisation constituting an instrument of its leader, "of whom […] the organisation is a vehicle for political achievement" (Panebianco 1982: 263). However, it does suggest an important change in the nature of the LN as a political organisation, with features that are not fully captured by the *charismatic party* label.

References

Albertazzi, Daniele (2006) ' "Back to Our Roots" or Self-Confessed Manipulation? The Uses of the Past in the Lega Nord's Positing of Padania', *National Identities* 8: 1, 21–39.

Baldi, Brunetta (2003) *Stato e territorio. Federalismo e decentramento nelle democrazie contemporanee*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.

Betz, Hans Georg, and Stefan Immerfall (eds.) (1998) *New Politics of the Right: Neo-Populist Parties and Movements in Established Democracies*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Biorcio, Roberto (1997) *La Padania promessa*. Milano: Il Saggiatore.

Biorcio, Roberto (2010) *La rivincita del Nord. La Lega dalla contestazione al governo*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Bossi, Umberto (1991a) *Opening speech to the Federal Congress*. Pieve Emanuele (Milano), 8 February. Available at: http://www.leganord.org/ilmovimento/momentistorici/pieve_91apertura.pdf, p. 20.

Bossi, Umberto (1991b) *Speech in Pontida*. 16 June. Available at: http://www.leganord.org/ilmovimento/storia/02_lega_nord_storia88_95.pdf.

Cedroni, Lorella (2007) 'Lega Nord', in: Luciano Bardi, Piero Ignazi and Oreste Massari (eds.), *I partiti italiani. Iscritti, dirigenti, eletti*. Milano: Università Bocconi Editore.

Cento Bull, Anna (2002) 'Towards a Federal State? Competing Proposals of for a Revision of the Constitution and the Institutional Referendum of 7 October 2001', in: Paolo Bellucci and Martin Bull (eds.) *Politics in Italy*. Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books.

Cento Bull, Anna, and Mark Gilbert (2001) *The Lega Nord and the Northern Question in Italian Politics*. Houndmills and New York: Palgrave.

De Luna, Giovanni (ed.) (1994) *Figli di un benessere minore: la Lega, 1979–1993*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia.

Diamanti, Ilvo (1993) *La Lega: geografia, storia e sociologia di un nuovo soggetto politico*. Roma: Donzelli.

Diamanti, Ilvo (1996) *Il male del Nord. Lega, localismo, secessione*. Roma: Donzelli.

Gómez-Reino, Marga (2002) *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Italian Politics. Inventing the Padania: Lega Nord and the Northern Question*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Heinisch, Reinhard (2003) 'Success in Opposition – Failure in Government: Explaining the Performance of Right-Wing Populist Parties in Public Office', *West European Politics*, 26: 3, 91–130.

Hirschman, Albert, O. (1970) *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Ignazi, Piero (1992) 'The Silent Counter-Revolution: Hypotheses on the Emergence of Extreme Right-Wing Parties in Europe', *European Journal of Political Research,* 22: 1, 3–34.

Lega Nord (1999) *Cronistoria della Lega Nord dalle origini ad oggi. Quarta parte 1999.* Available at: http://www.leganord.org/ilmovimento/storia/04_lega_nord_storia1999.pdf, p. 16.

Mannheimer, Renato (ed.) (1991) *La Lega Lombarda*. Milano: Feltrinelli.

Morlino, Leonardo, and Marco Tarchi (1996) 'The Dissatisfied Society: The Roots of Political Change in Italy', *European Journal of Political Research,* 30: 1, 41–63.

Panebianco, Angelo (1982) *Modelli di partito: organizzazione e potere nei partiti politici*. Bologna: Il Mulino. English translation *Political Parties. Organization and Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Smith, Anthony D. (1981) *The Ethnic Revival*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

nap new academic press

Strøm, Kaare and Wolfgang C. Müller (1999) 'Political Parties and Hard Choices', in: Kaare Strøm, and Wolfgang C. Müller, *Policy, Office, or Votes? How Political Parties in Western Europe Make Hard Decisions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–35.

Taggart, Paul (2000 *Populism*. Buckingam, Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Tambini, Damian (2001) *Nationalism in Italian Politics. The Stories of the Lega Nord, 1980-2000*. London and New York: Routledge.

Tarchi, Marco (1998) 'The *Lega Nord*', in: Lieven De Winter and Huri Türsan (eds.) *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe*, London: Routledge, pp. 143–157.

Tarchi, Marco (2003) *L'Italia populista. Dal qualunquismo ai girotondi*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Astrid Barrio and Oscar Barberà[1]

Convergència i Unió

4.1. Introduction

Convergencia i Unió (CiU) is an alliance between two moderate Catalan nationalist parties, Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya (CDC) and Unió Democràtica de Catalunya (UDC). CiU was established in 1978, and within two years it became the governing party in Catalonia's autonomous institutions (known as the Generalitat of Catalonia). CiU retained this position until 2003, enjoying absolute majorities from 1984 to 1995. During much of this period, the party also played a key role at the state-level, providing support for Spanish parties lacking a governing majority and extracting policy concessions for Catalonia in return. Between 2003 and 2010, CiU saw a transformation in its status, from being a party of government to a party of opposition at the regional level, and to a party with considerably less bargaining leverage at the state-level. Only in the most recent regional elections in November 2010 did the party return to government office with a minority government.

This chapter outlines and describes the CiU's evolution from being a party in power to a party in opposition, and then government once more. The implications of the party's lifespan for its organisation and goals are then examined, with particular attention paid to the effects of loosing its governing party status in 2003. The chapter also deals with CiU's policy impact as a result of being in regional government for 23 years, and its ability to shape central government policies during the periods when it provided crucial support for left and right-wing state-wide parties.

4.2. The Lifespan of CiU

As noted above, Convergencia i Unió (CiU) is an alliance between two parties, namely (CDC) and (UDC).[2] As such, it is not possible to fully understand CiU's lifespan without referring to the origins and particular lifespans of the two parties that compose it. These are summarised in table 4.1 below.

---

[2] On CiU, see the works of Barberà (2001), Lissot (2005); Barberà and Barrio (2006) and Barrio (2008).

nap new academic press

Table 4.1. *The lifespans of UDC and CDC (1932–36 and 1977), and CiU (1979 onwards)*

a) Regional level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1932			UDC			
1936	-[1]					
1977						CDC[2]
1980						CiU
2003			CiU			

Notes:
[1] UDC declared illegal by the Francoist regime.
[2] Provisional government of the Generalitat of Catalonia.

b) State level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1932			UDC			
1933		UDC				
1977			UDC	CDC		
1979				CiU		
1982			CiU			
1993				CiU		
2000			CiU			
2004				CiU		

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

4.2.1. The origins of CiU: the lifespans of CDC and UDC

UDC is a Catalan nationalist Christian Democratic party that was established on 7 November 1931, after the proclamation of the Second Spanish Republic and in a climate of strong secularist and anti-clerical sentiment.[3] The UDC was created without the sponsorship of the Catholic hierarchy and without a charismatic leader, although it achieved support from some intellectuals and elements of the scarce Catalan urban middle classes

---

[3] The most important studies of the UCD include Raguer (1976), Culla (2002), Balcells (1999) and Barberà (2000 and 2006).

nap new academic press

(Raguer 1976). The UDC's early progress in passing different thresholds was not linear, as it first passed the threshold of representation when, in 1932, a Member of Parliament (MP) from another Catalan party joined its ranks. Shortly afterwards, the UDC crossed the thresholds of declaration and authorisation by joining a coalition with the LligaRegionalista to participate in the 1932 Catalan election. On this occasion, the party obtained representation in its own right by electing a regional MP. However, UDC failed to retain its representation at the state level in the 1933 general election. After the Spanish civil war (1936–1939), the party was declared illegal, although it maintained moderate clandestine activity throughout the Francoist period.

With the death of General Franco in 1975 and subsequent efforts to establish a democratic regime in Spain, the UDC was legalised in March 1977 and thus crossed the thresholds of declaration and authorisation once again. In spite of efforts to agree an electoral pact with Adolfo Suárez's state-wide Unión del Centro Democrático (UCD), UDC ran in the first democratic general elections of 1977 in coalition with the much smaller Centre Català (CC) (Barberà 2000). The UDC regained state-level representation, although its one MP fell far short of its pre-election aspirations. This disappointing result provoked an internal crisis, with the majority of the party opting to form an alliance with the CDC, whilst a minority (including its only MP, Anton Cañellas) left to join the UCD. Since then, and as a partner within CiU, UDC has always had seats in both the Spanish and Catalan parliaments. From 1980 until 2003, it also had members in the Catalan government. When Spain entered the European Economic Community in 1987, UDC secured a Member of European Parliament (MEP) as part of CiU's electoral list, representation which it retained until the 2004 European elections. The UDC MEP chose to sit with the European People's Party (in contrast to CDC, as noted below).

For its part, CDC is a moderate Catalan nationalist party that was established on 17 November 1974 under the leadership of Jordi Pujol.[4] CDC was initially conceived as a political movement organised on the basis of indirect affiliation; this allowed the UDC and other social and political organisations to be part of it. However, with the process of democratic transition under way, CDC was transformed into a formal political party with direct membership, a circumstance that led the UDC to withdraw from the organisation at the beginning of 1976 (Marcet 1984).

CDC was legalised, and thus passed the thresholds of declaration and authorisation, in February 1977. It competed in the 1977 general election as part of a broader coalition, the Pacte Democràtic per Catalunya (PDC). The coalition obtained 8 seats, and played a key role in the subsequent pro-

---

[4] For more detailed accounts of the CDC, see Marcet (1984 and 2000) and Culla (2001).

cess of designing the new Spanish political system. One of CDC's representatives, Miquel Roca, was particularly influential in the elaboration of the Spanish Constitution, which incorporated Catalan demands for regional political autonomy. CDC also played a fundamental role in writing Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy, which established the basis for Catalan self-government (Marcet 1984). Given the influence wielded by the CDC during this constitutional process, it can thus be said that the party crossed the threshold of relevance at the state-level in 1977. After the 1977 election, Jordi Pujol was appointed a member of the provisional Generalitat government; thus the party passed the threshold of government for the first time at the regional level in this year.

Since CiU's first electoral participation in the 1979 general election, CDC has never been without parliamentary representation within either the Congress of Deputies or the Senate (Spain's lower and upper chambers). Moreover, in Catalonia, Jordi Pujol was invested President of the Generalitat in 1980, a position he held continuously until 2003. Like UDC, CDC gained access to the European Parliament in 1987, a seat that it has retained in European elections since then. Unlike the UCD, however, CDC has preferred to sit with the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party within the European Parliament.

4.2.2. From government to opposition to government

The birth of CiU was closely linked to the realignments that occurred in the sub-system of Catalan parties between the 1977 and 1979 general elections (Pitarch *et al*. 1980; Marcet 1984; Culla 1989; Barberà 2000). The restructuring began with the creation of the Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (PSC) in the mid 1970s, but ended up affecting the three main center-right parties (UDC, CDC and UCD). One of the key actors in that process was UDC, which, as noted above, decided to align itself with CDC to form CiU. The alliance was formally established on 19 September 1978, with both parties signing an agreement to cooperate in future electoral contests.

CiU crossed the thresholds of declaration and authorisation at the state-level when it was registered as an electoral coalition before the 1979 general election. In those elections, CiU experienced a slight decline in votes and seats in comparison with those obtained by the CDC and UDC coalitions in 1977. Despite this, the UCD's lack of a governing majority in the Congress gave CiU significant coalition potential, as its 8 seats guaranteed the former a stable government (see table 4.2). CiU was repeatedly offered the opportunity of joining the Spanish government, but the alliance chose instead to remain a party of opposition, preferring to give periodic support to the UDC's government. This decision reflected Pujol's concerns that crossing the threshold of government at the state-level could impact

negatively on CiU's electoral performance in the forthcoming autonomous elections (Reniu 2002).

In the 1979 local election, CiU expanded its representation within Catalonia considerably. CDC emerged as the party that was most uniformly implanted and had the largest number of mayors across the Catalan territory (Marcet 1984). The result of this election increased CiU's visibility and, despite being second to the PSC in terms of number of votes, it was the winning party in most towns and cities outside the main urban areas.

The first Catalan autonomous election was held in 1980, with CiU emerging as the largest Catalan party albeit without an absolute majority (see table 4.2). This victory can be explained as a result of two main factors. Firstly, the proporcionality of the electoral system increased because the number of seats for the regional elections was increased in each constituency. This, combined with the fact that CiU was much better established outside the industrial area of Barcelona in comparison to its rivals, played to the party's electoral advantage (Baras and Matas 1998b). Secondly, CiU benefitted from distinctive patterns of voter behavior in autonomous elections. In a trend referred to as dual voting, autonomist parties are preferred in autonomous elections, whilst state-wide parties are preferred in general elections (Montero and Font 1991; Pallarés and Font 1994; Pallarés 2000). CiU also benefited from differential abstention, whereby supporters of the PSC in general elections abstained in regional elections (Riba 1995). These trends in voter behaviour were confirmed in subsequent autonomous and general elections, although they became less pronounced from the mid-1990s onwards.

In the period that followed the 1980 autonomous election, there were new interactions between state and regional arenas. Whilst CiU offered occasional support to the UCD's minority government at the state-level (as noted above), UCD returned the favour by supporting the investiture of Pujol as President of the Catalan government (Reniu 2002). UCD's disappearance after the 1982 general election also favored CiU since many of the UCD's members in Catalonia joined the alliance. At the same time, the internal crisis suffered by the PSC, and the crisis and subsequent disintegration of the Catalan Communist party, the Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya (PSUC), meant that CiU faced little serious electoral competition. Furthermore, Pujol's autonomy-building efforts during this period, especially the mobilisation in defense of Catalonia against the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) government in Madrid from 1982 onwards, was also effective in attracting new electoral support (Barrio 2008). These factors contributed to the party's absolute majority in the 1984 autonomous election (Baras and Matas 1998a; Pallarés and Font 1994). This result was repeated in the 1988 and 1992 autonomous elections (Pallarés and Font 1994; Baras and Matas 1998a). For this reason, CiU was

nap new academic press

considered to be a hegemonic party in Catalan politics during the 1980s and 1990s (Pallarés and Font 1994).

It should be noted, however, that the aforementioned electoral domination has been confined to autonomous elections. In general elections, CiU has never been able to gain more votes than the PSC. This can be explained in large part by the trends for dual voting and differential abstention alluded to above. CiU's vote share has ranged from a low of 16.4% in 1979 to a high of 32.7% in 1993. Moreover, whilst in local elections, the alliance has been the party with the most mayors and town councilors elected by far, the PSC has remained the most voted party in Catalonia's major cities (Baras and Matas 1998a).

Nevertheless, at different times from the early 1980s onwards, CiU has been a highly relevant player at the state level. As mentioned above, CiU enjoyed considerable coalition potential from 1979 to 1982, although its relevance was curtailed when the PSOE governed with an overwhelming majority from 1982 to 1993. This period was marked by tense relations between the central and Catalan governments, as the former sought to harmonise the powers of Spain's autonomous regions, a policy opposed by CiU.[5]

Even from this position, however, CiU sought to shape the dynamics of Spanish politics. It did so by taking advantage of the disintegration of the UCD, and promoting the creation of a new state-wide centrist party, the Partido Reformista Democrático (PRD). The main leader of this new party was CiU's speaker in the Congress of Deputies, Miquel Roca. The PRD and CiU formed a coalition to contest the 1986 general election. However, the appearance of other Spanish state-wide centrist parties and the electoral growth of the right-wing Alianza Popular (AP) resulted in the PRD failing to win any parliamentary representation, and subsequently disappearing from the Spanish political arena (Marcet 2000).

In 1993, when PSOE lost its absolute majority, CiU was again invited to join the Spanish government. But, just as with the UCD in 1979, the offer was once again rejected by the alliance; instead, it provided legislative support (particularly with regard to budgetary issues) in exchange for concessions related to a range of autonomous policies (Aguilera de Prat 2001). This decision meant significant confrontations within CDC between Roca, who wanted to enter the government, and Pujol, who was committed to the policy of occasional support from the position of opposition party (Antich 1994).

---

[5] Spain's State of Autonomies originally anticipated an asymmetrical decentralisation of power to the regional level, with the so-called "historic communities" of Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia granted greater competencies than other autonomous communities. This was altered in the early 1980s as a result of an agreement between the two main state-wide parties, the UCD and the PSOE. CiU opposed the alternative symmetrical model of decentralisation pursued by these actors.

Table 4.2. *Government and parliamentary support in Catalonia and Spain (1993-2010)*

	1993-1994	1995	1996-1999	2000	2001-2002	2003	2004-2010	2010-
Catalan Government	CiU (M)	CiU (m)		CiU (m)		PSC-ERC-ICV (M)		CIU (m)
Main Parliamentary support		PP		PP				*
Spanish Government	PSOE (m)		PP (m)		PP (M)		PSOE (m)	
Main Parliamentary Support	CiU/PNV		CiU/PNV		CiU	(Several)	(Several)	PNV/CC

Source: Authors' own compilation.
Notes:
(M) Absolute majority government.
(m) Minority government.
* Undecided at the time of writing.

In 1996 the Partido Popular (PP) won the general elections without a clear majority. Again, the PP invited CiU to join the Spanish government, and on this occasion CiU signed a stable legislative agreement with the right-wing state-wide party (Aguilera de Prat 2001). Beyond the significance of the content of the agreement reached (for example, an increase in Autonomous Communities' share of tax revenues, the creation of a Catalan regional police and the abolition of military service), the pacts between CiU and PP were a guarantee of mutual support in both the state and regional arenas. This enabled CiU to continue governing in Catalonia even after losing its absolute majority in the 1995 autonomous election. This situation was maintained until 1999.

In the 1999 autonomous election, CiU retained its relative majority, although the PSC – under the new leadership of Pasqual Maragall – was able to surpass it for the first time in the number of votes. The result gave CiU the option of either forming a governing alliance with the left-wing Catalan nationalist party Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) or the Catalan branch of the PP. Whilst ERC wanted to join the Catalan government, the PP's demands were limited to diffuse parliamentary support in the Spanish parliament; CiU's favouring of the latter option led to a new *rapprochement* between these two political forces, at the same time as a distancing from ERC (Barberà and Barrio 2006).

In the 2000 general election, the PP obtained an absolute majority and CiU's support at the state-level was no longer essential. However, both par-

nap new academic press

ties maintained their collaboration,[6] which saw the PP continuing to support CiU's minority government in Catalonia. As part of this agreement, the PP asked CiU not to demand reform the Catalan Statute of Autonomy. However, the linkage between both parties would have negative electoral consequences for CiU. In voters' minds, the party became associated with the unpopular policies pursued by Aznar's government (such as the Iraq war). The appointment of a new leader (Artur Mas) and a new organisational structure (see below) were not enough to stave off electoral decline in 2003 autonomous election. CiU was once again surpassed in votes by the PSC and, after weeks of intense negotiations, the PSC established a coalition government with ERC and Iniciativa per Catalunya-Verds (ICV). Thus CiU was excluded from Catalan government for the first time in 23 years. After the 2004 general election, the PSOE minority government would also look to ERC, Izquierda Unida (IU) and other minor parties instead of CiU, for legislative support, thus undermining CiU's relevance in state-level politics.

A further electoral blow came in the 2004 European election. In an attempt to overcome the second-order effects associated with these type of contests, the existence of a single state-wide constituency and poll predictions of further electoral losses, the CiU formed an electoral coalition with the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV) and the Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG). This strategy was, however, unsuccessful. CiU polled its worst results in any election since 1980; moreover, the party's share of the Catalan vote was surpassed by the PP for the first time ever. This result translated into the loss of one MEP for CiU, with the UDC being left without any representation at the supranational level.

By the mid 2000s, therefore, CiU was a party in opposition at the regional and state levels, with reduced representation at the European level. Nevertheless, the party still played a crucial role in the reform of Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy in 2006. Although the process was initiated by the region's tripartite government, it was a pact between CiU and the PSOE in the Congress of Deputies that enabled the reformed Statute to gain final legislative approval. CiU thus regained its status as key interlocutor with the central government, and defender of Catalonia's interests in Madrid. Disagreement between ERC and the PSC on the scope of the reforms in the revised Statute[7] led to the former being ejected from the Catalan government, and new autonomous elections being called in 2006. However, a new governing pact between PSC, ERC and ICV meant CiU remained confined to the role of opposition party in the Generalitat. The

---

[6]   After the elections, the PP even asked CiU to join the government, although this offer was rejected.

[7]   In the 2006 referendum, ERC campaigned for a "no" vote on the basis that the new Statute did not go far enough in increasing Catalan autonomy.

2008 general election, and the new PSOE minority government that sought parliamentary support from other political forces, sustained the limited relevance of CiU at the state-level. In this election CiU obtained even worst results than in the 2004 European election.

It was only with the growing economic crisis from mid-2008 onwards that CiU regained its electoral appeal. The 2009 European election results were, for the first time ever, better than those in the preceding general election. A shift in the PSOE's economic policies also led it to seek out political support from more centrist parties such as the PNV and CiU. Moreover, growing disillusionment with Spanish and Catalan government responses to the crisis, disagreements between the three governing parties, and the radicalisation of many nationalist groups following the Spanish Constitutional Court's amendments of the reformed Statute of Autonomy in June 2010,[8] provided further conditions that facilitated the CiU's electoral victory at the November 2010 autonomous election. The party's vote-share increased from 31.5% in 2006 to 38.5% (see table 4.3), and its 62 seats were sufficient for the party to return to government office, albeit as a minority government.

4.3. Change in party organisation

As already mentioned, CDC and UDC participated in the first general elections of 1977 in different coalitions with unequal success. The results of those elections, and the subsequent realignment of the Catalan party sub-system, provided the context for the formation of CiU (Pitarch *et al.* 1980; Baras and Matas 1998b). The agreement between CDC and UDC was mutually beneficial: for CDC it constituted another step towards the Catalan government; for UDC, it meant a guarantee of survival. In such circumstances, and in spite of the enormous electoral inequality between both formations (with CDC being by far the dominant electoral force based on the performance of both actors at the 1977 general election), the alliance could prove to be stable. UDC did not pose a threat to CDC's stability; the electoral threat posed by CDC to UDC, as well as the danger of the latter's disappearance, guaranteed the cohesion and unity of UDC's leadership and, therefore, its continued adherence to the alliance.

Several mechanisms were put in place to regulate and co-ordinate the relationship between both parties on several levels. These included monthly joint meetings of both executive committees, joint local coordination committees, and the creation of a joint liaison committee in charge of

---

8   The Constitutional Court declared certain judicial, financial and linguistic provisions contained in the revised Catalan Statute of Autonomy to be unconstitutional, and these were thus not enacted.

nap new academic press

Astrid Barrio and Oscar Barberà

Table 4.3 *The electoral performance of the CiU and main the Catalan political parties, 1977–2010 (% of votes and, for CiU, number of seats)*

Year	Type	CiU	PSC	AP/PP	UCD	PSUC/ICV	ERC
1977	G	15.4 (6)[1] 5.4 (2)[2]	28.8	3.6	17.1	18.5	4.5
1979	G	16.4 (8)	29.7	3.7	19.4	17.4	4.2
1980	C	27.8 (43)	22.3	-	10.6	18.7	8.9
1982	G	22.5 (12)	45.8	14.7	4.0	4.6	4.0
1984	C	46.8 (72)	30.0	7.7	-	5.6	4.4
1986	G	32.0 (18)	40.1	11.4	-	3.9	2.7
1987	E	27.8 (3)	36.8	11.2	-	5.4	3.7
1988	C	45.7 (69)	29.6	5.3	-	7.7	4.2
1989	E	27.5 (2)	36.4	8.6	-	5.5	3.3
1989	G	32.7 (18)	35.6	10.6	-	7.3	2.7
1992	C	46.2 (70)	27.4	5.9	-	6.5	7.9
1993	G	31.8 (17)	34.9	17.0	-	7.5	5.1
1994	E	31.5 (3)	28.2	18.5	-	11.1	5.5
1995	C	41.0 (60)	24.9	13.1	-	9.7	9.5
1996	G	29.6 (16)	39.4	18.0	-	7.6	4.2
1999	E	29.3 (3)	34.6	16.9	-	5.4	6.1
1999	C	37.7 (56)	37.9	9.5	-	2.5	8.7
2000	G	28.8 (15)	34.1	22.8	-	3.5	5.6
2003	C	30.9 (46)	31.2	11.9	-	7.3	16.4
2004	E	17.4 (2)	42.9	17.8	-	7.2	11.8
2004	G	20.8 (10)	39.5	15.6	-	5.8	15.9
2006	C	31.5 (48)	26.8	10.7	-	9.5	14.0
2008	G	20.9 (10)	46.1	16.7	-	5.0	8.0
2009	E	22.4 (2)	36.0	18.0	-	6.1	9.2
2010	C	38.5 (62)	18.3	12.3		7.4	7.0

Key: E: European elections; G: General elections (*lower chamber*); C: Catalan elections
Source: Ministerio del Interior (Gobierno de España); Parlament de Catalunya.

Notes:
[1]   CDC within the PDC coalition
[2]   UCD in coalition with CC

supervising CDC's and UDC's local committees. However, these mechanisms frequently did not work, and did not provide a single organisational structure for the alliance. The agreement also established guidelines for the selection of candidates for CiU electoral lists. Based on the 1977 electoral results, 75% of the slots corresponded to CDC and 25% to UDC. However, the text did not establish the placement order of candidates, and did not contain any mechanisms to solve related conflicts. Tensions arising from these ambiguities worsened over time favored the centralisation of decision-making authority in the hands of the leadership of the participating parties (Barberà 2001; Barberà and Barrio 2006).

Upon signing the 1978 agreement, the trend to centralise power was already in evidence. This was first noted with the candidate selection process for the 1979 local election where CDC and UDC central offices had a determining role in the formation of the party's lists. With CiU securing a large number of local representatives, the inexistence of a common CiU structure meant that these local groups constituted the only working institutions of the alliance. However, CiU's victory in the 1980 autonomous election and its entry into government led to further changes in power relations within each party (see table 4.4). In the case of CDC, the party in public office, and members of the Catalan government in particular, acquired a preponderant weight over the central office; this was perhaps unsurprising given that leading members of the party's central organs had taken up government posts (Barberà 2001; Barberà and Barrio 2006). With regard to UDC, the party on the ground and the party central office succeeded in retaining their autonomy, although there were conflicts with the representatives in public office during the early 1980s (Culla 2001 and 2002; Barberà 2006). The control of a new and growing public administration also led CDC and UDC to develop a strong trend of party patronage that was enhanced with successive absolute majorities (Molas 1992; Barberà 2001; Barberà and Barrio 2006; Barrio 2006).

Jordi Pujol's strong leadership, and the fact that his leadership was exercised from the Presidency of the Generalitat, also favored the presidentialisation of CiU. From his institutional position, Pujol became the unquestionable leader of CDC and CiU. Apart from his indisputable personal charisma, his central position within the Catalan political system allowed him to consolidate his position above inter-party disputes, the alliance, and even the government. A similar process was experienced within UDC, beginning with the creation of the post of "Chair" of the party executive in 1980 and, from 1987, with the concentration of powers in the hands of the party leader, Josep Duran (Culla 2001 and 2002; Barberà 2006).

The difference in the relative weight of CDC and UDC, as well as Pujol's dominant leadership, translated into the hegemony of CDC within

CiU. This inequality has been a constant source of concern for the UDC. Even though the survival of UDC (seriously threatened in 1978) was ensured within CiU, significant internal differences existed with regard to the UDC-CDC balance of power. During the early 1980s, tensions increased between those committed to participation within CiU and within the Catalan government, and those concerned to maintain the autonomy of UDC. CDC took advantage of these tensions to reinforce its dominant position within the alliance. The crisis lasted until 1987, when an internal pact led to Duran assuming UDC's leadership. He oversaw a consolidation of the UDC and sought to re-assert the party's position within CiU; his demands included greater participation in the alliance's decision-making and the restructuring of its organisation (Culla 2001 and 2002; Barberà 2006). For example, pressure from UDC saw the liaison committee begin to meet from 1988 onwards, having been inoperative since its creation in 1979 (Barberà 2001; Barberà and Barrio 2006).

The final characteristic of the organisational evolution of CiU during the 1980s was its stability, not least due to Pujol's dominant leadership and successive electoral victories. The most serious internal problems during this period were caused when preparing electoral lists, and the few conflicts that existed were essentially a reflection of the internal problems of each party (especially UDC). Overall, however, the existence of the alliance was never seriously challenged (Matas 2000).

In contrast, between 1990 and 2001, CiU's relevance at the state level and the replacement of Pujol as CiU's leader, generated considerable conflict within CiU. This affected the relationship between CDC and UDC as well as the internal distribution of power within each party. One early source of tension emerged within CDC, when Miquel Roca (the CDC's second in command) challenged Pujol in an attempt to position himself as the next party leader. He did this by advocating CiU's entry into the Spanish government and openly criticising the UDC's growth strategy. The crisis ended with Pujol's decision not to join the Spanish government, and his imposition of his own criteria for selecting his successor. Pujol thus remained the indisputable leader of CDC and CiU (Antich 1994), whilst Roca retired from political life a few years later. The crisis had the side-effect of reinforcing UDC's position within CiU; Duran's support for Pujol against Roca allowed him to have a greater say in CiU's decision making, thus consolidating UDC's position within the alliance (Barberà 2006).

CiU's electoral stagnation during the mid-1990s – and the prospect of failing to keep hold of government office – gave rise to a different set of internal challenges. One particularly difficult issue was Pujol's replacement as leader of CiU. Following the PSC's substantial electoral advance in the 1999 autonomous election (see table 4.3 above) under the leadership of the popular ex-Mayor of Barcelona, Pasqual Maragall, the issue of

nap new academic press

Pujol's succession became more urgent. At the same time, a new generation assumed control – with Pujol's approval – of CDC and key posts in the Catalan government (Álvaro 2003). Pujol's maneuvering of potential replacements into key positions aroused tensions with UDC's leader, Duran, who also aspired to assume control of CiU. These came to the fore on the occasion of finalising electoral lists for the 1999 autonomous election, when the CDC's Artur Mas was situated in second place behind Pujol.

Duran's prominent role in the 1999 electoral campaign and the narrow margin by which CiU kept hold of government office, forced the formation of a minority government in which Mas and Duran were given equal status. However, a political scandal involving irregularities in the UDC's finances seriously eroded Duran's leadership prospects. Early in 2001, Pujol finally appointed Mas as his successor. The decision prompted a deep internal crisis within CiU, eventually leading to the fundamental transformation of the alliance into a "federation of parties" in 2001 (Barberà and Barrio 2006; Barrio 2008).

This transformation was accompanied, for the first time, by the creation of a single party organisation, composed of bodies such as a National Executive and National Council. Pujol remained CiU's President, with Duran appointed Secretary-General; Duran would also head CiU's list in the 2004 general election, with Mas the candidate for President of the Catalan government in 2003 (Barberà and Barrio 2006). The federation was designed according to the classical mass party model with a dual territorial-sectorial structure. However, mechanisms for direct affiliation to CiU were not created, with the new federation thus being something in between an alliance and an indirect party (Barrio 2006). There were also changes in the way voting lists were prepared. These were to be composed of 60% of CDC candidates, 20% of UDC candidates and 20% of members designated by the federation (approved by the two parties). The new agreement also specified the order in which candidates should be placed on lists.[9] Moreover, the lists had to be approved by the National Executive and ratified by CiU's National Council.

Passing back over the threshold of regional government in 2003, and the threshold of relevance at the state-level in 2004, did not stall or change the direction of the process of federalisation. On the contrary, the process was consolidated, with an agreement at the CiU's annual conference in 2004 to perfect the new organisational design.Although the initial objective was to achieve a greater level of integration between the

---

[9]   Thus if CDC headed the list, the second position corresponded to UDC, the following two to CDC and the fifth to the federation and so on; if UDC headed the list, the three following positions corresponded to CDC, and the fifth to the federation.

nap new academic press

participating parties, the conference simply consolidated and improved the 2001 scheme. Artur Mas's designation as President and Pujol's appointment as Honorary President were among the most notable changes approved. The National Conference was also converted into a convention (thus displacing the National Council as the body with ultimate decision-making authority). UDC's opposition to direct affiliation saw the federation create the position of 'CiU supporter', lacking the rights of a full UDC/CDC member. This change consolidated CiU as an organisation approximating an indirect party within which two completely sovereign parties continued to coexist.

Whilst leaving government did not seriously challenge the process of organisational transformation, it did have a major impact on the distribution of power within UDC, CDC and the CiU. After twenty years of government office, hundreds of party members had enjoyed positions in the public administration. These were lost after 2003. The CiU as a party in public office was reduced to those that made up the party's parliamentary group and their supporting staff. This had significant implications for CiU's capacity to develop policy and prepare for electoral competition. These tasks had to be assumed by the parties' central staff and the foundations and think tanks linked to them.

It is also important to stress the multi-level nature of the erosion of CiU's institutional power. The loss of government status at the regional level also affected the alliance's capacity to campaign and mobilise electoral support in elections to institutions at other territorial levels. This was very obvious in less important elections such as the European elections in 2004 or the municipal elections of 2007. In the former, for example, CiU obtained its worst electoral results since 1979; CiU's reduced organisational capacity contributed in part to this result. Moreover, the lack of control over government resources also undermined the important patronage relationships that assisted the CiU leadership keep hold of some of its municipal power. This has translated into a reduction of some seven hundred town councilors between 1999 and 2007, electoral defeat in some important cities, and the loss of the Presidency of two Provincial Deputations.[10]

---

[10] Provincial deputations are the highest local governing body in each one of the Spanish provinces.

Table 4.4. *Pressures for organisational change as a result of crossing thresholds*

Threshold	Local level	Regonal level	State level	European level
V		**Strong** (1980) - The party to the Catalan admini-stration. - Centralisation of power. - President Pujol's leadership over CDC and UDC. - Hegemony of CDC, instability of UDC. - Stability of the alliance. **Strong** (mid 1990–2003) - Electoral decline and prospect of losing government status prompts organisational transformation into a federation.		
IV-B				
IV-A			**Strong** (1993) - CDC crisis, reinforcement of UDC.	
III	**Medium** (1979) - Significant increase in the number of members occupying - public office. Shift of power from the party on the ground to the party in public office.	**Medium** (2003) - Losing government status = consolida-tion of federation.		
II				
I				

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

nap new academic press

4.4. Changes in party goals

CiU's goals have been adapted as a result of crossing different thresholds, with different goals also being pursued at different territorial levels. With the end of the Franco regime, the main goals of CDC and UDC were the creation of a democratic regime in Spain and the re-establishment of the autonomous Catalan institutions quashed in 1939. These were policy goals that were shared with other Catalan parties at the time; indeed, all democratic forces opposing the dictatorship agreed that establishing a new democracy also meant reforming the unitary state put in place by the regime. The main Catalan party leaders also agreed that discussions on the decentralisation of political authority should not take place until after the first general elections, so that they could be included in the broader process of drawing up a new constitutional framework for the Spanish state. What differentiated the goals of CDC and UDC from those espoused by other parties, like the PSC and the PSUC, was their ideas about the model of decentralisation that should be put in place. The CDC and UDC emphasised autonomy and devolution as guiding principles, rather than federalism.

The results of the first democratic elections held in 1977 demonstrated clearly that autonomist parties would play a prominent role within the new Spanish party system, proving the endurance of the centre-periphery cleavage as a defining feature of Spanish politics. Thus autonomist parties, including the CDC as mentioned above, played a fundamental role in the constitutional debate that took place at the end of the 1970s. Indeed, the CDC's Miquel Roca is considered as one of the 'fathers' of the Spanish Constitution. Although federalism was quickly abandoned as a possible model for the territorial organisation of the state, no clear alternative was adopted. Instead, the Constitution provided a starting point for creating a State of Autonomies without specifying the endpoint of the devolution process, or the degree of autonomy that should be granted to each autonomous community. Nevertheless, this agreement satisfied the CiU's core territorial ambitions, and the party supported the ratification of the Constitution.

This position contributed to undermining the image of CiU as an anti-system party, and enabled it to establish itself as a key political actor from 1979 onwards. The moderation of the party's territorial demands, as well as its left-right positioning, made it a credible coalition partner in the eyes of the UCD after the 1979 general elections. Faced with the offer of entering a minority UCD government, CiU had to confront the potential trade-off between office and votes for the first time. As noted above, whilst Roca endorsed participation in a governing coalition with Suárez, Pujol feared the electoral risks associated with doing so, which in turn could jeopordise the party's office-seeking goal at the regional level. Government office at

the regional level was thus deemed to be more important (Matas 1999; Reniu 2002).

A different trade-off between votes (and leadership) at the local level and votes (and leadership) at the regional level emerged during the 1979 local election. This time, the dilemma concerned the nomination of a CiU candidate for the post of Mayor of Barcelona. Whilst many party leaders (Roca amongst them) stood for the nomination, Pujol eventually selected a 'loser' candidate out of fear that strong leadership in Barcelona could undermine his own authority as party leader and challenge him for this position in the event of a defeat in the 1980 autonomous election). These examples show very clearly the multi-level nature of trade-offs between different party goals, an inevitable consequence of being active in several political arenas simultaneously.

Once in regional government, CiU's goal became the retention of office as a means of implementing its policy agenda, whilst at the same time seeking to influence policy-making at the state-level through its support to the UCD minority government. As noted above, the UCD's rapid demise, and the CiU's success in capturing the party's vote, enabled it to consolidate its governing position at the regional level and proceed with the goal of 'building the Catalan nation' through the institutions of the Generalitat. The absolute majority of the PSOE in the 1982 election, however, changed the context within which CiU sought to exercise policy influence at the state-level. In response, CiU adopted a different strategy: outright and vocal opposition to the PSOE's policies with regard to the development of the State of Autonomies. The latter's desire to harmonise the competencies of Spain's Autonomous Communities was portrayed by Pujol and CiU as an attempt to undermine and reduce Catalan autonomy. The issue became a symbol of Catalonia's fight against Madrid's desire to centralise political authority. This strategy contributed to bolstering CiU's electoral performance in subsequent autonomous elections, enabling it to govern with absolute majorities until the mid 1990s.

An alternative strategy in pursuit of its territorial goal, during the 1980s, was the promotion of PRD as a centre-right state-wide party. The PRD would act as the CiU's natural ally at the state-level (although it would not be disadvantaged by being tied exclusively to territorial autonomist interests) and would challenge the PSOE's dominant position within Spanish politics. However, the appearance of a new central-right party, Centro Democrático y Social (CDS) led by former President Suárez, and the difficulties deriving from the electoral law (with a threshold of 3% for representation) saw the so-called 'Roca operation' fail (Marcet 2000).[11]

---

[11] The party did not win any seats in the districts in which it ran despite the fact that CiU experienced a substantial increase in votes in Catalonia.

Things changed between 1993 and 2000. As noted above, PSOE and PP minority governments during this period made the CiU an important actor with substantial bargaining power at the state level. The party considered legislative bargaining, rather than government incumbency, to be the most effective way of achieving its territorial goals. For this reason, the party has been categorised as a "party of pressure" (Molas 1977) or a party espousing a "tribune strategy" (Seiler 1982). CiU justified its decision by arguing that the Spanish public would not understand the fact of being part of a government whilst simultaneously demanding more competencies, more money and more symbolic recognition for Catalonia. There is evidence, for example, that many Spanish voters perceive CiU (and other autonomist parties) as using their positions of influence in state politics exclusively to achieve preferential treatment for their specific autonomous community; this gives these parties a negative image, and makes Spanish voters disinclined to support them (Capo 2000).

There were also tactical reasons for CiU's decision not to enter government at the state-level. As suggested previously, this would have disappointed many of CiU's most nationalist voters. For this reason, the trade-off between being in office at the state level and winning votes and government office at the regional level has always been resolved in favour of the latter. A further consideration related to Pujol's desire to protect his position as party President. Just as Pujol took care to avoid a potential challenge from a local-level candidate in 1979, having a visible and powerful CiU Minister at the state-level could have posed a threat to his leadership authority. Such a challenge had already been posed by Roca in the early 1990s.

Having lost its absolute governing majority at the regional level for a second time in 1999, CiU was faced with the choice of sharing office with ERC (and then, radicalising it nationalist politics by accepting the latter's demands for reform to the Catalan Statute of Autonomy) or being alone in power but committing itself to moderate policies as a basis for receiving parliamentary support from the PP. The latter option was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, CiU expected a minority PP government to be elected in the 2000 general election, thus providing the party with a greater margin of manoeuvre at the regional level and scope to bargain for autonomy concessions at the state-level. Complex multi-level games, therefore, formed part of the CiU's strategy for meeting its territorial goals. Secondly, being alone in government gave Pujol greater autonomy over the choice of his successor; this, in turn, would be crucial to the future electoral and office success of the party. Although the first of these expectations did not materialise (see above), Pujol's succession was achieved ahead of the 2003 autonomous election.

As a party of opposition from 2003 to 2010, CiU's primary goal became that of regaining government status. The strategy adopted to achieve this

involved a radicalisation of its territorial demands. The fact that CiU was not in a position of relevance at the state-level facilitated this re-positioning. During negotiations to reform the Catalan Statute of Autonomy, for example, the party pushed for changes to taxation laws, the mode of cooperation with central government and the structure of the judiciary in Catalonia. Such proposals implied a revision of the Spanish Constitution. CiU's demands challenged the more moderate ambitions of the PSC, and provoked serious public disagreements between the parties of the Catalan government, as well as between the Catalan and Spanish governments. During the passage of the reformed Statute through the Congress of Deputies, however, CiU showed itself willing to be flexible in its territorial stance. The party's ability to compromise with the PSOE on the Statute's content was crucial in securing legislative approval within the Chamber. The move enabled Mas (CiU's new leader) to claim that his party had 'saved' the Statute, whilst giving his party credibility in the eyes of PSOE as a reliable ally. The strategy also demonstrated that recuperating electoral support and government incumbency was ultimately more important than remaining loyal to core territorial goals. In the event, this strategy only partly paid off; although CiU won the majority of seats and votes in the 2006 autonomous election, this was insufficient to block the formation of a second tripartite government (composed of PSC, ERC and ICV).

Ahead of the 2010 autonomous election, CiU further shifted its discourse, placing greater emphasis on economic issues that territorial reform. In this respect, the CiU's response to the Spanish Constitutional Court's decision to amend the reformed Catalan Statute of Autonomy has been very moderate. Instead of adopting a more radical position (such as demanding a further referendum on increasing Catalan autonomy) the party focused instead on demanding a new financial settlement for Catalonia (along the lines of that agreed for the Basque Country). This demand was presented as part of a broader agenda for delivering economic growth, thus appealing to voters disillusioned with the economic policies of the tripartite government.

4.5. CiU's policy impact

During the 1980s and the early 1990s, CiU focused on building up the institutions of Catalan self-government. The first step of this nation-building process was the recruitment (through an extensive use of patronage) of new personnel for the Catalan administration. This was complemented with the development of a comprehensive body of Catalan legislation. Some of this focused on the use of Catalan language (the use of which had been prohibited by the Franco regime) and Catalan civil rights. Pujol's administration also oversaw the creation of a Catalan television channel (TV3) during the

nap new academic press

early 1980s and a Catalan police force (known as the Mossos d'Esquadra) during the early 1990s. More difficult to assess, but undoubtedly important, is the role that CiU's successive governments played in the rapid economic and social development of Catalonia during these two decades.

CiU was also successful in promoting a symbolic image of Catalonia as a key political actor in Spanish politics. Pujol in particular articulated the idea that the Catalan institutions and its people were different from the rest of Spain, and thus deserved special and differentiated treatment. During the 1990s, CiU's coalition potential in the eyes of different state-wide parties contributed to the general impression that Pujol, in his position as Catalan President, was in a privileged position to exert greater influence over Spain's problems than many other autonomous communities (Aguilera de Prat 2002). As a result, although many Catalan voters disliked Pujol's policy choices during the 1990s, they nevertheless took for granted that CiU had forged a key role for Catalonia in Spanish politics, and that Pujol was a key interlocutor in defending Catalan interests in this arena. This symbolism was important in consolidating CiU's electoral and political position in Catalan politics. However, when this coalition potential disappeared in the early 2000s, it was also Pujol and the CiU who were blamed for the loss of Catalan influence in state-wide politics.

Nevertheless, and as has been argued throughout this chapter, it is difficult to deny the success of CiU in placing the centre-periphery issue high on the agenda of Spanish politics. This feat cannot be attributed exclusively to CiU, but undoubtedly the alliance has played a dominant role in this respect. The ability of CiU to push for enhanced autonomy rights for Catalonia in exchange for its support for different minority governments was a key mechanism through which this was achieved, as noted above. Moreover, CiU's policy impact at the state-level has not been confined to the territorial dimension. For example, one of CiU's most important successes in the 1990s was the abolition of the mandatory military service. It is also arguable that CiU played a role in ensuring the modernisation of the Spanish economy; the alliance has long defended reforms to encourage and protect small entrepreneurs and the self-employed.

CiU's extensive policy impact as summarised above has not, however, been cost-free. On the one hand, the evolution of Catalan autonomy since the transition to democracy has provided a reference point for the development of autonomous competencies elsewhere in Spain. From the mid 1980s onwards, central government efforts to harmonise the decentralisation of competencies across all autonomous communities constituted an obstacle to Catalonia's desire for enhanced autonomy. Every concession granted to the latter was, sooner or later, demanded by (and granted to) all other regions. The result was that, by the end of the 1990s, almost all the Spanish autonomous communities had similar institutional powers (Aja 2003).

Since then, maintaining Catalan distinctiveness has been extremely difficult. This has been mainly due to the mechanisms of multilateral cooperation amongst autonomous communities established by the central government. For example, any reforms to the system of autonomous community financing must be approved by all the actors concerned. CiU's efforts to secure policy differentiation for Catalonia have thus been largely frustrated since the 1990s. The party's support for statute reform from 2003 to 2006 was the latest attempt to secure additional autonomy for the autonomous community. However, the most ambitious provisions that envisaged distinctive forms of co-operation between Catalonia, the Spanish government and other autonomous communities were declared unconstitutional.

On the other hand, multi-level alliances with state-wide parties of the left and the right have also been costly. For example, many Catalan voters objected to the CiU's co-operation with these actors; this was one of the causes of the decline in CiU's electoral performance from the mid-1990s onwards. Thus whilst the CiU is likely to remain an important actor at the state-level in future, the risks associated with cooperation with state-wide parties may well lead the party to hold back from working too closely with either the PSOE or PP.

4.6. Conclusion

In many respects, CiU can be considered a highly successful autonomist party. As an electoral alliance first established in 1978 in the early stages of Spain's transition to democracy, CiU rapidly passed the thresholds of declaration, authorisation and representation at both the Catalan and Spanish levels. The CiU also established itself as the party of Catalan government, retaining this position for 23 years. From this position of power, the party proved highly adept at building the Catalan nation through autonomous policy-making. CiU was also able to give visibility to Catalan autonomist demands at the state-level, not least through its multi-level alliances with state-wide parties of the left and the right. In this respect, it is arguable that CiU has been a highly pragmatic and opportunistic political actor, taking full advantage of political opportunities to advance Catalan autonomy as they have arisen. This political opportunism was most recently displayed by CiU's new President, Artur Mas, in his negotiations with the PSOE government to secure the parliamentary passage of the new Catalan Statute of Autonomy. Even when out of regional government, therefore, CiU remained a key actor in Catalan and Spanish politics.

The organisational consequences of this lifespan have been the consolidation and eventual transformation of CiU into a federation of parties. This process was not without its own challenges; a strong trend towards the centralisation and presidentialisation of political authority provoked tensi-

nap new academic press

ons both within the two parties forming the alliance, as well as between them. However, these tensions never seriously threatened CiU's integrity. In this respect, CiU'sorganisational adaptation to the challenges of representation and governing can also be considered a success story.

However, this case study also demonstrates that even the most successful of autonomist parties cannot avoid many of the difficulties associated with pursuing a nationalist project in a complex multi-level political context. For example, the shift in political authority to the party in public office often associated with passing the threshold of regional governance was particularly pronounced in CiU's case, given the speed with which it achieved this goal and the length of its period in office. Such organisational challenges have been especially complex in this case, given CiU's nature as an alliance between two separate parties. Moreover, CiU has at different times been faced with many of the trade-offs faced by political parties balancing the different goals of vote-maximisation, office incumbency and policy influence. Whilst CiU succeeded in negotiating some of these trade-offs successfully – for example, by refusing on all occasions to enter the Spanish government because of the potential effect on its electoral standing – at other times this has been more difficult. CiU's strategy of pursuing its moderate nationalist goals through the Catalan government and through state-level alliances paid electoral dividend until the mid 1990s. However, this ceased to be the case, with a trend of steady electoral decline resulting in the loss of government office in 2003. The transition from power to opposition presented new challenges, not least that of re-connecting with its electorate as a prerequisite for returning to regional government. This was achieved in November 2010. However, as a minority government, the party's ability to deliver on its electoral promises will depend on its ability to forge new alliances with its autonomist and state-wide competitors. As has been argued above, such alliances carry their own risks to CiU's political and electoral standing.

References

Aguilera de Prat, Cesáreo R. (2001) 'Convergència i Unió ante los pactos de gobernabilidad de 1993 y 1996', *Sistema*, nº 165, 9–43.

Aguilera de Prat, Cesáreo R. (2002) *Partidos y estrategias nacionalistas en Cataluña, Escocia y Flandes*. Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch.

Álvaro, Francesc-Marc (2003) *Ara sí que toca! Jordi Pujol, el pujolisme i els successors.* Barcelona: Edicions 62.

Antich, José (1994) *El Virrey*. Barcelona: Planeta.

nap new academic press

Aja, Eliseo (2003) *El Estado autonómico. Federalismo y hechos diferenciales.* Madrid: Alianza editorial.

Balcells, Albert (1999) *Miquel Coll i Alentorn. Historiografia i democràcia.* Barcelona: Proa.

Baras, Monserrat and Jordi Matas (1998a) 'El sistema de partits a Catalunya', in: Miguel Caminal and Jordi Matas (eds.), *El sistema polític de Catalunya.* Barcelona: Tecnos, pp. 161-190.

Baras, Miquel and Jordi Matas (1998b) 'El sistema electoral i les eleccions a Catalunya', in: Miquel Caminal and Jordi Matas (eds.), *El sistema polític de Catalunya.* Barcelona: Tecnos, pp. 191–229.

Barberà, Oscar (2000) *Unió Democràtica de Catalunya (1976–1978). CiU – El pacte amb Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya.* Barcelona: Editorial Mediterrània.

Barberà, Oscar (2001) 'La coalició CiU', in: Joan B. Culla (ed.), *El pal de paller. Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya (1974-2000).* Barcelona: Pòrtic, pp. 285–320.

Barberà, Oscar (2006) *Partits en aliances polítiques: Rutes del canvi organitzatiu. El cas d'Unió Democràtica de Catalunya (1978–2001).* Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of Political Science and Public Law, Bellaterra: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

Barberà, Oscar and Astrid Barrio (2006) 'Convergencia i Unió: From Stabilty to Decline?', in: Lieven De Winter, Marga Gómez-Reino and Peter Lynch (eds.), *Autonomist Parties in Europe: Identity Politics and the Revival of the Territorial Cleavage – Vol. I.* Barcelona: ICPS, pp. 101–142.

Barrio, Astrid (2006) 'La trajectòria de CiU: de coalició electoral a partit indirecte?', *Diàlegs*, 9: 32–33, pp. 67–85.

Barrio, Astrid (2008): *Les aliances entre partits. El cas de CiU (1978–2004).* Unpublished PhD Thesis. Department of Political Science and Public Law. Bellaterra: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

Capo, Jordi (2000) 'El bucle de la gobernabilidad: opinión pública y pactos en las elecciones de 1996', in: Jordi Matas (ed.), *Coaliciones políticas y gobernabilidad.* Barcelona: ICPS, pp. 241–266.

Culla, Joan B. (1989) 'L'evolució de l'espai de centre a Catalunya 1976-1982', *Working Papers ICPS*, n. 4.

Culla, Joan B. (ed.) (2001) *El pal de paller. Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya (1974–2000).* Barcelona: Pòrtic.

Culla, Joan B. (2002) *Unió Democràtica de Catalunya: el llarg camí (1931–2001).* Barcelona: Unió Democràtica de Catalunya.

Lissot, Pierre (2005) 'Rôle et statut de Convergència i Unió en Catalogne et en Spagne', in: Pascal Delwit (ed.), *Les partis regionalistes en Europe. Des acteurs en développement?.* Bruxelles: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, pp. 179–200.

Marcet, Joan (1984) *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya. El partido y el movimiento político.* Barcelona: Edicions 62.

Marcet, Joan (2000) 'Partido Reformista Democrático', in: Isidre Molas (ed.), *Diccionari dels partits polítics a Catalunya. Segle XX.* Barcelona: Enciclopèdia Catalana, pp. 209–210.

Matas, Jordi (1999) 'Majories, oposición i coalicions', *Working Papers ICPS*, n. 166.

Matas, Jordi (2000) 'Los gobiernos de coalición en Catalunya', in: Jordi Matas (ed.), *Coaliciones políticas y gobernabilidad.* Barcelona: ICPS, pp. 87–126.

Molas, Isidre (1977) 'Los partidos de ámbito no estatal y los sistemas de partidos', Pedro De Vega (ed.), *Teoría y práctica de los partidos políticos.* Barcelona: Edicusa**,** pp. 183–192.

Molas, Isidre (1992) 'Electores, simpatizantes y partidos politicos. El caso de Catalunya', *Revista del Centro de Estudios Constitucionales*, 17, pp. 145–179.

new academic press

Montero, José Ramón and Joan Font (1991) 'El voto dual en Cataluña: lealtad y transferencia de votos en las elecciones autonómicas', *Revista de Estudios Políticos* 73, pp. 7–34.

Pallarés, Francesc (2000) *Eleccions i comportament electoral a Catalunya 1989–1999.* Barcelona: Fundació Bofill/Editorial Mediterrània.

Pallarés, Francesc and Joan Font (1994) 'Las elecciones autonómicas en Cataluña (1980–1992)', in: Pilar Del Castillo (ed.), *Comportamiento político y electoral.* Madrid: CIS, pp. 221–273.

Pitarch, Ismael, Joan Botella, Jordi Capo and Joan Marcet (1980) *Partits i parlamentaris en la Catalunya d'avui. 1977–1979.* Barcelona: Edicions 62.

Raguer, Hilario (1976) *La Unió Democràtica de Catalunya i el seu temps.* Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat.

Reniu, Josep M. (2002) *La formación de los gobiernos minoritarios en España 1977-1996.* Madrid: CIS-Siglo XXI.

Riba, Clara (1995) *Vot dual i abstenció diferencial. Tres aproximacions a l'estudi del comportament electoral de Catalunya (1982–1993).* Unpublished PhD Thesis. Department of Political Science and Public Law, Bellaterra: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

Seiler, Daniel-Louis (1982) *Les partis autonomistes.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

nap new academic press

Santiago Pérez-Nievas

The Partido Nacionalista Vasco

5.1. Introduction

The Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV) stands out in the comparative analysis of autonomist parties for its longevity. Indeed, the PNV, founded in 1895, is the second oldest party in contemporary Spanish politics. Since its foundation, the party has been ambiguous about its ultimate political goals. The dilemma between adopting a radical stance in favour of independence, and pursuing a more pragmatic strategy aimed at winning far-reaching autonomy within the Spanish State, has divided successive generations of party leaders and followers. This chapter examines the ways in which the PNV has attempted to resolve this dilemma at different times during its lifetime.

To make sense of such a long party history, the chapter begins by summarising the PNV's evolution from its creation until the end of the Francoist dictatorship. The aim is to analyse how tensions between different groups and goals within the party led to a factional type of party organisation from the outset. This was also the party format the PNV readopted in the 1970s after the re-establishment of democracy. The chapter then turns to summarise the lifespan of the PNV for the period 1977–2010. The consequences of crossing successive thresholds on the internal organisational life of the PNV are then examined, as are the implications for the party's pursuit of different goals. The chapter concludes by evaluating the policy impact of the PNV.

5.2. The lifespan, organisation and goals of the PNV (1895–1977)

The Basque Country has a long tradition of territorial autonomy. Until the early nineteenth century, the three Basque Provinces (Álava, Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa), together with Navarra, enjoyed a pre-modern form of self-government known as the *fueros vascos*. The abolition of this regime in the 1870s gave birth to a regional political movement that demanded the restoration of this system of *fuerismo*. Although these demands were not articulated on behalf of a clearly defined and unified Basque nation, this movement would be the precursor to the creation of the PNV in 1895 by Sabino Arana, a charismatic leader whose shadow looms large within the party to this very day.

The PNV initially only competed in provincial and local elections in the four provinces considered to constitute the Basque Homeland (see above). In 1898, an association known as the *Sociedad Euskalerria* formed a political alliance with the PNV. The *Euskalerriakos*, as the association's members were known, brought new financial resources to the PNV's electoral campaigning. The two groups – *Aranistas* (the early founders of the PNV and supporters of Arana) and *Euskalerriakos* – presented joint lists for the 1899 municipal elections, and won several seats in Bilbao's city council and in other small towns in Vizcaya.

However, this electoral success prompted a period of state repression that saw several of the PNV's newspapers closed down, and the party's leader, Sabino Arana, imprisoned. These political and legal constraints on the PNV's electoral authorisation prompted the more liberal and moderate *Euskalerriakos* to push for reform of the PNV's internal organisation and political programme. The agreement reached in 1906 represented a compromise between the different ideological and strategic priorities of the *Aranistas* and the *Euskalerriakos*, thus avoiding a definitive split between the two factions (Corcuera 1979: 478; De Pablo *et al.* 1999: 70). The manifesto commitment to the "complete restoration of the *fueros*" was vague enough to satisfy the *Aranistas*' desire for Basque independence and the *Euskalerriakos*' more moderate (albeit ill-defined) desire for some form of autonomy. It was also a formulation that was not too radical to prohibit the PNV's authorisation to compete anew in elections; thus the party presented candidates for the first time in state-wide elections in 1907.

With regard to party organisation, the PNV was greatly influenced by the legacy of the *fueros* from the outset. The party was thus conceived as a confederation, with the four Basque provinces retaining sovereignty over organisational matters within their territory. The national (all Basque) level of party organisation remained very weak during the earliest years of the party's existence. This basic model was not changed in 1906; the most significant innovation was the introduction of a rule prohibiting the holding of public and party offices simultaneously; this remains in place to this very day. This reflected the different goal priorities of the *Aranistas* and *Euskalerriakos*: whilst the former were preoccupied with the ideological goal of mobilising a Basque nation based on shared myths and values, the latter were more office-seeking and aimed to secure government office at the local level. The incompatibility rule facilitated a division of labour between the two factions. Whilst the *Euskalerriakos* would continue to dominate candidacies for public office, the *Aranistas* were guaranteed control over the PNV's ideology and strategy. This reform thus encouraged the institutionalisation of different factions within the PNV, each specialising in different activities and controlling its own resources.

nap new academic press

The pursuit of these contrasting goals by different sectors within the was not problematic as long as the party limited its competition to the local level; the party remained united for the first two decades of its existence. However, between 1916 and 1919, the party – renamed Comunión Nacionalista Vasca (CNV) in 1916 – experienced a period of electoral expansion. In 1918, the CNV obtained its first seats in the Spanish Parliament, thus crossing the threshold of representation at the state-level. Representation gave new visibility and resources to the CNV's elected members (mostly *Euskalerriakos*). The new party in public office also sought to gain greater autonomy from the party in central office, for example in order to be able to forge new alliances with other political parties. Crossing the threshold of representation also forced the CNV to be clearer about its policy ambitions. Whilst the party's official goal remained the restoration of the *fueros*, the party launched a campaign that sought a more modern form of autonomy for the Basque provinces. However, the Spanish government's refusal to countenance the decentralisation of political authority heralded a decline in the CNV's electoral fortunes, and tensions between the party's different factions evolved into open conflict. In 1921, the party split into two separate organisations: a re-founded PNV with a more radical autonomist discourse and ideology, and the more moderate CNV.

The two parties merged anew in 1930, a few months before the establishment of Spain's Second Republic (1931–1936). Known once again as the PNV, the organisational structures defined in 1906 were re-adopted. However, this period was also one where the PNV successfully developed a mass-membership support base. The party created and sponsored an extensive network of *batzokis* (leisure and cultural centres attached to the party's local assemblies) that provided members with social and cultural goods and, at the same time, served the purpose of socialising the local population in Basque nationalist ideology. In 1933 the party had 26,000 members, although it had three times this number through its satellite organisations (De Pablo *et al.* 1999: 229–236). This organisational model was crucial in ensuring the PNV's survival during, and re-emergence after, the Francoist period.

This organisational consolidation was also a crucial factor in enabling the PNV's electoral consolidation during the early 1930s. Electoral growth led the party to re-prioritise its policy goals, namely self-government for the Basque Country. More specifically, the party pursued the goal of a Statute of Autonomy for the Basque Country. During the first two years of the new regime, the PNV pursued this goal in co-operation with *Comunión Tradicionalista*. However, the latter's strong Catholic values meant that there was little sympathy to these autonomist demands among the Republican-Socialist government in Madrid. This prompted a

change in the PNV's strategy, with a new phase of collaboration with left-wing governments from the end of 1932 onwards. The change of political alliances prompted the Basque branch of the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) to adopt a more pro-autonomist position, paving the way for the negotiation of a new Statute of Autonomy between the two parties. In this respect, the PNV had crossed the threshold of relevance. However, although the proposed Statute was approved by the Basque electorate in a referendum held in 1933, the defeat of the Republican-Socialist state-wide coalition in November that same year prevented the implementation of self-government. Negotiations were resumed after a new victory of the Left in February 1936. The prospect of enacting the Statute informed the PNV's decision to support the Republicans upon the outbreak of civil war in July 1936. In September of that year, the PNV crossed the threshold of government at the state-level when one of its members, Manuel Irujo, entered the War Cabinet. One month later, the Spanish Parliament approved the first Statute of Autonomy for the Basque Country. This allowed the formation of the first Basque autonomous government led by the PNV, with the participation of PSOE and other smaller parties. The PNV was thus successful in achieving its main policy goal. This brief experience of regional government came to an end in April 1937, however, with the dissolution of the Basque institutions and the suspension of Basque autonomy.

Under General Franco's rule, the PNV was illegalised and thus crossed back over the threshold of authorisation. Nevertheless, a clandestine National Executive continued to operate within the Basque Country until 1953, when it moved to the south of France (where it remained until 1971). Moreover, through a network of secondary and 'legal' associations (mostly of a cultural or religious nature), the PNV was able to preserve a social base of party loyalty among large sections of the Basque population (Zirakzadeh 1991; Díez Medrano 1995). This proved crucial for the rapid reconstruction of the party in the 1970s (see below).

The experience of the Francoist regime was to have a major impact on the PNV in another respect. In 1959, a new Basque nationalist organisation was formed, namely Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA). The group espoused an uncompromising position on the goal of Basque independence, and used political violence as a means of securing its territorial goal. ETA's strategy, and that of political parties linked to it from the 1970s onwards, would have a major impact on the PNV's lifespan in the post-Franco period.

nap new academic press

5.3. The lifespan of the PNV (1977–2010)

Upon the death of General Franco in 1975, a transition to a new democratic regime was begun in Spain. As part of this process, the PNV was legalised in March 1977; the party thus crossed once more the thresholds of declarationand authorisation. At the party's first National Assembly, Carlos Garaikoetxea was elected President of the party's National Executive. The PNV participated in the June 1977 general election and regained its position as the first party of the Basque Country; the party won 29.3% of the Basque vote and 8 seats in the Spanish Chamber of Deputies (see table 5.1).

The electoral system used for general elections – a proportional system using a D'Hondt highest average formula which rewards the first and second parties at the district level (Gunther *et al.* 1986) – has always resulted in a slight over-representation of the PNV at the state-level.[1] However, during discussions on the design of a new Spanish constitution, the PNV also acquired more prominence than could be expected from its electoral share for two reasons. Firstly, ETA's political violence threatened to destabilise the region and the country. The first Unión del Centro Democrático (UCD) governments believed that granting far-reaching autonomy to the Basque Country, in line with the PNV's demands, offered a solution to the ETA problem. In the late 1970s, therefore, ETA's existence gave the PNV substantial blackmail potential *vis-à-vis* central government. Secondly, the first democratic elections showed the Basque party system to be highly fragmented; this would be confirmed in subsequent elections (see Table 5.1). By occupying the centre of the Basque political arena, the PNV was able to present itself as representing the whole region despite the fact that the party had the support of less than a third of the Basque electorate (Llera 2000). The party used this position to wield considerable influence in negotiations on the drafting of the 1978 Spanish Constitution and a Basque Statute of Autonomy (known as the Statute of Gernika) approved in 1979.

---

[1]   This is because the PNV has been the first or second party in votes at the district level in most general elections, particularly in Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa.

Table 5.1. *Results of general elections in the Basque Country, 1977–2008 (% of vote, and number of seats in the Chamber of Representatives)*

	PNV	EA	EE[1]	HB/EH/ *Batasuna*	Aralar	PSOE	PP	UCD/ CDS[4]	PCE/IU
1977	29.3 (8)	-	6.1 (1)	4.4[2]	-	26.5 (7)	4.4 (1)	12.8 (4)	4.5
1979	27.6 (7)	-	8 (1)	15 (3)	-	19 (5)	3.4	17 (5)	4.6
1982	31.2 (8)	-	7.7 (1)	14.8 (2)	-	29.3 (8)	11.6 (2)	1.8	1.7
1986	26.4 (6)	-	9.2 (2)	17.8 (4)	-	26.4 (7)	10.6 (2)	5.0	1.2
1989	22.9 (5)	11.2 (2)	8.9 (2)	17 (4)	-	21.3 (6)	9.4 (2)	3.5	3
1993	24.4 (5)	10 (1)	-	14.8 (2)	-	24.9 (7)	14.9 (2)	0.8	6.4
1996	25.4 (5)	8.4 (1)	-	12.5 (2)	-	24.0 (5)	18.6 (5)	-	9.4 (1)
2000	31.3 (7)	7.8 (1)	-	-[3]	-	24.0 (4)	29.2 (7)	-	5.6
2004	34.2 (7)	6.6 (1)	-	-[3]	3.2	27.6 (7)	19.2 (4)	-	8.4
2008	27.7 (6)	4.6	-	-[3]	2.7	38.9 (9)	18.9 (3)	-	4.6

Source: Own elaboration based on data from the *Departamento de Interior del Gobierno Vasco.*

Notes:

[1] *EuskadikoEzkerra* (EE) was a Basque nationalist party which fused with the PSOE in 1993.

[2] HB did not exist in 1977; the electoral result shown in the table refers to *EuskadikoSozia-listaBiltzarra* and *Acción Nacionalista Vasca*, two of the parties that in 1978 formed the coalition HB.

[3] EH called for abstention, and therefore did not participate, in the 2000 elections; EH's successor party, *Batasuna*, was outlawed in 2003, and therefore could not participate in the 2004 and 2008 elections.

[4] The *Centro Democrático y Social* (CDS) was formed in 1982 by the Adolfo Suárez, leader of the UCD.

With regard to the design of Spain's new constitutional architecture, the PNV demanded the restoration of the *fueros*; and that the constitutional recognition of such a regime should derive its legitimacy not from the Constitution itself, but from a historical period prior to it. Such a proposition was unacceptable to the governing UCD. For this reason, the PNV urged its

voters to abstain from the referendum on the Spanish Constitution (even though it had secured other important concessions, such as the recognition of certain 'historical rights' derived from the *fueros* and a provision for allowing the further decentralisation of policy competences in specific circumstances). Lower voter turnout and support for the Constitution in the Basque Country, together with the growth of the anti-system vote for Herri Batasuna (HB) – a political party with links to ETA (see Izquierdo, this volume) – in the 1979 general election, strengthened the PNV's blackmail potential ahead of discussions on a new Statute of Autonomy for the Basque Country. The eventual text agreed contained two major concessions to the party: the creation of a Basque police force and the *Concierto Económico*, a system of autonomous financing rooted in the tradition of the *fueros* and which guaranteed the Basque provinces a high degree of fiscal autonomy. The PNV's strategy in these years of democratic transition has been described as "semi-loyal" to the new regime (Linz 1986). On the one hand, the party pursued a confrontational style of politics accompanied by a clearly independentist rhetoric (as represented by its opposition to the Spanish Constitution). On the other, the party was also pragmatic in its willingness to agree a limited (albeit considerable) form of self-government for the Basque Country. This two-pronged approach was crucial in enabling the party to appeal to a wider spectrum of voters, and consolidate its position as the Basque Country's primary political force. The PNV won 38.1% of the vote in the first autonomous election held in 1980, and the party immediately crossed the threshold of government at the regional level (see table 5.2).[2]

From 1981 onwards, however, the PNV began to lose some of its blackmail potential. After a failed coup in February 1981, the two main statewide parties – the UCD and the PSOE – reached an agreement to slow down the decentralisation process. Moreover, the landslide victory of the PSOE in the 1982 general election served to strengthen the central government in relation to political parties in the autonomous communities, especially key players like the PNV. Although in the same election the PNV retained its 8 parliamentary seats, one consequence of this change in political dynamics at the state-level was that the speed by which competencies were transferred to the autonomous level decreased. This was especially true in the case of the Basque Country, where negotiations were more complex due to the fiscal autonomy granted by the *Concierto Económico*.[3]

---

[2] HB's decision not to take up its seats in the Basque parliament enabled the PNV to govern as if it had a parliamentary majority. HB also rejected parliamentary representation in the second Basque legislature.

[3] For example, whilst in Andalusia and Catalonia the transfer of competencies in health policy was completed as early as 1981, this was not done in the Basque Country until 1987 (Adelantado *et al.* 2002); moreover, this was finally achieved as a result of coalitional agreements between the PNV and the PSOE in the mid-1980s.

In the second autonomous elections in 1984, the party increased both its share of the Basque vote and number of seats (see table 5.2). The party's better performances in regional, compared to general, elections can be explained in part by different patterns of voting in different elections, which favours autonomist parties at the regional level.[4] Nevertheless, in 1984 the PNV found itself in a blocked situation, since its own number of seats (32) equalled that obtained by its opponents. This situation arose for several reasons, including the reform of the Basque electoral law (with the number of seats in the parliament increased from 60 to 75, with 25 for each province), a slight decrease in support for HB, and the electoral advance of the PSOE on the back of its state-level victory in the 1982 general election.[5] In this situation, a growing sector within the party came to see the solution to both the parliamentary blockage and the slow transfer of autonomous competencies to be a political agreement with the PSOE (Pérez-Nievas 2002: 475–9). In January 1985, the PNV's newly elected leader, Jose Antonio Ardanza, signed a legislative agreement with the latter which served to unblock the parliament and facilitate policy transfers from the central state.

This decision was not without cost to the PNV. Opposition to cooperating with the PSOE prompted growing internal factionalism, and this contributed to a decline in votes and parliamentary seats in the 1986 general election (see table 5.1). In response to this disappointing result, a third of the party's representatives in the Basque Parliament decided to form a rival party, Eusko Alkartasuna (EA). This forced the PNV government to call an early autonomous election at the end of 1986, which saw the party lose further electoral support; a third of its electorate preferred to back its new autonomist rival. Although the PNV remained the most voted party in the Basque Country, it was surpassed in seats by the PSOE (see table 5.2).

Nevertheless, the PNV retained its governing status at the regional level as a result of coalition agreements with the PSOE; this situation persisted until 1998, with PNV-led governments including the PSOE as the only or major governing partner. Cooperation with the PSOE at the regional level

---

4   However, it should also be noted that patterns of so-called dual voting are less pronounced than in Catalonia (Pallarés and Keating 2003; see also Barrio and Barberà, this volume). The political effects of low inter-block volatility are also less salient since the PNV has won all autonomous and general elections (with the exceptions of the 1993 and 2008 general elections). There is also less of a difference in turnout depending on the type of election in the Basque Country, when compared to Catalonia.

5   In Basque autonomous elections, the larger size of electoral districts leads to more proportional representation than in general elections. However, the equal representation of the three provinces in the Basque Parliament, despite substantial differences in their populations (Vizcaya has 5 times the population of Álava), has led to distortions in representation at times.

Table 5.2. *Results of regional elections in the Basque Country (1980-2005) in % of the valid vote (number of seats in the Basque Parliament [1])*

	PNV	EA	EE	HB/ EH/ Bata-suna/ PCTV	Aralar	PSOE	PP	UCD/ CDS	PCE/ IU	UA[4]	UPD[6]
1980	38.1 (25)		9.8 (6)	16.6 (11)		14.2 (9)	4.8 (6)	8.5 (2)	4 (1)		
1984	42 (32)		8.0 (6)	14.6 (11)		23.1 (19)	9.4 (7)		1.4		
1986	23.7 (17)	15.8 (13)	10.1 (9)	17.5 (13)		22.1 (19)	4.9 (2)	3.5	0.5		
1990	28.5 (22)	11.4 (9)	7.8 (6)	18.3 (13)		19.9 (16)	8.2 (6)	0.7	1.4	1.4 (3)	
1994	29.8 (22)	10.3 (8)		16.3 (11)		17.1 (12)	14.4 (11)		9.2 (6)	2.7 (5)	
1998	28.0 (21)	8.7 (6)		17.9 (14)		17.6 (14)	20.1 (16)		5.7 (2)	1.3 (2)	
2001	42.7 (33)[2]	[2]		10.1 (7)		17.9 (13)	23.1 (19)[5]		5.6 (3)	[5]	
2005	38.7 (29)[2]	[2]		12.5 (9)[3]	2.3 (1)	22.7 (18)	17.4 (15)		5.4 (3)	0.4	
2009	38,6 (30)	3,7 (1)			6,1 (4)	30,7 (24)	14,1 (13)		3,5 (1)		2,1 (1)

Source: Own elaboration based on data from the *Departamento de Interior del Gobierno Vasco.*

Notes:

[1] The total number of seats in the Basque Parliament was 60 in the 1980-84 legislature. In 1984, this was been increased to 75 seats.

[2] In the 2001 and 2005 elections, PNV and EA formed an electoral coalition.

[3] Batasuna was outlawed in 2003 and could not participate in the 2005 election; one week before the election Batasuna's leadership endorsed the "legal"candidacy of the Partido Comunista de las Tierras Vascas (PCTV) and called its electorate to vote for this list.

[4] UnidadAlavesa (UA) was a political party that contested election in the province of Álava between 1989 and 2005. It was established as a party opposing Basque nationalism.

[5] In the 2001 election PP and UA formed an electoral coalition.

[6] Unión Progreso y Democracia (UPD) was founded in September 2007, and emerged out of the movements opposed to ETA's violence.

nap new academic press

also paved the way for cooperation at the state level. With a PSOE minority government in Madrid between 1993 and 1996, the PNV acquired coalition potential and was formally invited to enter state-level government. This situation was repeated in 1996, when the Partido Popular (PP) was in minority government. Like its Catalan counterpart, Convergencia i Unió (CiU), the PNV refused these offers and preferred to provide legislative support in exchange for policy concessions relating to decentralisation.[6] The period between 1986 and 1998 also coincided with the party's slow but steady electoral recovery and the parallel decline of its main autonomist competitor, EA. HB, however, maintained its electoral strength and the PP evolved from a marginal position to become the second largest party in the Basque Country in the 1998 autonomous election (see table 5.2).

From the end of the 1980s onwards, the PNV also began to play the European card. The party had a long tradition of support for European integration, and supported Spain's entry into the European Economic Community. The PNV first crossed the threshold of representation at the supranational level in 1989, and has retained a presence within the European Parliament ever since. This has been achieved through forming alliances with other autonomist parties in Spain, a strategy forced upon the party by the single Spanish constituency employed for European elections. The PNV's choice of alliances has always been dictated by preferences and priorities in regional and state-level politics. In the 1987, 1989, and 1994 elections whilst pursuing its more moderate strategy, the PNV led a common list with parties that could more accurately be labelled as 'regionalist' rather than nationalist. By contrast, in 1999 the PNV joined a common platform with EA, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) and the Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG); this followed on from the signing of *Pacto de Lizarra* with some of these same actors (see below). The 2004 European election saw a further change of alliances, with the PNV joining CiU and the BNG in the coalition *Galeusca*. This built on the attempt by these actors to co-ordinate their activities at the state-level in order to push for territorial reform of the Spanish state.[7] In 2009, the PNV ran in coalition with CiU. Each change of electoral alliance was accompanied by the PNV's change of party-group membership within the European Parliament; it switched from the European People's Party to the European Free Alliance (EFA) in 1999, and from EFA to the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party in 2004 (Pérez-Nievas 2006a: 52).

---

[6]   For example, the PNV's parliamentary support of the PP in the period 1996-2000 allowed it to bargain for the extension of the Basque Country's fiscal autonomy to include 'special taxes' (such as on alcohol and tobacco) that had not been initially included in the *Concierto Económico* (Pérez-Nievas 2006a: 46).

[7]   As noted by other contributions to this volume, in 1998, these three parties signed the *Declaración de Barcelona* which demanded the transformation of Spain into a multi-national, multicultural and multilingual state.

The year 1998 was a turning point in the PNV's lifespan. As noted above, the PP had been elected to central government in 1996, and became the second largest party in the Basque Country in the 1998 autonomous election; the latter development constituted an important reconfiguration of the Basque political system (Llera 2000; De la Calle 2005). The PP espoused a stronger Spanish nationalist position than the PSOE. There were also renewed efforts to put an end to ETA's terrorism and bring its political arms into parliamentary politics (Perez-Nievas 2006a; see also Izquierdo, this volume). These factors prompted a shift in the PNV's territorial position, unambiguously placing Basque sovereignty and the right to self-determination as the keystone of its new political strategy. This was most clearly manifested in the PNV's signature of the *Pacto de Lizarra* along with EA, HB and Izquierda Unida (IU). The agreement advocated a political solution to the issues of the Basque autonomous community's sovereignty and the status of Navarra within a future re-unified Basque Country (reflecting the nationalist conception of the 'Basque homeland'). ETA declared a ceasefire a few weeks after the signing of the agreement.

In the 1998 regional election, the party's new strategy resulted in a slight decline in its electoral performance. However, under the new leadership of Juan José Ibarretxe, the PNV formed a coalition government with EA, with external support from Euskal Herritarrok (EH), successor party to HB. However, ETA's resumption of violence less than a year later prompted the PSOE and PP to accuse the PNV of being supported by a terrorist group. Throughout the year 2000, the PNV focused on forcing a rupture between ETA and its political branch, EH. The failure of this strategy led the PNV to break its parliamentary agreement with the latter, and early autonomous elections were called in 2001. The PNV contested the election in alliance with EA; this built on co-operation for the 1999 local and European elections. Faced with stronger competition from the right-wing PP, the alliance proposed consulting the Basque electorate about the future status of the region as part of a negotiated process that could bring an end to political violence. In an electoral campaign strongly polarised around issues of Basque vs. Spanish identity, PNV/EA won a resounding victory (42.7% of votes and 33 out of 75 parliamentary seats). Much of this support came from voters who had switched from backing EH and its predecessors.

A new Basque government was formed composed of the PNV, EA and IU. Bolstered by the previous year's electoral performance, in September 2002 Ibarretxe announced an initiative to reform the Statute of Gernika in order to accommodate the Basque Country's right to self-determination within a new political framework of autonomy. The so-called *Plan Ibarretxe* was approved by the Basque parliament in December 2004, and presented to the Spanish Parliament in January 2005 where it was rejected overwhelmingly.

nap new academic press

This defeat contributed in no small part to the PNV's electoral decline in the autonomous election held in April 2005, which translated into a loss of 4 parliamentary seats. This did not, however, signal the party's exit from government; the previous legislature's coalition (PNV/EA/IU) was re-established. It is also necessary to note that the PNV had recuperated its coalition potential at the state-level following the election of a minority PSOE government in 2004 (see table 5.1). The PNV supported the latter's efforts to advance a peace process in the Basque Country (ETA declared a second ceasefire in 2005, which lasted until January 2007) as well as its socio-economic policies.[8]

The most recent autonomous election in 2009 marked another turning point for the PNV. In the previous year's general election, the party had been surpassed by its main political rival within the Basque Country, the PSOE, for the first time. In the run-up to the autonomous election, the PNV's electoral alliance with EA was also terminated after ten years of stable co-operation. The latter accused the PNV of not pushing hard enough for a referendum on territorial reform for the Basque Country, whilst there were also differences between the two parties on issues of linguistic policy. Moreover, 2009 was the first time that parties linked to the activities of *Batasuna* – inheritor of the radical left tradition represented by parties such as HB and EH (see Izquierdo, this volume) – would not be competing in autonomous elections due to its illegalisation; the party was also prohibited from supporting 'clean' lists as had happened in 2005. All of these factors suggested a potentially important reconfiguration of the Basque political system. After some internal debate, Ibarretxe was presented once again as the PNV's candidate to head the Basque government. During the campaign, however, the party played down issues of sovereignty and self-determination, and focused instead on proposals to manage the growing economic crisis. The party sought to present itself as the most trustworthy actor in dealing with economic affairs. In the event, the PNV was the most voted party and secured the same electoral result as the PNV-EA coalition four years previously. For the first time since 1980, however, this result was insufficient to enable the PNV to return to government office. Instead, a PSOE government was formed with the external support of the PP. Thus, after nearly thirty years of regional government, the PNV crossed back over the threshold of government, and became a party of opposition within the Basque parliament for the first time in the post-Franco period. The PNV's lifespan at the state and regional territorial levels from the mid 1970s onwards is summarised in table 5.3.

---

[8] For example, the PNV voted in favour of every budget presented by the PSOE between 2005 and 2010.

nap new academic press

Table 5.3. *The lifespan of the PNV*

a) Regional level

	I	II	III	IV-B	IV-A	V
1980						PNV
1984						PNV
1985						PNV
1987						PNV
1991						PNV
1995						PNV
1999						PNV
2001						PNV
2005						PNV
2009			PNV			

b) State level

	I	II	III	IV-B	IV-A	V
1977				PNV		
1982			PNV			
1993					PNV	
2000				PNV		
2004					PNV	
2008					PNV	

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

5.4. Changes in party organisation

As noted above, the PNV was established as a factionalised organisation with a low degree of internal cohesion. The party's reunification in the 1930s continued with this factionalised model, and it was once again adopted upon the party's legalisation in the late 1970s (see figure 5.1).[9] Thus, party goals in the 1970s and 1980s were pursued within the framework of a party model designed several decades previously. The PNV's organisation had two key features.

---

[9]   On the reasons why this model was readopted in the 1970s, and why attempts to change it during the period from 1977 to 1980 failed, see Pérez-Nievas (2002: 326-337).

nap new academic press

Firstly, the strict rule of incompatibility between holding public and party offices was reintroduced. Secondly, the party's territorial organisation continued to reflect the foral tradition that defined the party's political project. The PNV was thus organised at the local, regional (Álava, Guipúzcoa, Vizcaya and, outside the Basque Autonomous Community, Navarra) and national (all-Basque) levels. These formed part of an overarching confederal party structure. Within the PNV's National Assembly, the regions enjoyed equal representation (fifteen members each) regardless of the number of party members in each region. Between meetings of the National Assembly (which worked as an extended executive), the 1977 Statutes established the National Executive as the highest authority within the party. Until the organisational reforms of 1987, this body was composed of twelve members chosen by and from the regional executives (three from each); these in turn elected a President who would preside over both the Executive and the party. This party model clearly strengthened the party's regional tier at the expense of both the national and the local levels; this was particularly evident within the National Executive, where members followed regional mandates and were not responsible to a national level organ.

Figure 5.1. *The PNV's organisation from 1977–1987 (left) and following the 1987, 1992, and 1995 reforms (right)*
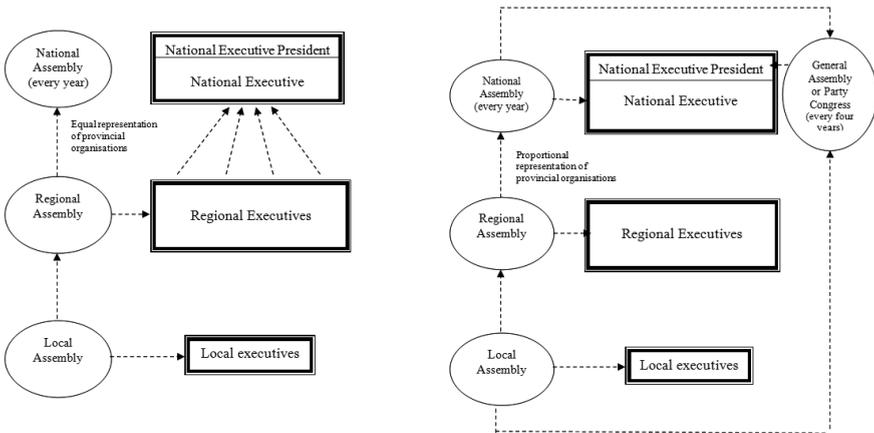
Source: Own elaboration from Party statutes.

This organisational model gave rise to factionalism within the PNV in two respects: between the party in central office and regional government; and between party leaderships at different territorial levels. Factionalism is not always detrimental to a party's growth. Sferza (2002) argues, for example, that factionalism can provide a competitive advantage in certain circumstances. In the context of high cleavage mobilisation, such as Spain's transition to democracy in the late 1970s, this structure allowed different groups within the

nap new academic press

PNV to specialise in different roles. On the one hand, immediately after its legalisation the PNV focused on building a large membership base, larger in fact than that of any other Spanish party with the exception of the Partido Comunista de España (PCE) (Pérez-Nievas 2006a: 56). This, along with a decentralised territorial structure, enabled the party to develop specific mechanisms for mobilising support for a nationalist project based on the principle of Basque sovereignty. On the other hand, the PNV's elected representatives were able to negotiate far-reaching autonomy for the Basque Country within the Spanish state. With this structure and distribution of roles within the party, the PNV was able to appeal to, and obtain the support of, a wider spectrum of voters than any other political party in the Basque political system (Acha and Pérez-Nievas 1998: 94; Pérez-Nievas 2006a: 42).

However, at other times factionalism has posed major challenges for the PNV. For example, in the early years of the new democratic regime the party on the ground impacted on the PNV's strategy by demanding a confrontational strategy *vis-à-vis* other state-wide parties and in constitutional negotiations. This bottom-up pressure from a radicalised party membership clashed with the more moderate preferences of the party leadership (see table 5.4). In 1978, for example, when the PNV leadership promoted the first public demonstrations to condemn ETA, it met with strong resistance from many PNV local assemblies and the party's members. Similarly, during internal discussions to determine the party's position on the 1978 Constitution, the party's representatives in the Congress of Deputies were forced to negotiate with party members in order to reach agreement on a policy of abstention from the constitutional referendum; the latter favoured voting to reject the new Constitution (Pérez-Nievas 2002: 250–2).

During the early 1980s, therefore, a widening gap developed between the Basque government and the party in central office. When the PNV faced a blockage both in the transfer of autonomous competencies and the formation of a regional government (in 1986), the two factions proposed different solutions. Whilst the PNV's National Executive favoured cooperation with the PSOE, Garaikoetxea preferred maintaining the confrontational blackmail strategy of the previous period which allowed the party to compete on its more radical flank (and specifically with HB).

Table 5.4. *Pressures for organisational change upon crossing thresholds*

Threshold	Regional level	State level	European level
V	**Strong** - substantial increase in number and variety of tasks performed: professionalisation (particularly after reforms in the late 1980s and early 1990s) conflict between central and public office - Greater involvement of party on the ground in the selection of the party leader - and definition of the manifesto (after early 1990s reforms).		
IV-B			
IV-A	**Strong** - - increased centralisation	**Strong** - increased centralisation - conflict between central and public office	
III	**Strong (1980–)** - increase in the number of staff employed increased internal - complexity conflict between central - office and public office pressures in vertical party coordination: conflict - between different territorial levels (provincial vs. Basque) **Medium (2009–):** Losing the government strengthens the decision-making authority of the National Executive	**Medium** - conflict between central and public office - conflict between national leadership and party on the ground	**Medium** - coordination with other autonomist parties (common lists for European elections)
II	**Medium** - adoption of statutory rules for competing in elections and decision-making		
I			

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

The party's territorial structure also gave rise to factional divisions during the early 1980s. In 1983, the PNV's National Executive signed an

agreement with the leadership of Alianza Popular (AP, predecessor of the PP) to support the latter's candidate for the Presidency of the government of Navarra (where the PNV had limited parliamentary representation). In exchange, AP would support PNV candidates in Bilbao and other city councils in the Basque Country. However, the PNV regional executive in Navarra refused to back the agreement and was expelled from the party. The Navarrese executive was supported by Garaikoetxea. A second internal conflict with a territorial dimension arose in response to the Basque government's proposed *Ley de Territorios Históricos*. Under the provisions of the *Concierto Económico*, fiscal autonomy had been devolved not to the regional government of the Basque Country, but to the elected provincial assemblies. In the Basque Country, the PNV-led government sought to legislate to coordinate taxation and public spending across the three provinces of Álava, Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya; this reflected a desire to centralise political authority in the hands of the regional government. However, the move was fiercely resisted by the provincial governments also under the PNV's control; they were supported by the PNV's National Executive (Gómez and Pérez-Nievas 2009: 109).

To summarise, these tensions during the 1980s were rooted in the PNV's original organisational model, and were aggravated by efforts at party consolidation in a multi-level political context that included the state, the regional and (within the Basque Country) the provincial territorial levels. Party consolidation was further challenged by the fact that the PNV operated in two autonomous communities, namely the Basque Country (where it was the dominant party) and Navarra (where it had limited parliamentary representation but a key role in government formation). Internal divisions thus related to questions of what sphere within the party (the regional government or the party central office) and what territorial level of party organisation (the central or the regional) had the authority to determine the PNV's political strategy.

After the 1984 regional election, and following numerous unsuccessful attempts by the PNV's National Executive to discipline Garaikoetxea, the latter was forced to resign following a decision taken by the National Assembly. This led to the further regionalisation of the PNV's internal conflict. Whilst Garaikoetxea was supported by the previously expelled members from Navarra and the party's organisation in Guipuzcoa, the PNV in Vizcaya and Álava supported the central party leadership. In the following two years, the party's organs in Guipúzcoa (the PNV regional executive and assembly – see figure 5.1) became an organisational haven for the critical sections of the PNV organised around Garaikoetxea. They opposed Ardanza's cooperation strategy with the PSOE, and succeeded in forcing the resignation of Arzalluz's successor as President of the PNV National Executive, Román Sodupe, in January 1985. This achievement demonstra-

nap new academic press

ted the degree to which the PNV's regional party organisations were able to control the party's central bodies. In 1986, Arzalluz was re-elected President of the Vizcaya executive, and subsequently President of the National Executive. Having lost the ability to exercise control of the PNV from the regional level, Garaikoetxea and his supporters opted to create a new autonomist party, EA. The PNV's party organisation in Guipúzcoa joined this new formation, as did its expelled Navarrese members. The split thus had a territorial dimension, as well as a strategic one (Acha and Pérez-Nievas 1998: 93).

The organisational structures adopted by the PNV after the split (figure 5.1) illustrate the extent to which the political elite that remained within the party saw organisational problems as one of the causes of the crisis. To begin with, rules of incompatibility were made far more flexible. After 1987, public and party offices remained incompatible at the same territorial level[10] but were permitted across different territorial levels. Thus members of the National Executive were permitted to take up seats in the Congress of Deputies or the Basque Parliament (as the latter were legislative rather than executive bodies). This modification permitted the public funding of national and regional executives and, therefore, their professionalisation and specialisation.[11] Whilst the incompatibility of the party's top posts was maintained (that is, membership of the Basque government and the National Executive), mechanisms of coordination between the two were strengthened. For example, the *Lehendakari* (President of the Basque government) was permitted to attend all meetings of the party Executive (although without the right to vote as a full member of this body).

Reform of the PNV's territorial organisation was also substantial (Gómez and Pérez-Nievas 2009: 111–5). References to the confederate structure of the party were removed from the statutes, with emphasis placed instead on the PNV's character as a single party. There were also steps to strengthen the party's national level organs and rationalise vertical coordination across different territorial levels. Thus, for example, the equal representation of the Basque territories in the National Assembly was substituted by a system of proportional representation according to the membership in each province. A General Assembly was also created, composed of members of the National Assembly and delegates representing each local organisation (proportional to the number of members). The General Assembly, rather than the National Executive, was given the responsibility

---

[10] For example, a town Mayor could not simultaneously be a member of the local party executive, and a member of the Basque government would still be prohibited from sitting on the National Executive.

[11] For example, the 1987 reforms gave members of the PNV's National Executive responsibility for different policy areas, thus facilitating the supervision of the Basque, provincial and municipal governments.

for electing the party's President. The body was also given responsibility for determining the broad parameters of the PNV's political programme and strategy.

The party organisational model created with the reforms of the late 1980s has not undergone major change in subsequent years. It has, on the whole, been successful in containing the factional divisions that tore the party apart in 1986. However, tensions have re-emerged at different points in time, not least between the positions of the party in central office and in regional government. These were in evidence, for example, during Ibarretxe's period as Basque premier (1998–2009), with Josu Jon Imáz (2003–2007) and Iñigo Urkullu (2007–) as party Presidents. The election of Imáz in 2003 was the first occasion on which the PNV's General Assembly was charged with electing the party President. The competition between Imáz and Joseba Egibar for this post saw a re-emergence of some of the factional differences that had remained latent for almost two decades; the two candidates represented moderate vs. more radical ideological tendencies within the PNV. Once in his post, Imáz had to confront a regional government where the PNV was in coalition with EA, a party that placed a much stronger emphasis issues of Basque sovereignty and self-determination than its coalition partner. At times, the Basque government and the National Executive contradicted one another in a similar fashion to the public disagreements between Arzalluz and Garaikoetxea in the 1980s. As a result of these clashes, and for the "sake of party unity", Imáz did not renew his candidacy for the Presidency in December 2007 in exchange for his rival, Egibar, also not standing for the post. The eventual election of Iñigo Urkullu was a compromise between the two factions in a party, among which the memory of the 1986 split was still fresh.[12]

Paradoxically, losing government in 2009 decreased the organisational complexity of, and tensions within, the PNV. On the one hand, exit from government was largely a result of a reconfiguration of the Basque electoral system. The blame for failing to attract more moderate voters was attributed to Ibarretxe rather than the PNV President, Urkullu; the fact that the former had no position in the internal party organisation after 2009 meant that there was no need to seek his replacement within the party executive. On the other hand (as signalled in table 5.4), passing from government to opposition has strengthened the PNV's National Executive, which no longer has to compete with the party in government to define its political programme and strategy.

---

[12]   In the interviews gathered by Iglesias (2009), different PNV leaders (Arzalluz, Imáz, Egibar and Urkullu among them) pointed to the effect that memories of the 1986 split had in the decision not to open the selection of the party leader (Imaz versus Egibar) to the party on the ground in 2007, and the proposal of Urkullu as the new President instead.

nap new academic press

5.5. Changes in party goals

The PNV re-entered democratic politics, and became a relevant actor in state-level politics, at a time of strong mobilisation of the territorial cleavage and in competition with new (more radical) Basque nationalist parties. In this context, the PNV aimed at both vote-maximisation and policy influence. The party achieved a balance between fending off the electoral challenge from HB on its radical flank, whilst securing the highest possible degree of autonomy from the central state. As argued above, the party's factional organisational model, although it also created internal tensions, facilitated the pursuit of these two goals. The PNV's dual strategy (votes and policy) explains apparent paradoxes, such as the party's active involvement in constitutional negotiations whilst later refusing to approve the new Spanish Constitution. In this way, the PNV succeeded in shaping the content of both the Spanish Constitution and the Statute of Gernika, and dominating the Basque political arena from 1980 onwards.

As noted above, with the ratification and implementation of the Statute of Gernika, the PNV became a party of government at the regional level. However, the factional tensions provoked by this new role (see above) was also reflected in the different goal priorities of different groups within the party. Two developments aggravated these divergences: the PNV's loss of blackmail potential at the state-level after 1982, and the party's weakening hold on the Basque Parliament after 1984. The PNV National Executive's favoured option of a coalition with the PSOE demonstrated the prioritisation of office incumbency at the regional level, and policy impact at the state-level (since the agreement led to the acceleration in the transfer of autonomous competencies to the Basque government). As noted above, disagreement with this strategy prompted the formation of EA as a rival autonomist group.

The 1986 autonomous election was the first after the birth of EA, and saw the PNV suffer substantial electoral losses. The result contributed to a moderation of the party's political strategy towards its main regional competitor, the PSOE, in order to protect the party's coalition potential within the Basque arena. Securing government office remained the PNV's priority in the following two regional legislatures (1990–1994 and 1994–1998). To this end, the PNV abandoned references to self-determination and independence and embraced the full implementation of the Basque Statute of Autonomy as its goal in the short- to medium term. The party also led efforts to marginalise ETA and its political fronts, through the signing of the *Ajuria Enea* Agreement with the main Basque political parties in January 1988. At the state level from 1993 onwards, the PNV continued to extract policy concessions in exchange for parliamentary support in Madrid, first for the PSOE (1993–1996) and then for the PP (1996–1998).

However, although both parties offered the PNV the opportunity of entering central government, this was never taken up due to the potential electoral costs of doing so. Faced with the possible trade-off between office at the state level or vote-maximisation, therefore, the PNV has always prioritised the latter.

From 1998 onwards, the PNV's desire to create the conditions conducive to an ETA ceasefire prompted a further change in goals. The party, in coalition with EA, formulated the *Plan Ibarretxe* with the aim of attracting former HB voters who disagreed with ETA's persistent use of terrorism. This new focus on territorial reform was sustainable so long as the PNV was able to maintain its electoral appeal and its place in regional government. As noted above, the party was successful in the 2000 and 2004 general elections as well as the 2001 autonomous elections; the party also forged a new electoral and governing alliance with EA during this period.

Electoral results in the 2008 general election, and both the 2005 and 2009 autonomous elections, however, saw the PNV lose its more moderate voters to the PSOE. Electoral decline and the party's exit from government in 2009 marked a new turning point in the PNV's strategy and a redefinition of party goals. This has been most apparent at the state-level, where the PNV has regained its coalition potential and is a key actor in ensuring the continuity of the Zapatero government. The continued moderation of the PNV's territorial rhetoric has been key to this alliance with the PSOE, and has allowed the party to exercise considerable policy influence. For example, in exchange for parliamentary support the PNV obtained the transfer of unemployment policies to the Basque government. In so doing, the party has been able to bypass the Basque government and reinforce its image as the party best placed to defend the interests of the Basque Country in Madrid. This is a strategy aimed at recuperating the party's electoral support in order to regain the coveted position of party of regional government.

5.6. The PNV's policy impact since the 1970s

The PNV had an important and direct impact on the design and development of the Spanish model of state decentralisation, the *Estado de las Autonomías*. Although it did not explicitly support the 1978 Constitution, the PNV took part in the negotiations that preceded it, greatly influencing its content. The Spanish Constitution defined a flexible institutional framework based on the principle of asymmetric decentralisation that recognised different levels of autonomy for different regions. This paved the way for an open-ended process of decentralisation based upon bilateral negotiations between individual autonomous communities and the central state, rather than multilateral relations as in classical forms of federalism. For

this reason, the precise configuration of the Spanish model of decentralised government has evolved over time, as the competencies of different autonomous institutions have been periodically revised (Aja 1999; Máiz *et al.* 2002).

The PNV influenced the definition of this constitutional model in the following ways. For example, during negotiations on drafting the Spanish Constitution, the party's demand for the recognition of the historic Basque foral rights created a precedent for understanding decentralisation as a bilateral issue to be resolved between each region and the central state. Whilst the Catalan autonomous parties presented similar arguments based on the historical specificities of their region, the PNV was arguably more successful in securing autonomy concessions. Thus, for example, the party secured a form of self-government qualitatively different from that given to Catalonia, due to the specific right for fiscal autonomy contained in the *Concierto Económico.* Moreover, by achieving fiscal autonomy, the PNV introduced an element of instability into the whole system of regional finance, since other autonomous communities would in future demand equivalent rights.[13]

Fiscal autonomy has enabled the PNV to wield policy influence in other ways. During the 1980s, this model of financing made negotiations about the transfer of competences to the autonomous level more complex than for other autonomous communities such as Andalusia or Catalonia, where the process was much quicker (Máiz *et al.* 2002: 392). Once resolved, however, fiscal autonomy has allowed higher public expenditure *per capita* in the Basque Country and has led to the highest level of policy divergence of all Spanish regions (Adelantado *et al.* 2002: 243). As a result of this financial autonomy, voter evaluations of the Basque government's performance in policy areas such as education and health policy have been consistently very positive, and much more so than in other parts of Spain (Pérez-Nievas 2006b). This broad and stable popular support was crucial in ensuring the PNV's resilience as a party of regional government for almost thirty years. The PNV was thus highly successful in 'building' the Basque Country from the position of regional government, through directing policy-making within the increasing competence remit of the Basque autonomous institutions.

Despite these successes in securing and enhancing Basque autonomy, however, the PNV has always maintained (to different degrees at different points in time) the goal of Basque independence, or at the very least the recognition of Basque sovereignty within the Spanish State. From 1998

---

[13]   It is interesting to note that in the 2010 autonomous election in Catalonia, one of CiU's key demands was enhanced fiscal autonomy along the same lines as enjoyed by the Basque Country.

nap new academic press

onwards, the party radicalised its territorial demands, with the *Plan Ibar-retxe* proposing the creation of a new Basque state 'freely associated' with Spain. Based on the asserted right of Basque citizens to vote on the relationship of the Basque Country with the Spanish state, the *Plan* was conceived as a third way between full independence and limited autonomy within the state (Keating and Bray 2006). The PNV adopted increasingly nationalist rhetoric in defence of its proposal, in an attempt to win the support of radical left-wing Basque nationalists and regain the party's hegemony within the Basque nationalist movement. However, the proposals were criticised by the former for falling short of the goal of full independence. The PNV's nationalist rhetoric also provoked the opposition of Spain's two state-wide parties, who considered to plan to be unconstitutional and therefore non-negotiable. The defeat of the *Plan Ibarretxe* in the Congress of Deputies, and the PNV's subsequent electoral decline in the 2005 autonomous election, saw the proposals go into limbo. In this respect, the PNV has failed to deliver on its goal of full self-government for the Basque Country, whereby Basque citizens would decide on their own territorial future. The context within which the *Plan Ibarretxe* was formulated and debated, and the political reactions to the proposal, contributed to the PNV's failure to push through far-reaching reform of Basque territorial autonomy. Since then, as noted above, the party has shifted its attention away from issues of self-government, to focus on other priorities such as economic recovery and growth. In the short-term, at least, territorial politics has declined in salience in the PNV's political agenda, with the party preferring an alternative strategy for recuperating its electoral and political status within Basque politics.

5.7. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined and analysed the lifespan of the PNV since its foundation in the latter half of the nineteenth century to the post-Franco era of democratic politics in Spain. Throughout this period, the PNV has been ambiguous about its ultimate political goals; it is arguable that this has been a defining feature of the party throughout its history. At different points in time, the party has had to resolve the dilemma between adopting a radical stance in favour of independence, and a more pragmatic position aimed at winning as much autonomy as possible within the Spanish state. On the one hand, this dilemma has arisen out of the persistence of different strands of opinion both within the PNV and the Basque nationalist movement more generally on the desireability of Basque independence and how best to achieve it. Since the 1950s, the presence of ETA and political competition from its political branches has forced the PNV to respond to the more radical demands of these left-wing nationalists. On the other hand,

nap new academic press

delivering on territorial reform has required the PNV to recognise the need to cooperate and negotiate with other political actors, especially state-wide parties at both the regional and state-wide levels. To this end, the party has at times been willing to moderate its territorial goals, and (at least at the regional level) has placed office-incumbency ahead of the defence of core ideological principles as a means of 'building the Basque Country' from the position of regional government.

Prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, during the late 1970s and, arguably, between 1998 and 2001, the PNV was able to reconcile these different territorial goals, maintaining a radical discourse on Basque sovereignty while at the same time working pragmatically to achieve a limited form of autonomy within Spain. During these periods, the PNV's factional organisational model was an asset rather than drawback, allowing different party spheres to specialise on the pursuit of different goals simultaneously. This dual strategy was successful in establishing a far-reaching system of autonomous government in the Basque Country, enhanced over the years as a result of multi-level cooperation and bargaining with state-wide parties of the left and the right. At other times, however, the reconciliation of these territorial goals has been more difficult; factional conflicts have contributed to electoral decline and party splits. These were aggravated by the passing of different thresholds at different territorial levels. The departure of a substantial part of the PNV's membership to form a new party in 1986 removed these opposing ideological and strategic voices for the time being, and prompted a partial reform of the PNV's internal structures. However, the failure of the *Plan Ibarretxe* and the party's subsequent electoral decline and loss of government office at the regional level, provided the context for a re-emergence of long-rooted divisions within the party. Since 2009, the PNV has also had to develop a new strategy befitting a party of regional opposition. This has seen a playing down of the territorial agenda, in favour of pursuing multi-level opportunities to exercise policy influence in other areas, such as economic policy. For the time being, this is considered to be the most appropriate way of re-establishing the PNV's hegemony within the Basque Country, a pre-requisite to revisiting the issue of Basque self-government.

References

Acha, Beatriz and Santiago Pérez-Nievas (1998) 'Nationalist Parties in the Basque Country', in: Lieven De Winter and Huri Türsan (eds.), *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe*. London: Routledge, pp. 87–104.

Adelantado, José, Quim Brugué, Raquel Gallego, Ricard Gomá, Antón Losada and Natalia Rosetti (2002) 'Las políticas públicas autonómicas: capacidad de autogobierno y Estado de Bienestar', in: Joan Subirats and Raquel Gallego (eds.), *Veinte años de autonomías en España*. Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, pp. 203–249.

Aja, Eliseo (1999) *El Estado Autonómico: Federalismo y hechos diferenciales*. Madrid: Alianza.

Corcuera, Javier (1979) *Origenes, ideología y organización del nacionalismo vasco (1875–1904)*. Madrid: Siglo XXI.

De la Calle, Luis (2005) 'Cuando la proximidad deja de ser importante: modelos espaciales y voto en la política vasca (1994-2001)', *Revista Española de Ciencia Política,* 12, 113–144.

De Pablo, Santiago, Ludger Mees and José A. Rodríguez (1999) *El péndulo patriótico. historia del partido nacionalista vasco.* Barcelona: Crítica.

Díez Medrano, Juan (1995) *Divided Nations. Class, Politics and Nationalism in the Basque Country and Catalonia.* Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.

Gómez, Raúl and Santiago Pérez-Nievas (2009) 'Faccionalismo e integración vertical en contextos multinivel. El caso del Partido Nacionalista Vasco', *Papers: Revista de Sociología*, 92, 100–119.

Gunther, Richard, Giacomo Sani and Goldi Shabad (1986) *Spain After Franco: The Making of a Competitive Party System*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Iglesias, María Antonia (2009) *Memoria de Euskadi*. Madrid: Edición Aguilar.

Keating, Michael and Zoe Bray (2006) 'Renegotiating Sovereignty: Basque Nationalism and the Rise and Fall of the Ibarretxe Plan', *Ethnopolitics*, 5: 4, 347–364.

Linz, Juan (1986) *Conflicto en Euskadi*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe.

Llera, Francisco (2000) 'Basque Polarization: Between Autonomy and Independence', in: William Safran and Ramón Máiz (eds.), *Identity and territorial autonomy in plural societies*. Boulder, Co.: Frank Cass Publishers, pp. 101–120.

Máiz, Ramón, Pablo Beramendi and Mireia Grau (2002) 'La federalización del Estado de las Autonomías: evolución y déficits institucionales', in: Joan Subirats and Raquel Gallego (eds.), *Veinte años de autonomías en España*. Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, pp. 379–424.

Pallarés, Francesc and Michael Keating (2003) 'Multi-Level Electoral Competition: Regional Elections and Party Systems in Spain', *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 10: 3, 239–255.

Pérez-Nievas, Santiago (2002) *Modelo de partido y cambio político. El Partido Nacionalista Vasco en el proceso de transición y consolidación democrática*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Madrid: Instituto Juan March de Estudios e Investigaciones.

Pérez-Nievas, Santiago (2006a) 'The PartidoNacionalista Vasco: Redefining Political Goals at the Turn of the Century' in: Lieven De Winter, Marga Gómez-Reino and Peter Lynch (eds.), *Autonomist Parties in Europe: Identity Politics and the Revival of the Territorial Cleavage – Vol. I.* Barcelona: ICPS, pp. 31–64.

Pérez-Nievas, Santiago (2006b) *Las elecciones autonómicas vascas de abril de 2005: ¿Etapa o fin de un ciclo político?* Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas.

Sferza, Serenella (2002) 'Party Organization and Party Performance: The Case of the French Socialist Party' in Richard Gunther, José Ramón Montero and Juan Linz (eds.), *Political Parties. Old Concepts and New Challenges*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 166–191.

Zirakzadeh, Cyrus Ernesto (1991) *A Rebellious People*. Reno: University of Nevada Press.

Margarita Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro

The Bloque Nacionalista Galego

6.1. Introduction

Some scholars have defined autonomist parties – as well as green and radical right parties – as 'niche' parties (Meguid 2005; Adams *et al.* 2006). Niche parties exhibit three main characteristics: the absence of traditional politics, the novelty of the issues they espouse, and the politicisation of a restricted set of issues in electoral competition (Meguid 2005: 347–348). Although appealing, this categorisation is of limited utility for understanding autonomist parties. Some of these parties, for example, can be considered as mainstream parties, or as 'intrinsically catch-all parties' in the politicisation of issues and competitive dynamics (De Winter 1998: 223). Whether autonomist parties can be treated as 'niche' or 'mainstream' parties in their lifespan also depends on context and political opportunity structures. Many autonomist parties alternate between being niche and mainstream dynamics. For example, autonomist parties can behave as mainstream parties at the regional level of representation while they retain characteristics of niche parties at other levels of representation. Institutionalisation and 'normalisation' in party systems also involves many challenges and trade-offs. Some autonomist parties have been electorally very successful, and have managed to cross the thresholds of representation and relevance. However, achieving other goals, such as passing the threshold of government, may be more difficult, and may have significant implications for internal party dynamics.

The Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG) is an interesting case for examining some of the tensions autonomist parties experience between being 'niche' and 'mainstream' parties at different stages of development and at different territorial levels. The BNG evolved from being a marginal anti-system force in the early 1980s to being a moderate coalition partner in the Galician government more than two decades later. Over a near thirty-year period, the BNG followed a linear trajectory that distanced the party from its ideological and organisational origins and gradually changed party internal dynamics and goals. The aim of this chapter is to examine this trajectory from marginality to party consolidation and eventually government, and to explain why and how the BNG evolved from its birth in 1982 to the present.

6.2. The lifespan of the BNG (1982–2010)

The BNG was established in 1982. As illustrated in Table 6.1, a linear path of electoral expansion was experienced in regional, state and European elections in the 1980s and 1990s (although the best electoral results have always been obtained at the regional level). Since 1999, however, the BNG

nap new academic press

has declined in its electoral performance; this decline has been evident at all three territorial levels, but has been more pronounced in regional and European elections than in state elections.

Table 6.1. *The BNG's electoral results in regional, state and European elections, 1985-2010 (% of vote in Galicia)*

	Regional	State	European
1985	4.2		
1986		2.1	
1987			3.7
1989	8.0	3.6	4.2
1993	18.5	8.1	
1994			11.5
1996		13.0	
1997	25.1		
1999			22.3
2000		18.8	
2001	23.0		
2004		11.4	12.4
2005	18.9		
2008		11.5	
2009	16.4		9.08

However, this pattern of electoral performance alone does not say much about the party's different stages of development. Over the period 1982-2010, the BNG passed all of the different thresholds specified in the Introduction to this volume, although success was not spread equally across all territorial levels. Table 2 summarises the main thresholds crossed by the BNG, as well as the timing and sequence in which they were achieved.

Table 6.2. *The lifespan of the BNG*

a) Regional level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1982		BNG				
1985			BNG			
1997					BNG	
2005						BNG
2009					BNG	

b) State level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1986		BNG				
1996-2010			BNG			

b) European level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1987		BNG				
1999			BNG			
2004		BNG				
2009			BNG			

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

The contrast in the different passing of thresholds at the regional, state, and European levels is striking. Whilst the regional level of representation was achieved in 1985 when Xosé Manuel Beiras, the BNG's leader, was elected to the Galician parliament, it took more than a decade to secure representation at the state level. This was achieved in the 1996 general election, when the BNG obtained two seats in the Spanish Congress. Representation at the state level has been maintained since then. In 2000 the BNG managed to obtain three seats, although this declined to two in 2004; the BNG's representatives form part of a mixed parliamentary group with other autonomist parties. At the European level, the BNG's difficulties in crossing the threshold of representation have been more pronounced. This level was the last one to be crossed, in 1999. The party had one Member of the European Parliament during the period 1999-2004, but failed to retain this seat in the 2004 European election. In the 2009 European election, the

nap new academic press

BNG formed party of the coalition *Europa de los Pueblos*.[1] The list obtained one seat, to be shared between the parties on a rotation basis (giving the BNG's Ana Miranda a seat within the European Parliament for a proportion of the parliamentary legislature). In summary, it is only at the regional level that the party has achieved all thresholds, with this being achieved with the crossing of the thresholds of relevance and then governance in 2005.

One possible explanation for the differential lifespan pattern of the BNG at different territorial levels is that, for many autonomist parties, the state and European arenas are of secondary importance and therefore European elections and state elections are second-order in nature (Reif and Schmitt 1980). However, other factors have arguably been more important in shaping this differential pattern of threshold-crossing. These include internal factors, such as the BNG's inward-looking strategy during its early years, as well as external factors such as institutional and electoral constraints, and the party-competitive context.

The BNG's tardiness in passing the threshold of representation at the state and European levels (in comparison to the regional level) was in part a consequence of the BNG's strategic priorities during its early years. The party focused exclusively on Galician issues and Galician politics. This inward looking strategy was abandoned in the 1990s, and the party sought to secure a presence at other territorial levels (although other difficulties in passing the thresholds of representation, relevance and governance at the state and European level appeared, as is noted below). The result of the BNG's early strategic focus was that the expansion of the BNG clearly lagged behind at the state and European levels.

The BNG's difficulties in securing representation at the state level can also be linked to the nature of the electoral system in place, and specific patterns of voting behaviour in state and regional elections. Firstly, the difference in district magnitude between state and regional elections means there is greater proportionality between votes and seats in regional elections (Lago and Lago 2006). This makes obtaining seats in regional elections easier than in general elections.[2] Secondly, the existence of a multilevel political system in Spain has induced different patterns of electoral competition and strategic voting. For example, there is evidence of dual-voting whereby voters prefer autonomist parties in regional elections and state-wide parties in general elections (Montero and Font 1991; Riba 2000, Fraile and Pérez-Nievas 2000; Pallarés and Keating 2003). Although the

---

[1]   The other parties on the list included Aralar, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), Eusko Alkartasuna (EA), Chunta Aragonesista (ChA) and Los Verdes.

[2]   In particular, effective electoral thresholds in two Galician provinces, Lugo and Ourense, in state elections are much higher (12%) than in autonomous elections (5%) (Lago and Lago 2006: 18-20).

evidence is scant, some studies have argued that in Galicia, dual-voting takes place between the BNG and the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) (Rivera Otero *et al.* 1998: 295–297). Multilevel politics also affects electoral participation with the emergence of 'differential abstention', with lower levels of voter participation in autonomous elections (Riera 2007). In Galicia, although differential abstention is not as salient as in Catalonia (especially the Partido Socialista de Galicia (PSdeG) or the Basque Country, it nevertheless has an impact on the vote for state-wide parties who are the most de-mobilised in regional elections but mobilised in state elections (Lago 2000: 91). From the BNG's perspective, these patterns of voting behaviour facilitate the winning of seats at the regional level.

At the European level, in addition to the party's disinterest in European affairs for strategic reasons during its early years (see above), the negative attitude of the BNG towards the EU and the nature of the electoral system are additional factors that have constrained the party's ability to elect MEPs. The BNG has long espoused a Eurosceptic position, and even though its position on EU matters has softened since the 1990s (becoming an example of soft Euroscepticism) the European level of representation has played a minor role in BNG politics (Llamazares, Gómez-Reino and Ramiro 2008; Elias 2008). In terms of competing in European elections, in Spain the common problem faced by autonomist parties is that the size of the district (a single state-wide constituency) forces parties to form coalitions in order to obtain representation. For this reason, autonomist parties have in the past only obtained very limited representation in the European Parliament, usually between one and three of the Spanish seats.[3] Prior to 2004, the BNG had eschewed such coalitions due to internal disagreements as to which autonomist parties were the most suitable partners for electoral co-operation.[4] In the 2004 European election, in contrast, the BNG joined the Catalan Convergència i Unió (CiU) and the Basque Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV) as part of the coalition *Galeuscat* (see below). This was a decision forced upon the party by the specific conditions in which that election took place. Not only did the party's declining electoral fortunes in prior regional and state elections suggest that it would be unable to secure representation by going it alone, but the number of seats in the European Parliament assigned to Spain had also been reduced from 64 to 54 as a result of enlargement to central and

---

[3] Exceptionally in the 1999 European elections, the total number of autonomist MEPs reached seven.

[4] Internal debates considered alternative coalitions with other autonomist parties in Spain; whilst some groups preferred to co-operate with governing autonomist parties, others favoured left-nationalist coalitions with parties such as the Basque Herri Batasuna (HB), ERC or EA. The flexibility of the BNG's policy on alliances was most recently in evidence at the 2009 European election, with the party abandoning the Galeuscat list in favour of Europa de los Pueblos.

nap new academic press

eastern Europe. Consequently, it was even more difficult for autonomist parties to win seats. In the event, and despite its participation in the *Galeuscat* coalition, the BNG did not pass the threshold of representation in 2004. As noted above, the BNG's participation in the *Europa de los Pueblos* list for the 2009 European election partly recuperated this representation although with a completetly different coalition of autonomist parties.

Having finally crossed the threshold of representation at the state and European levels in 1996 and 1999 respectively, the BNG has not, however, passed the thresholds of relevance and governance at these territorial levels for the following reasons. At the state level, the BNG has never had coalition or blackmail potential because of its small numerical presence within this arena and because, until 2005, it had not been a party of government at the regional level. In this respect, the BNG differed significantly from autonomist parties from Spain's other so-called historical nationalities, such as the PNV and CiU; these two parties were in government in their respective autonomous communities, and with a greater numerical presence in the Spanish Congress of Deputies, yielded coalition and blackmail potential when state-wide parties lacked the majorities to govern alone (see the chapters by Pérez-Nievas, and Barrio and Barberà, this volume). Instead, from 1996 onwards the BNG's representatives in the Congress of Deputies performed a rather expressive role; the party denounced the negative influence of the Spanish state in Galicia, protested against the economic under-development of the region, and defended Galician interests *vis-à-vis* the central government. The BNG sought to improve its institutional and political status within this arena by forming part of *Galeuscat,* an alliance of nationalist parties in the historical nations of the Spanish state. On 16 July 1998, the BNG, together with the PNV and CiU, signed the *Declaración de Barcelona,* a common political agenda to transform Spain into a multinational, multicultural and multilingual state. The Declaration was considered by the BNG to be a major step in enhancing its policy influence at the state level, not least due to the association with the more relevant PNV and the CiU. The Declaration thus provided a basis for the co-ordination of the BNG's electoral, political and institutional strategies with these parties. In practice, however, the agreement failed to meet the BNG's expectations, and cooperation between the signatories proved difficult. On the one hand, the BNG represented a minor partner in the alliance given the close ties and the strength exhibited by the PNV and CiU at the state level. On the other hand, some issues such as culture (including linguistic issues) or sports were easier to advance than more political agendas on territorial autonomy. The result for the BNG was that *Galesucat* played a symbolic role without a clear policy impact at the state level.

At the European level, the BNG has sought to increase its relevance by being a member of European Free Alliance (EFA) (since 1994) and by sit-

nap new academic press

ting with the EFA-Green group within the European Parliament during the period 1999-2004, and since 2009. This period of European representation contributed to taming the BNG's anti-Europeanism. However, it is impossible to isolate specific instances of the party's political or policy relevance in this arena.

In summary, whilst the state and European levels became increasingly important for the BNG from the mid 1990s onwards, the extent to which the party has been able to influence the political agenda at these levels has been very limited. The most important territorial level in the BNG's life-span has undoubtedly been the regional one, and it is to consider the party's evolution in this arena that this chapter now turns.

Prior to the creation of the BNG in 1982, there were several attempts to organise Galician autonomist parties after Spain's transition to democracy. Two Galician autonomist parties – the Bloque Nacional-Popular Galego (BN-PG) and Esquerda Galega (EG) secured representation in the first regional election held in Galicia in 1981 (see table 6.3). Unlike Basque and Catalan autonomist parties, however, whose electoral results gave them representation and access to government at the regional level, Galician autonomist parties remained marginal during the first years of democratic politics in Spain (Máiz 1996; Beramendi and Nuñez Seixas 1996). One of the main causes of their electoral and institutional marginality was the fragmentation and heterogeneity of the Galician nationalist movement (Máiz 1996); along with the BN-PG and EG, the 1981 elections were also contested by the two other nationalist parties, namely CoaliciónGalega (CG)[5] and the Partido Galeguista (PG).

The BNG was established as a further attempt at consolidating the Galician nationalist movement, and inherited the ideological and organisational features of the Unión Popular Galega (UPG), a Marxist-Leninist party established during the 1960s. The BNG was committed to electoral competition from the outset, and did not experience any difficulties in passing the threshold of authorisation for electoral participation. As noted above, the party crossed the threshold of representation in the first regional elections in which it competed in 1985.

---

[5] CG was a Conservative platform launched in 1983 as a result of a merging of different forces after the dissolution of the state-wide Unión de Centro Democrático (UCD). Some scholars considered CG a regionalist, rather than a nationalist party (for example Beramendi and Núñez Seixas 1996: 274).

nap new academic press

Table 6.3. *The electoral performance of Galician nationalist parties in regional elections (% of votes and, in parentheses, n. of seats)*

	CG	BN-PG	BNG	EG	PG
1981	-	6.3 (3)	-	3.4 (1)	3.3 (0)
1985	12.9 (11)	-	4.1 (1)	5.7 (3)	4.2 (1)
1989	3.6 (2)	-	8.0 (5)	3.8 (2)	1.4 (0)
1993	0.4 (0)	-	18.6 (13)	-	-
1997	-	-	24.8 (18)	-	-
2001	-	-	22.6 (17)	-	-
2005	-	-	18.8 (13)	-	-
2009	-	-	16.4 (12)	-	-

Source: Xunta de Galicia.

However, several other Galician autonomist parties also crossed the threshold of representation during the 1980s (see table 6.3); in 1985 these parties obtained better results than the BNG. By the 1989 elections, however, the BNG had become the dominant autonomist party in terms of votes and seats. If the BNG formally crossed the threshold of representation (in terms of securing institutional representation) in 1985, in 1989 the party crossed the threshold of representation in a second sense, namely by becoming the reference point within Galician nationalism. This achievement paved the way for the consolidation of the nationalist movement during the period 1989-1994, of which more is said below. By 1993, however, the BNG had already crossed the threshold of representation in a third and final sense, that is being the only autonomist party with representation in the Galician Parliament (with other parties having failed to secure parliamentary seats).

These three stages in the development of the BNG's representation at the regional level were facilitating conditions for the party's electoral growth throughout the 1990s, and enabled it to cross the thresholds of relevance and governance. Securing relevance within a political arena is dependent on changes in the political opportunity structure that give blackmail or coalition potential. Sartori's (1976) definition of relevance (see also the Introduction to this volume) requires an open political opportunity structure in any party system. This was not present in Galicia between 1989 and 2005, since the Partido Popular de Galicia (PPdeG) enjoyed absolute majorities within the parliament between 1989 and 2001, and had a governing majority until 2005. The BNG did not, therefore, have relevance within the Galician political arena during this twelve-year period. Nevertheless, the fact that the BNG became the second largest party in Galicia in

terms of votes and seats in 1997 (overtaking the PSdeG), meant that it was considered as a potential future coalition partner for both state-wide parties (PPdeG and PSdeG).

In a broader sense, relevance can also be understood as achieving political influence in the Galician party system in terms of patterns of political competition and party agendas. The PSdeG suffered the most for the increasing competition from the BNG (Jiménez Sánchez 2003: 310). In terms of the PSdeG's political programme, the increasing electoral success of the BNG contributed at the end of the 1990s to the definition of an autonomist agenda for the first time. The influence on the PPdeG is less clear since its *rexionalismo* had already been accentuated under the leadership of Manuel Fraga (Lagares Díez 2003). Nevertheless, by the end of the 1990s the BNG was considered to be a potential ally or competitor of the two main parties in Galician politics.

Finally, the BNG crossed the threshold of governance in 2005 with the formation of a coalition government with the PSdG. The increasing electoral strength of the BNG was not the main factor in explaining the party's entry into government; indeed, electoral stagnation and decline had characterised the party's performance in all elections since 2001. In 2005, the BNG's representation in the Galician parliament actually decreased from 17 to 13 seats. However, changes in the political opportunity structure played a crucial role in providing the BNG with a pivotal position in the Galician party system. The PPdeG's loss of its absolute majority created an opportunity for its opponents to put an end to its long hold on power (in government since 1989) (Lago 2004: 1). The existence of a left-autonomist coalition government in Catalonia between the Partido de los Socialistas de Cataluña (PSC) and ERC provided a precedent for a PSdeG-BNG government.

Crossing the threshold of government (2005-2009) marked the highpoint in the BNG's lifespan. The BNG was given the posts of Vice-President and four ministries in the new government.[6] One of the agreements forming the basis of the coalition deal was that to write a new Statue of Autonomy for Galicia, which would enhance the autonomous community's level of self-government and recognise the 'national character' of Galicia.

The BNG crossed back over the threshold of government with the 2009 autonomous election when the PPdeG regained its an absolute majority to govern alone. This developed brought to an end the BNG's lifespan trajectory of crossing different thresholds sequentially at the regional level, from declaration in 1982 to governance in 2005.

---

[6]   These included: culture; rural development; industry, trade and innovation; and housing.

6.3. Changes in party organisation

Crossing different thresholds at different territorial levels has had a direct impact on the BNG's organisation. More specifically, the pressures on the BNG to change its internal organisational structures increased as successive thresholds were crossed (see table 6.4). However, these pressures for change have varied depending on the territorial level in question.

Table 6.4. *Pressure for organisational change upon crossing thresholds*

	Regional level	State level	European level
V	**Strong**		
	- New leadership		
	- Weakening of internal pluralism		
	- Elimination of *modeloasambleario*		
IV-B	**Medium**		
IV-A			
III	**Medium**		
	- Expansion of organisation		
	- Expansion of membership		
	- Functional and territorial division		
	- Representation of parties and *colectivos*		
I & II	**Weak**		
	- Organisational structure inherited from the BNG's predecessors		

The last section showed how the state and European levels of representation clearly lagged behind the regional level in the BNG's lifespan. Similarly, organisational change can be mostly attributed to pressures emanating from the regional level. At the state and European levels, crossing the threshold of representation led the party to define alliances with other autonomist parties in Spain and formulate new electoral and political strategies. In contrast, at the regional level the pressures of crossing the threshold of representation (in the three stages outlined above) led to more substantial organisational changes over time. Crossing the thresholds of relevance and government at the regional level prompted the BNG to undertake additional organisational reform.

Crossing the thresholds of declaration and authorisation in 1982 led to the creation of a new party organisation that inherited the weak organisati-

nap new academic press

onal resources of the parties that participated in the BNG's foundation (the Partido Socialista Galego (PSG) and especially the UPG) (Vilas Nogueira and FernándezBaz 2004: 203-205). First, the BNG was conceptualised as a party-front, a platform for mobilisation rather than an institutionalised organisation. During the mid 1980s, the BNG shifted between a strategy of an anti-system front based on direct mobilisation and a strategy of participation and institutionalisation. This dilemma was resolved in 1985 when the BNG formally recognised the Spanish Constitution and the Galician Statue of Autonomy, and committed itself to participation within these institutional frameworks. Second, the BNG also inherited from its predecessors a *modelo asambleario*, a system of direct voting by members in party assemblies, both at the local and regional level. This model became a defining feature of the BNG's organisational identity and it was preserved during the expansion and consolidation of the organisation over the subsequent two decades. Pressures to introduce organisational changes after passing the thresholds of declaration and authorisation in 1982 can thus be defined as weak, since the BNG inherited practices and resources from past and failed political experiences in Galician nationalism.

However, crossing the threshold of representation in 1985 led to a new pressure to institutionalise the party-front organisation. The BNG's national assemblies in 1985 and 1987 respectively sought to introduce a clear functional and territorial division of labour between party units (Vilas Nogueiraand FernándezBaz 2004). The pressure to strengthen the party organisation increased as a result of the BNG's electoral expansion from 1989 onwards. However, during the period that goes from crossing the threshold of representation (1985) to reaching some political relevance and influence in the Galician party system (1997) pressures for organisational change worked in different ways. Crossing the threshold of representation in the first sense of achieving representation in the Galician parliament in 1985 (see above) had a direct impact on efforts to consolidate the party's organisational structure, at first formally during the 1980s and then in practice during the 1990s. There was a recognised need to expand the organisation (in terms of structures and members) and to create a centralised organisation at the national (Galician) level.

Becoming the largest autonomist political force in Galician politics after the 1989 regional election prompted the BNG to try and co-ordinate and consolidate nationalist forces (Lago 2004; Gómez-Reino 2006). Whilst the 1980s were characterised by competition between different autonomist parties, the BNG had successfully incorporated these different groups into its organisation by 1994. Table 6.5 shows the year of incorporation of different groups into the BNG, the party family to which each belongs, their

nap new academic press

organisational origins, leadership and approximate membership.[7] The consolidation process involved the incorporation of pre-existing parties (PNG-PG, Inzar) but also the creation of new factions within the BNG, such as Esquerda Nacionalista (EN) (Gómez-Reino 2006). This process concluded with the incorporation of Unidade Galega (UG) in 1994. By that point, only the most radical and marginal nationalist groups remained outside the BNG. The BNG's internal expansion saw it consolidated as a single organisation whilst at the same time recognising its internal plural character through guaranteeing representation to different parties and *colectivos* (Gómez-Reino 2006).[8]

The coordination of Galician autonomist parties was the result of the interaction of exogenous an endogenous factors. With regard to the former, in the configuration of the Galician party system there were the increasing strength of the BNG *vis-à-vis* its autonomist competitors, and a new legal threshold for achieving representation at the regional level introduced in 1992 (from 3% to 5% of valid votes) (Lago and Lago 2006: 20) created new incentives for both the BNG and other autonomist forces to view consolidation favourably. The BNG used its increasing electoral strength to negotiate the incorporation of other autonomist parties into its own organisation. The specific internal configuration of the BNG as a party front was also, however, crucial in facilitating this consolidation process, allowing different groups to retain their distinctiveness within the party (Lago 2004; Lago and Lago 2006: 39). The criteria for the formation and integration of different groups within the BNG were defined at the party's national assemblies in 1993 and 1995, with different groups given two seats each on the party's National Counciland being represented on the BNG's electoral lists (Lago 2004: 53). It should be noted, however, that the real weight and political power of each of these *colectivos* within the BNG varied, with the UPG being the most dominant 'current' (Barreiro Rivas 2003; Lago 2004). Nevertheless, the formal recognition of the presence of different groups was an important move to try and maintain an internal balance between the different forces and counteract the power of the UPG within the organisation (Barreiro Rivas 2003; Lago 2004).

---

[7]   The accuracy of membership estimates are questionable, due to the absence of information. According to other sources, the BNG's total party membership was 11,915 in 2002 (Barreiro Rivas 2003).

[8]   There were also loses during this process. The PSG abandoned the BNG in 1982, although it left a small faction within the front named Colectivo Socialista. In 1985, disagreements over strategies led to the formation, within the BNG, of a new organisation, the Partido Comunista de Liberación Nacional; however this group also withdrew from the party in 1987 after they supported HB in the European elections (Beramendi and Nuñez Seixas 1996: 281).

Table 6.5. *The BNG's internal composition*

Party	Year of inclusion	Party family	Origins	Leadership	Membership
UPG	1982	Communist	Asamblea Nacional-Popular Galega (AN-PG), BN-PG	P. Rodríguez	1000
Colectivo Socialista	1982	Socialist	PSG	F. Trigo	100+ (in 1975)
PNG-PG	1991	Conservative Nationalist	Partido Galeguista (PG), Coalición Galega (CG), Unidade Galega (UG)	Rodríguez Peña	130 (in 2000)
Esquerda Nacionalista	1992	Socialist	Independents BNG	A. R.Feixoo	300
Inzar	1993	Post-Communist	Movimiento Comunista (MC), Liga Comunista Revoluciona-ria (LCR)	X. Vega	100
UG	1994	Left Nationalist	Partido Socialista Galego-Esquerda Galega (PSG-EG), CG	C. Nogueira	130

Source: Gómez-Reino 2006: 186.

This organisational consolidation enabled the BNG to become the exclusive voice of Galician nationalism. This achievement – the third sense in which the BNG crossed the threshold of representation, as noted above – further contributed to the consolidation of the party organisation. It led directly to the definition of the BNG's organisational model and final structure in the party's 1995 National Assembly. The BNG was confirmed as a plural organisation characterised by its *modelo asambleario* and with territorial representation across the entire region.

nap new academic press

The crossing of the threshold of relevance (in the sense of exerting political influence) had a less clear impact on party organisational change. The position achieved in 1997 as the second political force in Galicia led the BNG to adopt new political programmes and strategies at the regional, state and European levels. In this period, organisational change was less of a priority, given that a party model had already been established by the mid 1990s, as noted above. However, the threat of loosing this position within the party system in 2001 – in the regional election of that year, the BNG polled only marginally more votes that the PSdeG,[9] even though both parties won an equal number of parliamentary seats – was the catalyst for a series of internal organisational transformations. Electoral stagnation led to reforms of a very different nature to those witnessed in previous years; moreover, the nature of internal reform was also considerably more conflictual that had previously been the case. This conflict would pose a serious threat to the BNG's stability, and as such, is worth considering in greater detail.

Since 1982, the BNG's leader had been Xosé Manuel Beiras, a charismatic Professor of Economics who had been active in Galician nationalist politics since the 1960s. However, his role within the BNG had always been limited to that of *portavoz nacional* (national spokesperson); Beiras never exercised control over the BNG's internal organisation, which was largely under the sway of the UPG (as the largest party within the BNG). He became a member of the Galician parliament in 1985 and remained there until 2005, when he was excluded from the BNG's list of candidates for that year's regional election. In his role as spokesperson, Beiras provided stability and continuity during a period of organisational and ideological change in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the threat of losing electoral share and political relevance in Galician politics post-2001 was interpreted within the BNG (in particular by the UPG) as a sign that an electoral and political ceiling had been reached under his leadership. Thus, in its 2002 National Assembly, the BNG's leadership structure was amended and a separation of executive and electoral roles established. The result was to create two distinct posts, that of *portavoz nacional* and the *coordinador da Executiva* (executive co-ordinator), roles taken by Beiras and Anxo Quintana respectively. This was a first step in the replacement of Beiras as the leader of the BNG. In its following assembly in November 2003, Beiras was substituted as both party candidate for the Presidency of the Xunta de Galicia (Galician parliament) and *portavoz nacional*. He was replaced in the latter role by Anxo Quintana. Finally, in 2003 Anxo Quintana became

---

[9]   The BNG obtained a total of 346,430 and the PSdeG 334,819 votes.

nap new academic press

both presidential candidate and BNG spokesperson, while Beiras became President of the party.[10]

Anxo Quintana, the newly elected party leader, was a young BNG ex-mayor and senator, an independent within the party but who managed to obtain the crucial support of the UPG. The process by which he was appointed also saw the replacement of the old BNG elite in the party's electoral lists for the 2005 regional election, in the name of 'renewal and parity'. It is worth noting that of the thirteen representatives elected to the Galician parliament that year, all apart from two were new. A new generation also took up places on the BNG's executive committee, with the only two historical leaders remaining being Beiras and Francisco Rodriguez (leader of the UPG).

In sum, the threat of losing influence within Galician politics induced a fundamental generational replacement in the BNG's leadership elite between 2001 and 2005. This threat also, however, put pressure on the party to reduce the role of the different parties and *colectivos* within the organisation. The BNG's party-front model was viewed as increasingly burdensome and inefficient by some within the party. The 2002 National Assembly reduced each group's number of representatives on the BNG's National Council from 2 to 1, thus undermining the previous balance of power within the organisation. In the 2003 National Assembly, some party leaders demanded the merger of the different groups and *colectivos*. It also became clear that many of the older parties within the BNG were in crisis. For example, both EN and UG lost their historical leaders, Beiras and CamiloNogueira respectively. Beiras and a small number of his supporters abandoned their own organisation (EN) to cooperate with the UPG as the 'Beiras independents'. When some members of UG failed to support their leader, Nogueira, as Presidential candidate for the Galician parliament, Nogueira and his backers also left their party. The decline of these older parties coincided with a shift in the balance of power in favour of 'independents' within the BNG (individuals not affiliated to any of the BNG's groups or *colectivos*). It is estimated that these represent approximately 75% of party membership (Barreiro Rivas 2003; Vilas Nogueira and Fernández Baz 2004). From 2000 onwards, these individuals, under the leadership of Roberto Mera, demanded a greater role in the BNG's internal decision-making, not least in order to remedy a situation whereby a minority of members (as represented by different groups and *colectivos*) wield authority over the majority. These independents demanded representation within the party's decision-making fora as a distinct current within the organisation.[11]

---

[10] This role was created especially to accommodate Beiras in the party executive; he subsequently resigned from the post on 11 April 2005.

[11] In the 2005 National Assembly, although a list of independent candidates did not receive sufficient votes to be represented on the BNG's executive committee, Anxo Quintana

nap new academic press

Crossing the threshold of government in 2005 created further pressure to marginalise internal parties and *colectivos*. Moreover, the 2006 National Assembly modified the *modelo asambleario* that had characterised the BNG since its creation, replacing it with a system of delegate representation. This proposal, put forward by the party's leader, Anzo Quintana, was justified by the need to make the BNG a more effective and modern party organisation. The vote to maintain the *modelo asambleario* – a proposal advanced by Beiras – was defeated with 1,167 votes against, 803 in favour, and 39 abstentions.

The pressures that arose from electoral stalemate post-2001 and government incumbency from 2005 to 2009 thus undermined some of the distinctive features of the BNG's organisation in a relatively short period of time. The pressures to simplify and 'normalise' party internal dynamics predated participation in government, but were exacerbated when the BNG assumed this new role. Crossing this threshold also had the effect of shifting the internal balance of power away from the 'party on the ground', towards the 'party in central office' and the 'party in public office'. However, it should be noted that the latter two 'faces' of the party organisation also suffered from disagreements on policy issues and public appointments during the BNG's time in government. One of the messages articulated during the 2006 National Assembly was the need to improve the relationship between the party in central office and the party in government in light of criticisms of the latter's (lack of) progress in implementing the BNG's programme.

As noted above, the BNG failed to retain its governmental status after the 2009 regional election. This prompted another process of leadership renewal, initiated at a specially convened National Assembly in that same year. Two alternative lists were presented to fill the posts of *portavoz nacional* and members of the executive committee, namely Alternativa pola Unidade (headed by Guillerme Vázquez) and Máis BNG (headed by Carlos Aymerich). Guillerme Vázquez became the BNG's new *portavoz nacional* having won 55% of the votes cast by the Assembly's delegates.[12] These lists represented new groups that have been formed within the BNG to compete for a say in internal decision-making; they represent a revised version of one of the most distinctive organisational features of the BNG in the past. At the time of writing, the struggle between them to define the BNG's future strategy and direction is on-going.

To summarise, organisational change has taken the form of a smooth and slow adaptation of party internal dynamics to the environment over

---

took the decision to provide representation nevertheless as of September 2005.

[12]   There were initially four lists presented; Beiras's Incontro Irmandiño was in the end withdrawn, whilst the other, Máis Alá, was included in that put forward by Alternativa pola Unidade.

two decades, culminating in more recent attempts at 'normalising' the party's internal structures. Crossing the threshold of representation (in the three steps defined above) saw the BNG gain in organisational complexity and magnitude during the 1990s, consolidating its different territorial levels of the organisation. During this time, the distribution of power within the party clearly favoured party members who had a direct voice within the National Assembly, and the different groups and *colectivos* who had guaranteed representation on the BNG's executive organs. In this respect, crossing the threshold of representation reinforced the plural character of the BNG. However, these organisational features became a liability as the BNG leadership sought to respond to the electoral ceiling reached in 2001. Electoral decline constituted an external shock that altered organisational priorities; efforts to adapt the BNG's decision-making structures were accelerated after becoming a party of regional government in 2005. These reforms undermined the BNG's historic leadership, the representation of the different currents within the party, and the distinctive party-front model. Whilst failing to regain its governmental status in 2009 has seen the replacement of the BNG's leadership, it remains to be seen whether this latest stage in the BNG's lifespan will also have new organisational implications.

6.4. Changes in party goals and the BNG's policy impact

The BNG's lifespan can be described as a dynamic process in which some party goals were achieved sequentially. For a long period (1989-2005) all three goals (policy, vote and office) were compatible, since the political opportunity structure in the Galician party system was closed and the trade-offs between goals were minimal. The BNG thus avoided what Müller and Strøm (1999: 10) refer to as the "difficult, painful and consequential choices" often associated with goal-pursuit. It is only more recently that the BNG has experienced some of the dilemmas associated with pursuing different goals (see the Introduction to this volume). The general trend of the BNG's goals can be described as one whereby the party progressively relegates its policy ambitions (territorial reform), giving priority instead to vote-maximisation and gaining government office. However, it is also the case that the BNG pursued different goals at different levels, and at different times; there is thus a clear multi-level dimension to the definition and achievement of party goals.

At the state and European levels, where the BNG has only crossed the thresholds of declaration, authorisation and representation (see table 6.2 above), goal change has been less evident. During the 1980s, goals at both territorial levels were defined by policy objectives: the BNG sought to denounce Galicia's situation as a backward region in Spain and proclaim

nap new academic press

its status as a nation without a state in Europe. As noted above, however, the BNG's abandonment of its inward-looking strategy during the 1990s saw securing representation at the state and European levels become important; vote-maximisation thus became a priority. Particularly at the state level from 1996 onwards, the BNG's presence in the Congress of Deputies was a useful platform for defending Galician interests. Gaining representation within the European Parliament served a similar strategic purpose. However, as noted above, the party's limited numerical presence in both arenas, and especially within the Congress of Deputies, has constrained its ability to push for territorial reform. In this respect, the BNG has been unable to exert policy influence at the state-level in the same way as its more successful Catalan and Basque counterparts. The party's policy impact in this arena has thus been limited.

At the regional level, goal-pursuit has evolved from policy-seeking to office-seeking. Table 6.6 specifies the BNG's goal priorities in more detail, and classifies the importance of policy, electoral and office goals as 'high', 'moderate' and 'low' following Müller and Strøm (1999: 284). Crossing the thresholds of declaration and authorisation in its first years of existence did not alter the BNG's prioritisation of policy goals, namely greater political autonomy for Galicia. In the first formulation of the party's Political Principles in 1982, Galicia was defined as a nation with the right to self-determination. The party espoused an uncompromising defence of Galician self-government; it adopted an anti-system strategy that refused to recognise either the Spanish Constitution or the Galician Statute of Autonomy approved in 1981.

Table 6.6. *The BNG's pursuit of goals at the regional level*

Period	Policy Pursuit	Office Pursuit	Vote Pursuit
1982-1985	High	Low	Low
1986-1990	High	Low	Moderate
1991-1995	Moderate	Moderate	High
1996-2000	Moderate	High	High
2001-2005	Moderate	High	Moderate
2006-	Moderate	High	Moderate

Yet the policy goal of territorial autonomy was redefined as the party crossed different thresholds. First, policy priorities were subordinated to vote-seeking goals. In 1985, the BNG abandoned its anti-system strategy in favour of using the newly established institutional channels in Galicia to advance party goals. From 1989 onwards, the BNG also moderated its nationalist rhetoric in order to re-position itself closer to the centre of the Galician political system, as a means of appealing to a broader electorate

(Beramendi and Núñez Seixas 1996; Lago and Máiz 2004: 34). Crossing the three thresholds of representation (see above) thus allowed the BNG to pursue vote-seeking behaviour whilst simultaneously moderating its policy demands (1985-1997). The BNG never formally renounced its original ideological principles, even though the party's programme has departed significantly from them (Beramendi and Nuñez Seixas 1996; Máiz 1996). Towards the end of the 1980s, the BNG defined a new 'Common Project' that sought to integrate the different ideological influences of the parties newly integrated into the organisation. The BNG's original ideology was thus diluted as part of the process of organisational and electoral expansion. In 1997, when the BNG became the second political force in Galicia, the party further moderated its demands for autonomy, calling for institutional recognition of Galicia as a nation within the framework of a Spanish pluri-national state.

Office-seeking objectives also came to the fore in the late 1990s. This goal was achieved in 2005; the agreement between the coalition partners to undertake the reform of the Galician Statue of Autonomy constituted an opportunity for the BNG to achieve the core goal of enhanced autonomy for the region. This task was undertaken following similar efforts in Catalonia, which were successfully concluded in 2006 (see the chapters by Pérez-Nievas, and Barrio and Barberà, this volume). However, the BNG quickly displayed a willingness to be compromise on its territorial demands, for example by not insisting on the recognition of the 'national character' of Galicia in the reformed text. Throughout the negotiations, the BNG continued to assert that none of its positions were fixed and non-negotiable. In spite of this consensus-seeking approach, however, by January 2007 discussions between the three main parties – BNG, PSdeG and PPdeG – were blocked. The responsibility for this – and the ultimate failure of statute reform in Galicia – was attributed to the PPdeG; the BNG thus ultimately failed to deliver on territorial reform. The negotiations nevertheless highlighted the moderate territorial stance put forward by the BNG. There is little desire for independence within Galician nationalism, in contrast to the demands of certain groups in the Basque Country and Catalonia. Rather, the BNG espoused a pragmatic approach to institutional reform, with an emphasis on securing autonomy within the existing constitutional framework and a commitment to reaching a consensual solution through negotiation with state-wide parties. However, the failure to reach agreement on this core issue was cited as one of the reasons for the party's electoral failure in the 2009 regional election (BNG 2009). In this respect, the BNG's policy impact has been limited; the party has also experienced the electoral risks associated with failing to meet key objectives such as statute reform.

nap new academic press

The BNG also, however, used its time in government to pursue a political agenda that went beyond the core business of territorial reform. Since its creation, the BNG has always identified itself as a left-wing party, although the party has gradually abandoned the radical leftist ideas of the 1980s in favour of a more moderate social-democratic ideological profile. In office, the BNG sought to balance these two components of the party's identity: territorial autonomy and social solidarity. The party's emphasis of the latter was, however, arguably at the expense of its territorial ambitions. The BNG pushed for the formulation of equal and fair policies within the Spanish state (for example, demanding infrastructure investments in Galicia), and for improved employment and social services for the elderly and the poor in Galicia. Examining the BNG's policy impact beyond the issue of territorial reform is, however, beyond the scope of this chapter.

In sum, the BNG's lifespan displays, for the most part, a linear trajectory in which the sequence of party goals evolved from an uncompromising policy-seeking stand on self-government to office-seeking behaviour and moderate demands for increased territorial autonomy. Once in office, however, the BNG failed to deliver on territorial reform (due to the failure to reach a consensus with the PPdeG rather than its own reluctance to compromise). Since 2009, the party has been forced to re-focus on renewing its electoral appeal, as a pre-requisite for regaining its governing status. For most of its lifetime, the BNG faced 'soft' rather than 'hard' choices about which goals to pursue; as noted above, the party largely avoided the trade-offs associated with the pursuit of such goals, at least until it crossed the threshold of government. However, even these 'soft' choices had consequences for the party, not least in organisational terms as outlined above.

6.5. Conclusion

The BNG provides an example of a successful autonomist parties that, over a period of almost three decades, moved from electoral marginality to regional government, from niche to mainstream politics at the regional level. Until 2009, the party followed a linear trajectory of threshold-crossing that was facilitated by the party's consolidation as the main autonomist party in Galicia from the mid 1990s onwards. The party's success in terms of votes, at least until 2001, was the reward of a strategy of ideological moderation of autonomist goals and of organisational expansion that saw smaller nationalist parties incorporated into the BNG. The party was also successful in meeting its goal of being a party of government in 2005. Pursuing these vote-maximisation and office goals had a major impact on the party's organisational nature; whilst the BNG's distinctive party-front model was progressively strengthened during the 1980s and 1990s, it was subject to a major overhaul from 2001 onwards once an electoral ceiling had been rea-

ched. The result has been to make the BNG a far more 'normal' party organisation.

Ultimately, however, and in spite of the successes noted above, the BNG has been less successful in achieving its the core policy goal, namely greater self-government for Galicia. The party's limited presence at the state level – for a combination of strategic, electoral and systemic reasons – has limited its ability to influence decision-making within this arena. Moreover, a closed opportunity structure within Galician politics until 2005 constrained the BNG's ability to push for territorial reform. Being in coalition government created a new opportunity in this respect, although the failure to reach cross-party consensus on the scope of new autonomy frustrated the party's territorial ambitions. This failure to deliver on this key policy goal was one factor that contributed to the party's electoral decline in 2009. With the BNG once again consigned to the opposition within Galician politics, the party must re-think its political programme, electoral strategy and organisational identity in order to re-position itself as a party of government that can realise its ambition of greater self-government for Galicia within the framework of a pluri-national Spanish state.

References

Adams, James, Michael Clark, Lawrence Ezrow, and Garrett Glasgow (2006) 'Are Niche Parties Fundamentally Different from Mainstream Parties? The Causes and the Electoral Consequences of Western European Parties' Policy Shifts, 1976–1998', *American Journal of Political Science*, 50: 3, 513–529.

Barreiro Rivas, Xosé Luís (2003) 'Da UPG ao BNG: O proceso organizativo do nacionalismogalego', in: Xosé Manuel Rivera Otero (ed.) *Os Partidos Políticos en Galicia.* Vigo: Edicións Xerais de Galicia, pp. 99–261.

Beramendi, Justo G., and Xosé M. Nuñez Seixas, (1996) *O nacionalismo Galego.* Vigo: Edicions A Nosa Terra.

BNG, (2009) *Co Pobo Cara Adiante!* Santiago de Compostela: BNG.

De Winter, Lieven (1998) 'Conclusion: a Comparative Analysis of the Electoral, Office and Policy Success of Ethnoregionalist Parties', in: Lieven De Winter and Huri Türsan (eds.), *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe*. London: Routledge, pp. 190–235.

Elias, Anwen (2008) *Minority Nationalist Parties and European Integration. A Comparative Study.* London: Routledge.

Fraile, Marta and Santiago Pérez-Nievas (2000) 'Is the Nationalist Vote Really Nationalist? Dual Voting in Catalonia 1980–1990', Instituto Juan March, Working Paper 147/2000.

Gómez-Reino, Marga (2006) 'The Galician BNG from Outcast to Success', in:Lieven De Winter, Marga Gómez-Reino and Peter Lynch (eds.), *Autonomist Parties in Europe: Identity Politics and the Revival of the Territorial Cleavage–Vol. I.* Barcelona: ICPS, pp. 167–196.

Jiménez Sánchez, Fernando (2003) 'O PSdeG-PSOE (1973-2001): un caso de débil institucio-nalización', in:Xosé Manuel Rivera Otero (ed.),*Os partidos políticos en Galicia*. Vigo: Edi-cións Xerais de Galicia, pp. 263–344.

Lagares Díez, Nieves (2003) 'O Partido Popular de Galicia', in: Xosé Manuel Rivera Otero (ed.), *Os partidos políticos en Galicia*. Vigo: Edicións Xerais, pp. 19–98.

Lago, Ignacio (2000) 'Identidades duales y abstención diferencial en las comunidades autónomas: los casos de Cataluña, Galicia y País Vasco', *Dereito,* 9: 2, 83–103.

Lago, Ignacio (2004) 'La coordinación electoral del nacionalismo gallego', *Revista Internacional de Sociología*, 39, 35–61.

Lago, Ignacio and RamónMáiz (2004) 'Le nationalisme galicien: opportunités, mobilisation politique et coordination électorale', *Pôle Sud*, 20, 25–46.

Lago, Ignacio and Santiago Lago (2006) *Vinte e cinco anos de autonomía política en Galicia: mudanzas políticas e económicas*. Santiago de Compostela: Escola Galega de Administra-ción Pública.

Llamazares, Iván, Marga Gómez-Reino and Luis Ramiro, (2008) 'Euroscepticism and Politi-cal Parties in Spain', in: Paul Taggart and Aleks Szcerbiak (eds.), *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 134–151.

Máiz, Ramón (1996) 'Nación de Breogán: Oportunidades políticas y estrategias enmarcado-ras en el movimiento nacionalista gallego (1886–1996)', *Revista de Estudios Políticos,* 92, 33–75.

Meguid, Bonnie (2005) 'Competition Among Unequals. The Role of Mainstream Parties in Niche Party Success', *American Political Science Review*, 99: 3, 347–359.

Montero, José Ramón and Font, Joan (1991) 'El voto dual en Cataluña: lealtad y transferen-cias de voto en las elecciones autonómicas', *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, 73: 7–34.

Müller, Wolfgang, and Kaare Strøm (eds.) (1999) *Policy, Office, or Votes? How Political Par-ties in Western Europe Make Hard Decisions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pallarés, Francesc and Michael Keating (2003) 'Multi-Level Electoral Competition: Regional Elections and Party Systems in Spain', *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 10: 3, 239–255.

Reif, Karl-Heinz and Hermann Schmit (1980) 'Nine Second-Order National Elections. A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results', *European Jour-nal of Political Research*, 8: 1, 3–44.

Riba, Clara (2000) 'Voto dual y abstención diferencial: un estudio sobre el comportamiento electoral en Cataluña', *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 91: 59–88.

Riera, Pedro (2007) 'La participación pendular: abstención diferencial en la España autonó-mica: los casos del País Vasco, Galicia y Cataluña en el ciclo electoral 2005–2006'. Paper presented at the VIII Congreso Español de Ciencia Política y de la Administración, Valencia, 18–20 September.

Rivera Otero, Xosé Manuel, Nieves Lagares Díez, Alfredo Castro Duarte and Isabel Diz Otero (1998) 'Las elecciones autonómicas en Galicia', in: Manuel Alcántara and Antonia Martínez (eds.), *Las elecciones autonómicas en España, 1980–1997*. Madrid: CIS, pp. 285–308.

Sartori, Giovanni (1976) *Parties and Party Systems. A Framework for Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vilas Nogueira, José and Manuel Ángel Fernández Baz (2004) 'El BNG: definición y evolu-ción de su estructura organizativa', *Revista de Estudios Políticos,* 123, 201–222.

nap new academic press

Jordi Argelaguet[1]

Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya

7.1. Introduction

Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) is the oldest party in Catalonia. It was founded in 1931, on the eve of the local elections that led to the proclamation of the Spanish Second Republic. Since then, not only has ERC maintained a constant presence in Catalan political life, but it has also been a central political actor at different times (Sallés 1986; Ivern 1988; Alquézar 2001; Lucas 2004; Argelaguet 2004). In particular during the post-Franco democratic period, ERC has periodically maintained a pivotal position between the moderate nationalist Convergència i Unió (CiU) and the Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (PSC). This resulted in the party becoming a coalition partner in the Catalan government in 2003, a position that it regained in 2006.

And yet, the chapter argues that the party's ability to deliver on its key goal of independence for Catalonia has been limited. Limited presence at the state-level has denied the party the bargaining leverage enjoyed by CiU, whilst the party's coalition potential and participation at the regional level has cost it dearly in terms of its electoral standing and political status. The party's organisational evolution, with the progressive strengthening of the decision-making authority of more radical party members as a consequence of passing different thresholds, has played no small part in constraining the ERC's ability to take advantage of different political opportunities to deliver Catalan self-government. Having outlined and explained the ERC's lifespan, the chapter turns to examine the organisational changes triggered by the need to adapt to new political contexts, and how these in turn have constrained the party's policy success.

7.2. The lifespan of ERC

The ERC's lifespan is summarised in table 7.1. The table also provides details of the key historical periods during which the lifespan of ERC will be analysed.

nap new academic press

Table 7.1. *The lifespan of ERC*

a) Regional level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1932						ERC[3]
— Francoist regime (1939–1975)[1] —						
1980					ERC	
1984						ERC
1988			ERC			
1992				ERC		
1995					ERC	
1999					ERC	
2003						ERC
2006						ERC
2010					ERC	

b) State level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1931						ERC
1933			ERC			
1936						ERC
— Francoist regime (1939–1975)[1] —						
1977			ERC[2]			
1979			ERC			
1982			ERC			
1986			ERC			
1989			ERC			
1993			ERC			
1996			ERC			
2000			ERC			
2004					ERC	
2008				ERC		

nap new academic press

c) European level

	I	II	III
1987			ERC
1989			ERC
1994		ERC	
1999			ERC
2004			ERC
2009			ERC

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

Notes:
[1]   ERC was illegalised during this period.
[2]   ERC made its public reappearance in July 1976, and was legalised in August 1977, after the general election in June of that year.
[3]   Between October 1934 and February 1936, the Catalan autonomous institutions were suspended after a failed attempt to proclaim the "Catalan State within the Spanish Federal Republic" (6 October 1934).

7.2.1. The thresholds of declaration and authorisation

ERC was founded as the result of the merger of several parties and groups on the eve of the local elections of 12 April 1931. In Barcelona, on 17-19 March, various Catalanist and republican parties, groups and personalities gathered for a 'Conference of the Catalan Left', with the aim of organising participation for the forthcoming elections (Alquézar 2001). These organisations, representing approximately 16,000 members, decided to form a single party (ERC), with a single leadership and political programme. The new organisation competed in the elections in coalition with a small Catalan socialist party, the Unió Socialista de Catalunya.

By the end of the Spanish Civil War, ERC had suffered great human losses, including the execution of several of its leaders.[2] The party was illegalised by the Francoist authorities, but it continued to participate in the anti-Francoist resistance. After Franco's death and with the beginning of a transition process towards democracy, ERC ceased to operate as a clandestine movement. In July 1976, a party congress attended by 500 members appointed ERC's leader, Heribert Barrera, as its new General Secretary.

---

[2]   Among of them was Lluís Companys, the President of Catalonia; he was executed on 15 October 1940 after being captured by the German police in France.

The party also declared its intention to participate in the first democratic elections in June 1977.

However, this first required ERC to be legalised. Each political party was required to present its statutes – outlining its internal organisational structures and political goals – to the authorities. The government, if it found any evidence of illegality, could send the documentation to the Supreme Court for a final decision. Once a party had been legalised, only the courts could illegalise it, and only in specific circumstances and after a trial.[3] On 14 March 1977, ERC submitted its statutes to the Ministry of the Interior. However, the government opposed the party's request for legalisation due the inclusion of the word "republican" in its name. The Supreme Court, therefore, refused ERC's legalisation. ERC was thus not authorised to compete directly in the June 1977 elections. Instead, it formed a coalition together with the Partido del Trabajo de España and other minor organisations referring to themselves collectively as Esquerra de Catalunya. ERC passed the threshold of representation in these elections, winning one seat in the Congress of Deputies and two in the Senate. However, it did so without having first passed the threshold of authorisation; the party was eventually legalised on 2 August 1977.

7.2.2. The threshold of representation

ERC first passed the threshold of representation at the local level, very quickly after its creation and with resounding results. In the local elections of April 1931, it was the winning party in Catalonia's main cities. Two days later, its leader, Francesc Macià, proclaimed the Catalan Republic as an integrative part of an Iberian Federation, and he established a provisional Catalan government. On the same day, the provisional government of the Spanish Second Republic decided to negotiate with the new Catalan authorities on how to respond to Macià's unilateral declaration. Three days later, there was an agreement: the new Catalan Republic was transformed into a provisional autonomous government, to be referred to using its historical name, the *Generalitat de Catalunya*.

A few weeks later, the Spanish government called for the election of a new parliament, the main task of which would be to write a constitution that, among other things, would give autonomy to Catalonia. In the June 1931 election, ERC secured 25 of the 54 parliamentary seats contested in Catalonia. When the new constitution was approved (9 December 1931), negotiations on a Catalan Statute of Autonomy begun in the Spanish Par-

---

[3] These procedures are still in place at the time of writing. However, in 2002 the law was modified to change the criteria for the illegalisation of a political party. This was done to illegalise the political branch of the Basque terrorist group, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA).

liament. When the Statute was approved by referendum in September 1932, elections to the newly established *Generalitat* followed soon after. ERC was once more victorious, winning 56 seats out of a total of 85. However, these elections were the first and only ones for this body, due to the outbreak of civil war and the subsequent abolishment of the Catalan institutions by the Francoist authorities. In the two general elections before the Civil War, ERC managed to secure 17 seats (in 1933) and 21 seats (in 1936).[4]

Since the resumption of democratic elections in 1977, ERC has not succeeded in emulating its earlier electoral dominance (see table 7.2). Moreover, the party has experienced a different level of success depending on the type of election; it has achieved its best results in Catalan autonomous elections, followed by local elections, whilst performing worst of all in Spanish general elections. The difference between electoral results during the Second Republic and the post-Franco democratic period is due to four factors. Firstly, ERC emerged from the Francoist period a considerably weaker organisation; it had lost a great deal of its members during the Civil War and the subsequent period of General Franco's rule.[5] Secondly, Catalonia experienced major demographic changes from the 1960s onwards. Between 1960 and 1975, its population increased by 1.77 million people, most of them being immigrants from other parts of the Spanish state (Ajenjo and Blanes 1999). As a result, in 1975, 37% of the Catalan population was born outside Catalonia. These socio-demographic changes had major implications for the scope of the ERC's political appeal, given that its traditional support base was among those born in Catalonia (Equip de Sociologia Electoral 1990). Thirdly, ERC was forced to compete in a very different political context to that which existed during the Second Republic. In particular, the party's political space had been encroached upon by PSC and CiU; given its weak organisation and aging activist base, the party struggled to compete successfully. Fourthly, ERC's fluctuating electoral performance in different types of elections can be explained by the trend of dual voting (Montero and Font 1991) – which boosts ERC's vote in autonomous elections but sees it decline in general elections – and as a consequence of an electoral system for general elections that penalises small parties. In contrast, the electoral system used for autonomous elections

---

[4]   In 1933, the ERC emerged as the second political force behind the moderate nationalist party, the Lliga Catalana (22 seats). In 1936, ERC regained its position as the premier political force in the region; the party formed part of a broad coalition of leftist parties that won 41 seats (58.9% of the Catalan votes), of which 21 belonged to ERC.

[5]   For example, the human cost to Catalonia of the Spanish Civil War was about 135,000 people, approximately 4.5% of its population (between deaths and exile). The significance of these losses was not only quantitative, but also qualitative, in that they affected large swathes of the political and cultural leadership of different Catalan groups and political parties (Risques 1999: 346-347).

nap new academic press

employs larger districts, thus making it easier for ERC to secure representation at this level.

It should also be noted, however, that ERC's electoral performance has fluctuated from election to election as a result of the particular political context at the time. In this sense, the growth of ERC in the early twenty-first century can be attributed to a confluence of different factors: the political performance of CiU with its unpopular governing agreements with the state-wide Partido Popular (PP) (see Barrio and Barberà, this volume); the modification of ERC's message (see below); the presence of a new electorate that has been socialised in a context of stable democracy and territorial autonomy (Tormos 2008); and an increase of support as a reaction to the PP's rule at the state-level (at least until 2004) (Pallarés and Muñoz 2004; Lago and Montero 2004; Tormos 2008).

The ERC's results in European elections are similar to those of other elections over the same period. A proportional electoral system, based on a single state-wide district with closed party lists, compels smaller parties to build coalitions with other actors in order to increase their chances of gaining representation. ERC has crossed the threshold of representation at the supranational thanks to its participation in coalitions with other autonomist parties.[6] Within the European Parliament, it sits as part of the European Free Alliance (EFA) group representing autonomist parties from across Europe.

7.2.3. The threshold of relevance

ERC immediately crossed the threshold of relevance upon its creation in 1931. The party's overwhelming victory in the local elections of that year, as noted above, out it in a position to impose the creation of autonomous Catalan institutions, within which the party subsequently governed. For much of the post-Franco democratic period, however, ERC's ability to exercise relevance within Catalan and Spanish politics had been limited. With its small number of votes and seats (as noted above), and with CiU and the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) governing at the Catalan and Spanish levels respectively with absolute majorities for much of the 1980s and early 1990s, ERC did not have either coalition or blackmail potential.

---

[6]   In the 1987 and 1989 elections, the ERC participated in a coalition with Eusko Alkartasuna (EA) and the Partido Nacionalista Galego, whilst in 1994, it cooperated with EA and Acció Catalana. In 1999, the party ran on a joint list with the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV), EA and Unió Mallorquina. In 2004, it participated alongside EA, Chunta Aragonesista, Partido Socialista Andaluz and other minor regionalist parties, whilst in 2009, a coalition was formed along with the Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG), Aralar, EA and Chunta Aragonesista.

Table 7.2. *ERC's electoral results and representation (1977–2010)*

Year	Type	Votes in Catalonia	% of votes of Catalonia	% of votes of Spain	N. of seats
1977	G	143.954	4.7	0.8	1
1979	G	123.452	4.2	0.7	1
1979	L	103.547	3.9	-	210
1980	C	240.871	8.9	-	14
1982	G	138.118	4.0	0.7	1
1983	L	84.984	2.9	-	155
1984	C	126.943	4.4	-	5
1986	G	84.628	2.7	0.4	0
1987	L	74.700	2.5	-	185
1987	E	112.107	3.7	1.7	1
1988	C	111.647	4.1	-	6
1989	G	84.756	2.7	0.4	0
1989	E	78.408	3.3	1.5	1
1991	L	91.995	3.4	0.5	228
1992	C	210.366	8.0	-	11
1993	G	186.784	5.1	0.8	1
1994	E	141.285	5.5	1.3	0
1995	L	203.053	6.3	0.9	526
1995	C	305.867	9.5	-	13
1996	G	162.545	4.2	0.7	1
1999	L	224.955	7.7	1.1	671
1999	E	174.374	6.1	2.9	2
1999	C	271.173	8.7	-	12
2000	G	190.292	5.6	0.8	1
2003	L	414.549	12.8	1.8	1.278
2003	C	544.324	16.4	-	23
2004	G	638.902	15.9	2.5	8
2004	E	249.757	11.8	2.5	1
2006	C	416.355	14.0	-	21
2007	L	334.923	11.7	1.5	1.580
2008	G	291.532	7.8	1.1	3
2009	E	181.213	9.2	2.5	1
2010	C	219.173	7.0	-	10
2011	L	257.564	9.0	1.1	1.384

Key: E: European elections; G: General elections (*Congreso*); C: Catalan elections; L: Local elections.
Sources: For Spanish and European Elections: *Ministerio del Interior, Gobierno de España*; for Catalan and local Elections: *Departament de Governació i Administració Pública, Generalitat de Catalunya*.

Having said this, there have been periods when ERC, in spite of its small electoral presence, has nevertheless been in a pivotal position between CiU and PSC, with the capacity to determine the composition of regional governments. Whilst CiU had absolute majorities in three of the nine Catalan legislatures since the first autonomous election in 1980 (1984, 1988, and 1992), this was lacking in the remaining six. After three of these elections – 1995, 1999 and 2010 – there were no viable winning coalitions without CiU's participation. In the other years, however, there were other governing alternatives, with ERC being a central actor in each governing option (either with CiU or with PSC and other leftist forces). In 1980, ERC supported the CiU government, and its leader was elected as the President of the Catalan parliament (although it declined to formally enter government). On the one hand, this decision reflected the belief that the moderate nationalist party represented the best option for consolidating and developing the newly established autonomous institutions. On the other, it allowed ERC to avoid the reconstitution of a leftist front with the Communists; negative experiences of such an alliance during the Second Republic continued to resonate with many Catalan voters. In 2003, however, the political panorama was quite different. The election results gave CiU the majority of seats, whilst PSC had most votes; ERC had the option of governing with either of these forces. In opting for the latter, the CiU's past record of cooperation with the PP, and the latter's state-wide governing majority, were decisive factors in favouring the formation of a 'government of the Left'. The coalition government with PSC and Iniciativa per Catalunya-Verds (ICV)[7] was re-established after the 2006 autonomous election (Pallarés and Muñoz 2007a). The basis of the *rapprochement* between these parties of the left is considered in greater detail below.

At the state-wide level, ERC's relevance has for the most part been very limited, not least due to its weak representation and the absolute majorities of state-wide governments of the left and the right (between 1982 and 1993 and 2000 and 2004). An improved electoral performance in the 2004 general election, with 8 seats and becoming the fourth parliamentary group in the Congress of Deputies, altered this situation. With ERC in government with the PSC at the regional level, and a PSOE minority government looking for parliamentary support at the state-level, ERC became an ally of the latter (although without making any major policy demands in return, given that the PSOE had other options of support had this not been forthcoming from ERC). This situation was repeated after the 2008 general election even though ERC's representation in the Congress had declined to 3 seats. In this respect, the configuration of political alliances at the regional level shaped ERC's behaviour at the state-level.

---

[7]   ICV is a post-communist and ecologist party.

7.2.4. The threshold of governance

As noted above, ERC crossed the threshold of governance at the regional level in 1931. Immediately after a provisional autonomous government was established, ERC's main goal was to reach an agreement on the autonomy of Catalonia with the authorities of the Spanish Second Republic. Until the approval of the new Catalan Statute of Autonomy in the autumn of 1932, there were three Catalan executives, all of them under the presidency of ERC's leader, Francesc Macià, and in collaboration with members of other Catalan parties.

After the Catalan elections of November 1932, ERC governed alone until the crisis of 6 October 1934. In a context of political confrontation between the Catalan parliament and the Spanish government (which was under the control of right-wing forces after the 1933 election), the Catalan President, Lluís Companys, proclaimed a Catalan state within the Spanish Federal Republic. The move was not, however, supported by other left-wing Republican forces, and within a few hours and after some fighting, the Spanish army took control of the situation. As a result of the failed insurrection, the Catalan institutions were suspended and ERC's leaders (including almost all the Catalan government and the leaders of Barcelona's local authorities) were imprisoned. With the victory of leftist forces in the elections of February of 1936, the Catalan institutions were restored and members of the Catalan executive were given amnesty. ERC returned to regional government until the end of the civil war in 1939, when all the Catalan institutions were abolished. The ERC's periods of government incumbency at the regional level were also mirrored at the state-level, with the party appointing a minister to the Spanish executive when it was under the control of left-wing political forces between December 1931 and December 1933, and between May 1936 and August 1938.

Since 1977, ERC has never repeated the experience of government at the state-level. At the regional level, in contrast, the party has crossed the threshold of governance on two occasions, as noted above. Between 1984 and 1986, ERC governed with CiU, although its period in office was brief. Fears for ERC's profile within the coalition government, and a poor performance in the 1986 general election (where it failed to pass the threshold of representation), led to a change in leadership and a decision to withdraw from government office in 1987 (see below). ERC's second period of government incumbency was between 2003 and 2010. In 2003, ERC was given the office of First Counsellor (the second executive post after that of President of the government) and five ministerial portfolios.[8] However, the party's

---

[8] These were: Education; Social Welfare and Family; Government (including the civil service and local government); Universities, Research, and the Information Society; and Trade, Consumption, and Tourism.

nap new academic press

decision to vote 'No' in a referendum on the revised Catalan Statute of Autonomy (and thus rejecting the position of its coalition partners who were in favour of the reformed statute) led to the collapse of the government and the holding of new regional elections after the referendum (Pallarés and Muñoz 2007b). The PSC-ERC-ICV coalition was reconstituted based on the 2006 electoral results.[9]

7.3. Changes in party organisation

The crossing of different thresholds in the ways outlined above has had important implications for ERC's internal organisation. This is especially true for threshold-crossing at the Catalan level, where the greatest pressure for organisational change has been exerted. These changes are summarised in tables 7.3 and 7.4.

Table 7.3. *Pressure for organisational change upon crossing thresholds (1931–39)*

Threshold	Regional level	State level	European level
V	**Strong (1932)** - definition and consolidation of internal structure; enhanced capacity to integrate new members.		
IV-B			
IV-A			
III			
II			
I			

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

---

[9]   ERC was once more given five ministerial portfolios: the Vice-Presidency (with competence in foreign affairs, religious affairs, sports, and the Catalan language); Social Action and Citizenship, including social services, immigration, youth and families; Culture and the Mass Media; Home Affairs and Public Administration (including civil service, telecommunications, society of information); and Innovation, Universities and Research, with responsibility for tourism, trade and industry.

Table 7.4. *Pressure for organisational change upon crossing thresholds (1977 onwards)*

Threshold	Regional level	State level	European level
V	**Medium (1984)** - clarification and re-organisation of internal decision-making.		
IV-B	**Strong (1995)** - significant increase in number of staff employed; increased internal complexity; structuring of the party on the ground		
IV-A	**Medium (1992)** - consolidation of territorial expansion to reinforce the new leader, to clarify internal decision-making procedures and internal channels of participation.		
III			
II	**Medium (1977)** - formal definition of internal organisation and the procedures for the election of party leaders		
I			

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

In 1931, when ERC crossed all five thresholds in quick succession after its creation, the party was forced to adopt organisational structures that befitted its new role in Catalan politics. Whilst the party's original statutes were suitable for organising a coalition of parties and groups, they were inappropriate for a party of government with considerable electoral support. The ERC's first National Congress (1932) thus established a party based on direct affiliation, with the section as the basic unit of organisation. The party had five federations, corresponding to the five Catalan electoral districts (four Catalan provinces and the city of Barcelona), and an Executive Committee designated as the main organ of leadership. This body would be composed of a General Secretary (elected by the National Congress) and five representatives, one each from the five federations. The

nap new academic press

National Congress, with meetings each year, was composed of delegates from each federation.

This organisational model was retained until the approval of new statutes in April 1977, which sought to adapt the party to the new democratic context. The statutes established four levels of territorial representation (local, county, regional and national (Catalan)); this hierarchical model of territorial organisation remains in place at the time of writing. The reforms also established that all party members had the right to attend and vote at the National Congress, which met biannually from 1981 onwards; this body would also elected the party's General Secretary. Moreover, a National Council was created to facilitate internal deliberation, and was composed of 44 representatives of the party's lower branches. In subsequent congresses, ERC sought to consolidate this organisational model. Thus in 1981, membership of the National Council was increased to 180 members,[10] whilst the size of the Executive Committee was reduced (from 30 to 12 members). The latter reform enhanced the power of the party's charismatic General Secretary, Heribert Barrera, who was simultaneously President of the Parliament of Catalonia (1980–84). The goal was to give the party strong leadership, concentrated in the hands of the General Secretary.

The electoral decline of ERC in the 1984 autonomous election had important consequences for the party's organisation. In the following year, the party approved new statutes to limit the power of the General Secretary by including more members in the party's Executive Committee.[11] Nevertheless, this change was more apparent than real, because these same statutes created a Permanent Political Commission (composed of the General Secretary, one member of each of the Spanish and Catalan parliaments, one member of the Catalan Government and three members of the Executive Committee), whose main task was to make decisions when the Executive Committee did not meet. Further electoral decline in the 1986 general election forced Barrera to yield the leadership to Joan Hortalà in January 1987. The party's poor results also fuelled demands for further organisational reform to secure its survival and to increase internal democracy. During 1987, Hortalà withdrew from the Catalan government, and facilitated the entry into the party of a new cohort of individuals with a clear pro-independence profile. These people – including Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira, Àngel Colom and Joan Puigcercós

---

[10]   After 1981, the members of the National Council were made up of local representatives, 60 persons elected by the National Congress, and almost all of ERC's elected, including those few who had been in public office before 1939.

[11]   These included ERC spokespersons in different legislative arenas and in Barcelona's town hall, 6 additional members directly elected by the National Council, the Presidents of the five territorial federations, the General Secretary of ERC's youth movement, members of the Catalan government and the President of the Assembly of ERC's local authorities. Finally, the General Secretary nominated six secretaries, each one with a specific area of responsibility.

– rapidly assumed key positions within the party, and oversaw a radicalisation of ERC's territorial demands, as outlined below.

In the 1988 autonomous election, although ERC recuperated some of its electoral losses, its performance was still considered to be unsatisfactory. After a party congress in 1989 riven with internal division, the independentist faction took control of ERC's organisation, with Colom replacing Hortalà as the party leader. The result prompted many supporters of the former leadership to abandon the party. Colom, on the other hand, proceeded to alter the party's profile, placing greater emphasis on its leftist and independentist credentials. These shifts in rhetoric contributed to a better electoral performance in the 1992 autonomous election, when ERC became the third Catalan political party. Although CiU retained its absolute majority, ERC's performance demonstrated that there was a credible alternative to CiU in the Catalanist political space; it also showed the party's ability to mobilise new young voters with the independence issue. The organisational changes outlined above played no small part in enabling ERC to re-establish its relevance in Catalan politics.

However, this renewed relevance, ERC's increasing membership,[12] and its territorial expansion also prompted further organisational changes in 1992 National Congress. The new statutes consolidated a strong structure, improved internal channels of decision-making, clarified the allocation of responsibilities, and created a small professional staff (including legal advisers and press officers). Whilst ERC retained its structure of four territorial levels, the statutes gave a greater margin of political initiative to local branches. Finally, in an effort to improve internal democracy, the reforms reinforced the accountability of party leaders to the rank-and-file represented within the National Congress. To this end, the participation of all members in the National Congress was confirmed and the practice of delegating one's vote was stopped.

A further stagnation in electoral results in the mid 1990s triggered yet more demands for internal reform. The party's disappointing performance in the 1996 general election led for calls for a change in leadership. On the eve of the 1996 National Congress, ERC's leader, Colom, and some of his followers abandoned the party and founded the Partit per la Independència. Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira was elected in his place, and oversaw the reinforcement of elements of participatory democracy within the party. To this end, new powers were given to the National Congress to elect three General Vice-secretaries; each of these would propose a further two National Secretaries which would be in charge of a particular political area on the Executive Committee. The National Council was also given new powers, particularly to exercise control over the Executive Committee. The

---

[12] At the end of 1989, ERC had 2,489 members (ERC 1992). By October 1996, this had increased to 6,900 members (ERC 1996).

nap new academic press

result of these reforms was to constrain the decision-making autonomy of the General Secretary, who was no longer able to appoint all members of Executive Committee and who was more accountable to the National Council. It is also worth noting that ERC also expanded its professional staff, established new organs of political communication,[13] and sought to develop better training programmes for its members (for example, through seminars and commissions to discuss party policies). As the ERC's membership and electoral support continued to grow in subsequent years,[14] these organisational provisions were consolidated.

In 2004, having crossed the threshold of governance the previous year, ERC undertook some of the most far-reaching organisational reforms in its history. Most significant was the decision to directly elect the party's President (designated as the leader of the party) and General Secretary. Moreover, a new provision was adopted allowing party members to decide on certain key issues through a referendum. The National Congress (meeting every four years) would continue to be a forum where all party members could participate and vote, but it would also elect two General Vice-secretaries and twelve secretaries. Finally, the Congress would elect 30 representatives to sit on the National Council.

Party leaders had argued that organisational reform was needed in order to adapt the party's internal decision-making mechanisms to the new realities of being a party of regional government, and having increased responsibilities on different public bodies. The reforms eventually approved, however, did not meet the real goal of reducing the power of party members within the party. For example, the ERC leadership proposed reforming the nature of the National Congress, with its membership being limited to 1,500 representatives nominated by local branches. However, this was rejected by the rank-and-file. The result was the reinforcement of members' direct participation within party decision-making. The episode provided a clear example of how different sectors within a political party can hold very different ideas about party organisation and programmes (May 1973). This became clear again during the process of reforming Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy (2003–2006), when the membership was able to force the party's leadership to reject the amended Statute, despite having taken part in its negotiation and contrary to the latter's preference.

However, these new rules have also been the source of new tensions within the party. For example, after ERC's substantial losses in the 2008 general election (the party lost approximately 350,000 votes and five seats),

---

[13] Since the mid 1990s, for example, ERC has published a new magazine every fortnight entitled *Esquerra Nacional.*

[14]   In October 1986, ERC had 4,000 members (El Periódico 10 October 2006). By September 2006, the party had 10,016 members and 400 local branches, its highest level of membership and local organisation since 1976 (ERC 2006).

the provisions for the direct election of the President and General Secretary were used for the first time in a National Congress held later that year. Divergences of opinion over the causes and solutions for ERC's electoral decline led to four candidatures being presented for these posts.[15] ERC's General Secretary, Joan Puigcercós, was elected President, whilst the party's leader in the Congress of Deputies, Joan Ridao, was elected General Secretary. However, the candidature that had the support of the former leader of the party was defeated, whilst two other candidates (representing the most oppositional factions within the party) secured substantial support (27.4% and 8.1% of votes each). The new provisions for enhancing internal democracy thus served to highlight the extent of divisions within ERC. In 2010, the two 'opposition' candidates abandoned ERC to establish new independentist parties, namely Reagrupament and Solidaritat Catalana per la Independència. In the 2010 autonomous elections, the latter won four seats in the Parliament of Catalona.

In summary, it is arguable that the crossing of different thresholds has had a major impact on the organisational nature of ERC. Upon the party's creation, organisational structures were established that enabled the party's institutionalisation, such as the definition of the party's territorial and leadership structures. As the party secured representation and, at the regional level, political relevance and government status, further organisational reforms were necessary to adapt the party to its new circumstances and responsibilities. This included the expansion of the party in central office, with new staff required to support the party's expanding activities. It also, however, saw an unsuccessful attempt by the party's leaders to centralise political authority in their own hands. However, as a party with a strong tradition of grass-roots democracy, ordinary members were able to retain a key role in internal decision-making, thus constraining the leadership's political and strategic autonomy. This distribution of power has brought its own challenges, with differences of opinion between members and leaders on issues of policy and strategy creating new and electorally damaging internal rifts, as noted above.

7.4. Changes in party goals and the ERC's policy impact

Catalan parties operate within the political framework of two interconnected political arenas: the Catalan and the Spanish (other European and local arenas are less important). Of these two, the Catalan arena is the most important for Catalan autonomist parties, not only for symbolic reasons,

---

[15]   The main point of disagreement between the different lists related to the most appropriate strategy for achieving Catalan independence; the smaller factions favoured a more radical approach including the rejection of government participation alongside any political party that sought to implement the new Statute of Autonomy.

but also as the sphere within which to build the Catalan nation through policy-making aimed at improving the economic, social and cultural well-being of the Catalan people. For these reasons, the most significant changes can be seen at the regional level, as the one where the party has been most successful in terms of electoral support and political status.

As noted above, in the first period of ERC's history (during the Spanish Second Republic), the party used its position of governance to pursue its territorial goals, and achieved this through the design of the new Spanish institutions. In this respect, the ERC not only wielded substantial policy influence but also succeeded in realising many of its ambitions with regard to Catalan autonomy. Right-wing control of the republican institutions, perceived by ERC as a potential threat to the survival of the newly designed Catalan institutions, prompted the party to support the failed insurrection against the regime in October 1934. ERC's return to government office in February 1936, with the Republic once more under the control of a more sympathetic left-wing government, enabled the party to resume the task of implementing its autonomist project. During the Civil War, ERC focused on contributing to the success of the Republican Army and protecting the Catalan autonomous institutions. In subsequent years, under the Franco regime, ERC continued to contribute its scarce resources to sustain the Catalan government in exile, whilst also pursuing clandestine activities in an effort to undermine the regime. Given the repressive conditions under which such activities were pursued, however, ERC's greatest success during this period was its simple survival.

With the process of democratic transition underway, ERC's primary goal was that of vote-maximisation. This became even more urgent with the party's poor showing in the 1977 general election, and its failure to make a major impact on the Catalan political scene in the early 1980s. Nevertheless, the party's interest in advancing its policy ambitions also informed the choice to support CiU in minority government between 1980 and 1984. In exchange, CiU agreed to initiate a process to reform the autonomous community's Statute of Autonomy, and to implement several policies of particular nationalist importance, such as the promotion of the Catalan language. The election of CiU's leader to the Presidency of the *Generalitat*, but the party's decision to stay out of regional government, demonstrated the priority given to policy influence over office incumbency.

This decision was reversed in the next legislature, with Joan Hortalà becoming a member of the CiU government even though the latter had an absolute majority and thus a coalition government was not numerically necessary. The agreement between CiU and ERC consisted of promoting policies of a Catalan nationalist character, such as the implementation of a new language policy in 1983. However, office incumbency forced ERC to confront, for the first time, the trade-offs often associated with crossing the

threshold of government (see the Introduction to this volume). Being a member of a government dominated by CiU resulted in the erosion of the ERC's political profile and undermined its ability to scrutinise the CiU's activities. In short, ERC lost the capacity to present itself as a useful and distinctive choice to the Catalan electorate. This led to further electoral decline in the 1986 general election and the loss of its only representative in the Congress of Deputies. The result was interpreted by many as punishment for being a party of government in Catalonia. As noted above, the party's repeated failures in meeting its vote-seeking goal triggered internal tensions that led both to a withdrawal from regional government and important organisational adaptations. Under the new leadership of Joan Hortalà, ERC continued to prioritise vote-seeking, but adopted a more independentist rhetoric with the aim of distancing itself more clearly from the moderate nationalism of CiU.

In 1989, after the appointment of Colom as ERC's new leader, a pro-independence strategy was formally adopted and ERC devoted the following years to promoting its secessionist project. This strategy was successful: the party increased in votes and membership, although as noted above, an electoral ceiling was quickly reached. This can be attributed in part to poor strategy by the party's leadership. In particular, the ERC failed to take full electoral advantage of changes in the Catalan and Spanish political arenas during the early 1990s, which saw the crisis of the PSOE at state level, and the decline of CiU at the regional level. Moreover, the electoral growth of the right-wing PP across the country provided a new opportunity for ERC to position itself as a credible left-wing alternative. However, the party failed to distinguish itself sufficiently from CiU. Furthermore, by being associated almost exclusively with the goal of independence, the party lacked credibility as a serious potential party of government that could address other policy issues other than Catalonia's self-government.

The desire to change this situation was at the core of the movement to force the removal of ERC's leadership in 1996. After the 1996 National Congress, Carod-Rovira promoted a new political strategy: ERC's presentation as a clearly left-wing party intent on government participation, and capable of providing answers to Catalonia's socio-economic and cultural problems. This required, in the first place, promoting specific policies on a range of issues beyond the core business of constitutional reform (such as health, education, and so forth). Secondly, the party explicitly pursued government incumbency as its goal, since this would provide the platform for implementing the party's new policy agenda. This strategic shift marked the beginning of ERC's *rapprochement* with Catalonia's other left-leaning parties, the PSC and ICV. These developments took place in the broader context of important changes in the state-wide political arena, characterised by the political ascendancy of the PP. The PP had its first

nap new academic press

electoral victory in the 1996 general election, and the second in 2000 when it secured an absolute majority of seats in the Congress of Deputies. One consequence of this was the increasing polarisation of Catalan and Spanish politics, firstly between autonomist and state-based nationalism, and secondly between left and right-wing politics. The fact that CiU was, during this period, dependant on the PP's support to maintain its minority Catalan government, provided ERC with the opportunity to present itself as the only Catalan nationalist and left-wing party able to position itself in opposition to the PP.

ERC negotiated this political context quite successfully. In return for agreeing not to oppose the investiture of CiU's Jordi Pujol as Catalan President after the 1999 autonomous election, the party preferred to ask for limited policy compromises rather than demand entry into a CiU-led government. At the same time, the party continued to develop a closer relationship with others on the Catalan left. ERC, PSC and ICV agreed a common programme as the basis for presenting candidates to the Senate in 2000. The goal was to demonstrate to their right-wing competitors (CiU and PP) and their voters that there existed a real political alternative. The success of this initiative led to the arrangement being repeated in the nomination of candidates for the Senate in 2004.

The culmination of ERC's strategy was the formation, after the 2003 autonomous election, of a coalition government of left-wing forces. ERC's decision was clearly motivated by policy-seeking aspirations, as the ambitious programme of government signed in December of 2003 reflected. This agreement had as its main goal the reform of Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy. But ERC's policy ambitions were not limited to this territorial goal; whilst a coalition with CiU could have also delivered in this respect, it was only in partnership with other parties of the left that ERC could hope to implement its socio-economic policies.

However, the task of governing has not been easy for ERC. Soon after the new coalition assumed its functions, the party felt the full force of its opponents' political attacks. In early 2004, for example, the Spanish conservative newspaper *ABC* published details of how ERC's leader and number two in the government, Carod-Rovira, had met with the leaders of ETA to discuss a possible truce in Catalonia. The scandal led to Carod-Rovira's resignation, although ERC did not withdraw from government. Not only would this have provoked new elections, but it would also have undermined the party's ambition to give concrete policy form to its left-nationalist project. A less noble explanation of this decision to remain in government was that ERC had its first real taste of power in several decades, and those with new governing responsibilities did not want to relinquish them so quickly. The fact that office incumbency also allowed ERC to employ an unprecedented number of staff, in the form of advisors,

technical staff and so forth, would also mean that withdrawing from government would lead to substantial job losses.

Ultimately, however, the party's policy goals proved to be more important than government office. This became apparent in 2006 during the process of negotiating a new Statute of Autonomy for Catalonia. Unhappy at the extent to which the proposed text had been revised during its passage through the Congress of Deputies, ERC decided to vote against the Statute in the referendum held on 18 June 2006. This was a decision imposed by the party's grassroots (see above); the more pragmatic leadership had favoured abstaining as a means of avoiding a crisis at the heart of the coalition government that had initiated this reform. ERC thus campaigned alongside its arch-rival, the PP, to reject the proposed Statute (with PSC, ICV and CiU campaigning in favour). The Statute was approved by 73.2% of the voters, even though turnout was very low. Interestingly, not all ERC sympathisers followed their party's voting recommendation; a post-referendum survey revealed that 33.7% of ERC's voters supported the new Statute (compared to 32% who voted against), thus ignoring the 'revolution' instigated by the party's activists (CIS 2006). ERC was ejected from regional government after the referendum, and new autonomous elections held.

This decision taken by ERC with regard to the new Statute of Autonomy enables several interesting observations to be made about the complex decisions facing autonomist parties with regard to the pursuit of their goals. Whilst ERC accepted that achieving its final goal of independence for Catalonia could only be achieved through cooperation in government with other political forces, the party also recognised the high risk involved with being seen to support a compromise on the issue of territorial reform. By opposing the referendum on a statute that fell far short of Catalan independence, ERC hoped to capitalise electorally by appealing to voters who were disillusioned with the reform process.[16] It would also avoid alienating its core electorate, who would feel betrayed by the party's support of such a limited proposal. At the same time, however, ERC could also be sure of two things. Firstly, the Statute would be approved, even if by a narrow margin. Secondly, the political landscape at the time made it highly likely that in any new election ERC would continue to be a crucial actor in coalition negotiations. In this respect, ERC pursued a win-win strategy: demonstration of its prioritisation of its ultimate goal – independence for Catalonia – whilst keeping open the prospect of being a key actor in gover-

---

[16]   Thus, for example, ERC considered that the demonstration in Barcelona in February 2006 under the slogan "We are a nation and have the right to decide" and which attracted approximately 80,000 people, was evidence of a large pool of potential supporters for its 'no' position in the referendum. This demonstration was one of the largest to have taken place in Barcelona in 25 years.

nap new academic press

ning Catalonia and implementing enhanced self-government within the framework of a new Statute of Autonomy.

The autonomous election held on 1 November of 2006 gave CiU a plurality of both seats and votes. Nevertheless, ERC was once again a key actor in determining the eventual composition of the government since together with PSC and ICV, an alternative governing majority could be secured. The tri-partite coalition was eventually re-constituted, a decision ERC took with a view to re-affirming the party's ideological profile and programmatic ambitions. Since then, however, ERC has experienced a decline in its electoral performance, witnessed at the 2007 local elections and continuing in the 2008 general election. Between the 2003 autonomous election and the 2009 local election, ERC had lost more than 209,000 votes, equating to approximately 40% of votes won in 2003.

For many within ERC, this electoral decline was a symptom of the difficult trade-off between office and votes. In particular, the party was accused of being subordinate to the PSC, and thus in a position of weakness with regard to implementing its distinctive policy agenda. In the National Congress held in October 2007, a proposal to reconsider ERC's participation in the Socialist-led government was narrowly defeated (42.8% in favour, 48.8% against with 8.4% voters abstaining) (ERC 2007). Its success would have jeopardised the survival of the coalition government

However, discussions about ERC's goal priorities continued in subsequent months. The party's strategy was hotly contested at the following National Congress. Those in favour of maintaining the party's policy project (even if this meant losing votes in the short term) clashed with others advocating an end to collaboration with the PSC and pursuing an alternative policy agenda that could entail forming alliances with other political parties. It is necessary to note that the question of whether or not ERC should participate in government was not important in these debates; both camps were persuaded that ERC would continue to be pivotal in government formation in the future, and that there would always be opportunities to cross the threshold of government. There was also agreement that, even in the event that this would not be the case, being a party of opposition would not pose a major problem. The Congress concluded with the narrow victory of those favouring a continuation of collaboration with the PSC, in order to implement the policy agenda that had been agreed by the coalition in 2006. Some dissenters responded by leaving ERC to form new independentist parties, as noted above.

However, the party would once again be punished electorally for its participation in government in the 2010 autonomous election. A disastrous campaign saw ERC struggle to articulate a clear political message; in trying to simultaneously distance itself from the PSC but avoiding being too close to CiU, the party focused almost exclusively on the demand for a

referendum on independence during the next legislature. The party also pleaded for support in order to remain the third political force within the *Generalitat*. In the event, the losses predicted by the pre-electoral polls transpired: ERC emerged as the fifth political force with 218,000 votes (7% of the Catalan vote), being surpassed by the PP and ICV. The party's loss of its distinctive profile in government, the debacle of statute reform, and increased competition from new independentist parties, contributed to ERC's dismal performance, and launched a new period of internal debate over the party's ideological and strategic priorities.

This overview of changes in ERC's goals suggests the following general observations about the party's policy impact. Firstly, the ERC has had limited success in putting the territorial issue on the political agenda of state-wide political parties. Although ERC provided political support for minority PSOE governments in 2004 and 2008, the party did not extract major concessions for Catalan autonomy in return, for reasons outlined above. Secondly, whilst it is arguable that the party played a crucial role in pushing the PSC to undertake statute reform in the 2003–2006 legislature, it is also the case that the new Statute was only approved because of a deal between CiU and the PSOE government to secure the text's approval in the Congress of Deputies (see Barrio and Barberà, this volume). CiU, rather than ERC, was thus the key actor in delivering enhanced autonomy for Catalonia.

However, it is also the case that the policy impact of ERC has gone beyond the core business of Catalan self-government. Since 2003, ERC has not only had important responsibilities in the Catalan government, but it has been the main pillar of it. The majority of the policies implemented by the coalition can be attributed to the ERC. Unfortunately, however, this success has not satisfied the party's more radical membership, which remains opposed to cooperation with a state-wide party that accepts the legitimacy of the Spanish state as the framework within which Catalan self-government should be pursued. This fundamental ideological tension is likely to remain salient in the near future, as ERC continues to debate its political strategy and goals.

7.5. Conclusions

ERC is an example of an autonomist party that has crossed all thresholds at the regional level during its long lifespan. Given the centrality of this level of territorial activity to the party's *raison d'être,* it is not surprising that the party's different achievements have been associated with several important changes in the party's organisation, in an effort to adapt itself to new political contexts. These adaptations have not been unproblematic; ERC has experienced several scissions, even though none of these groups

have yet posed a serious challenge to the party's political space. Importantly, however, whereas many of the autonomist parties examined in this volume have experienced the increased centralisation of power as a result of passing successive thresholds, in the ERC's case there has been a strengthening of the party on the ground. The different priorities of different groups within the party organisation have been manifest at several points in ERC's history and, as the section above demonstrates, has impacted upon the party's choice of goals and strategies for achieving them. In contrast to other autonomist parties, ERC's leadership enjoys less autonomy to decide on these key questions.

In this respect, ERC can be categorised predominantly as a policy-seeking party. This refers primarily to the territorial goal of securing Catalan independence, although in more recent years there have also been efforts to bring the party's left-wing credentials to the fore. ERC has not shunned the opportunity to be in regional government as a means of realising its policy ambitions; indeed, it has frequently been a key actor in determining the composition of different Catalan government. However, it is also the case that being in office is of secondary importance to achieving the ultimate goal of independence for Catalonia. This became clear during internal debates on whether or not to continue the collaboration with PSC within the Catalan government, as summarised above. The decision to continue in regional government proved very costly. Members fearful of the dilution of party's independentist profile abandoned the party; ERC's efforts to reposition itself as the party of Catalan independence in the 2010 autonomous election were insufficient to stem the flow of votes to these new rivals offering a less ambiguous programme of Catalan self-government. Eighty years after its creation, ERC thus faces difficult decisions about how to re-establish itself as an important actor in the Catalan political space, in order to deliver on its core goal of Catalan self-government.

References

Ajenjo, Marc and Amand Blanes (1999) 'La població de Catalunya', in: Fundació Jaume Bofill, *Informe per a la Catalunya del 2000*. Barcelona: Editorial Mediterrània, pp. 19–39.

Alquézar, Ramon (2001) *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya. 70 anys d'història*, Barcelona: Columna.

Argelaguet, Jordi (2004) 'L'*Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*: la troisième force de l'espace politique catalan', *Pôle Sud,* 20, 9–24.

CIS (2006) *Post-referéndum Estatuto de Cataluña*. Survey No. 2,648. Available at: http://www.cis.es.

Equip de Sociologia Electoral (1990) *Atlas electoral de Catalunya 1982-1988*. Barcelona: Fundació Jaume Bofill.

nap new academic press

Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya

ERC (1992) *General Secretary's Report Before the National Council*. Sant Esteve del Monestir.

ERC (1996) *Pre Congressional Report*, 30 June.

ERC (2007) *Esquerra Nacional*. No. 83. Available at: http://www.esquerra.cat/esquerra-nacional/

ERC (2006) *Esquerra Nacional*. No. 74. Available at: http://www.esquerra.cat/esquerra-nacional/

Ivern, Maria Dolors (1988) *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (1931-1936)*. Montserrat: Abadia de Montserrat.

Lago, Ignacio and José Ramón Montero (2004) 'Más votos y menos escaños: el impacto del sistema electoral en las elecciones autonómicas catalanas de 2003', *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 105, 11–42.

Lucas, Manel (2004) *ERC. La llarga marxa: 1977-2004. De la il·legalitat al govern*. Barcelona: Columna.

May, John D. (1973) 'Opinion Structure of Political Parties: The Special Law of Curvilinear Disparity', *Political Studies*, 21: 2, 135–151.

Montero, José Ramón and Joan Font (1991) 'El voto dual: lealtad y transferencia de voto en elecciones autonómicas', in: Equip de Sociologia Electoral (ed.), *L'electorat català a les eleccions autonòmiques de 1988: opinions, actituds i comportaments.* Barcelona: Fundació Jaume Bofill, pp. 183–211.

Pallarés, Francesc and Jordi Muñoz (2004) 'Las elecciones autonómicas de Noviembre de 2003 en Cataluña', in: Instituto de Derecho Público (ed.), *Informe Comunidades Autónomas 2003.* Barcelona: Instituto de Derecho Público, pp. 775–784.

Pallarés, Francesc and Jordi Muñoz (2007a) 'Las elecciones autonómicas de 1 de Noviembre de 2006 en Cataluña', in: Instituto de Derecho Público (ed.), *Informe Comunidades Autónomas 2006.* Barcelona: Instituto de Derecho Público, pp. 775–790.

Pallarés, Francesc and Jordi Muñoz (2007b) 'El referéndum de 2006 sobre la reforma del Estatuto de Autonomía de Cataluña', in: Instituto de Derecho Público (ed.), *Informe Comunidades Autónomas 2006.* Barcelona: Instituto de Derecho Público, pp. 765–774.

Risques, Manel (ed.) (1999) *Història de la Catalunya Contemporània.* Barcelona: Pòrtic, Biblioteca Universitària.

Sallés, Anna (1986) *Quan Catalunya era d'esquerra*. Barcelona: Edicions 62.

Tormos, Raül (2008) *La influència de l'edat en el comportament electoral a Catalunya*. Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya. Col. Aportacions, 31.

Günther Pallaver

The Südtiroler Volkspartei

8.1. INTRODUCTION

The Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP) ranks among the most successful autono-mist parties in Europe (Holzer 1991; Holzer and Schwegler 1998; Pallaver 2005a; Pallaver 2006; Pallaver 2007a). Since its creation in 1945, it has occu-pied a hegemonic position in the province of Bolzano,[1] where it has gover-ned with an absolute majority since the first elections to the Provincial Assembly held in 1948. Also represented at the state-level since 1948, the SVP has often been a loyal ally for successive centre and centre-left govern-ments. Since the mid 1990s, as different state-wide parties have struggled to command governing majorities within the Italian parliament, the SVP has been courted as a potential coalition partner by those on the left as well as on the right. At the European level, with one representative in the Euro-pean Parliament since 1979, the SVP operates with the self-confidence of a national, rather than a regional, party.

This chapter outlines and explains this successful lifespan, and identi-fies the ways in which the party's organisation and pursuit of goals has evolved as a result of different achievements at different territorial levels. It is argued that, contrary to other autonomist parties examined in this volume, organisational and goal change have been less due to crossing dif-ferent thresholds – as these were achieved very early on in its lifetime – than due to other external factors, such as changes in the electoral system and the party competitive context. Moreover, with the party's autonomist goals largely achieved by the 1990s, the party has more recently focused on other, non-territorial, issues relating to the day-to-day governance of South Tyrol. To date, however, this shift from autonomist to domestic politics has not threatened the SVP's dominance of South Tyrol's political institutions, nor its monopoly on the representation of the province's interests within state and European arenas.

8.2. THE LIFESPAN OF THE SVP

Upon its creation in 1945, the SVP immediately crossed all the thresholds that characterise a party's lifespan at the provincial level; the party also rapidly acquired representation at the state-level, and became an increa-singly relevant actor in this arena over time. The introduction of European

---

[1]   Known in German as Bozen, the province will be referred to as Bolzano from hereon in.

nap new academic press

elections in 1979 provided a further arena within which the SVP has been successful in securing and retaining representation. The SVP's lifespan is summarised in table 8.1, and is outlined in more detail below.

Table 8.1. *The lifespan of the SVP*

a) Provincial level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1945–2010						SVP

b) State level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1948			SVP			
1994					SVP	
1996			SVP			
2006					SVP	
2008			SVP			

c) European level

	I	II	III
1979–2009			SVP

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

8.2.1. The thresholds of declaration and authorisation

The SVP was founded on 8 May 1945 (Holzer 1991: 61; Heiss 2002), the very day that the Second World War officially ended. Five days earlier, on 3 May, the Comitato di LiberazioneNazionale (CLN) had taken control of the province of Bolzano on behalf of the Italian government. American troops followed on 4 May and immediately established the Allied Military Government (AMG). The Allies—first the Americans, and later the British—administered the province of Bolzano until 31 December 1945, whereupon the administration of South Tyrol was handed over to Italy. Yet it was only with the Paris Agreement of 5 September 1946 that the definitive constitutional decision was taken that South Tyrol should belong to the Italian state. Italy and Austria, the two parties to this settlement, agreed on far-reaching protection for the region's German and Ladin-speaking minorities within a framework of territorial autonomy.

nap new academic press

For a political party to be founded and to credibly represent the interests of the South Tyrolean minority, it had to originate from within the opposition to the Nazi regime. In 1939, the Andreas Hofer Bund (AHB)[2] was established in opposition to the Option Agreement between Hitler and Mussolini, whereby South Tyroleans had to choose between emigrating to the German Reich or remaining in Italy without any legal protection. Approximately 86% of the region's inhabitants opted for emigration, although only a relatively small number actually left South Tyrol (Eisterer and Steininger 1989). From 1943 onwards, the AHB actively resisted the Nazi regime. After 1945, the organisation merged into the SVP.

Official permission to establish the SVP was granted by the AMG on 12 May 1945. Another two months would pass, however, before the AMG officially recognised the party (on 23 July 1945). This marked the SVP's official authorisation to participate in electoral competition (see table 8.1). That such a German-speaking party should be founded on Italian national territory (even if the issue of South Tyrol's territorial affiliation was still constitutionally controversial) was by no means inevitable; it is worth recalling that the policies adopted by the Allies at the Potsdam conference led to the expulsion of around 14 million Germans from Germany's former Eastern territories. The rapidity with which the SVP was able to enter the political arena is also striking; for example, Bavarian talks about establishing a Christian Democratic party only began on 14 August 1945, whilst the action committee that led to the creation of the Christlich Soziale Union convened on 17 September 1945.

Authorisation from the Allies was largely straightforward because the SVP's founders had been active in the anti-Nazi resistance. In reality, however, several individuals who had been complicit with the Nazi regime also attended the party's inaugural meeting. Consequently, not all founding members were listed in the party's official founding document (Holzer 1991: 61–62). Nevertheless, the SVP's founding fathers presented themselves to the Americans as loyal political protagonists with strong democratic credentials. Moreover, they declared their intention to defend the rights of South Tyroleans independently of the CLN; whilst the latter defended South Tyrol's integration into the Italian state, SVP fought for the territory's reintegration with Austria. Having said this, a political agreement between the SVP and the CLN was reached in order to address the most urgent problems of the immediate post-war period. As the first political party to be founded, the SVP had the advantage of political legitimacy, both among the population and *vis-à-vis* the Allies.

---

[2] Andreas Hofer (1767–1810), a Tyrolean hero and a symbol of the region's freedom, fought against the French-Bavarian occupation in 1809. He was executed in 1810.

nap new academic press

The SVP thus aimed to organising all German and Ladin-speaking South Tyroleans under a single political banner, in order to reach the territorial goal noted above (Gatterer 1968: 876). Although South Tyrolean society in 1945 was deeply divided between the *Optanten*, who had voted to emigrate to the German Reich in 1939, and the *Dableiber* who had declared themselves in favour of remaining in South Tyrol (Stuhlpfarrer 1985), the rift between these two groups was glossed over from the very beginning. The ideological fault line dividing supporters and opponents of National Socialism was eclipsed by the shared goal of self-determination for South Tyrol, as a pre-requisite for deciding its own constitutional future.

8.2.2. The threshold of representation

The SVP has participated in all elections to the Provincial Assembly since 1945. Prior to the Italian constitutional reforms of 2001, representatives to this body were elected indirectly via elections to the Trentino-South Tyrol Regional Assembly. The Trentino-South Tyrol region was divided into two provincial electoral districts, namely Trento and Bolzano. The 70 members of the Regional Assembly, who served for five years, were simultaneously members of their respective provincial institutions in Trento and Bolzano. Since the 2001 reforms, members of the Regional Assembly are no longer elected; members of the assemblies of the two autonomous provinces of Bolzano and Trento are elected instead. Taken together, they constitute the Regional Assembly.

The SVP also participated in drafting the electoral law defined in the Statute of Autonomy for Trentino and South Tyrol (Südtiroler Landesregierung 2005). Because of the three linguistic groups existing in South Tyrol and the resulting social divisions, the Statute of Autonomy – in accordance with the logic of consociational democracy (Lijphart 1977; Di Michele *et al.* 2003) – provides for a proportional electoral system. Political parties present electoral lists, with voters having the right to cast up to four preferential votes. The Statute of Autonomy also provides for a mechanism guaranteeing at least one seat in the Provincial Assembly to the Ladins, the smallest minority in South Tyrol.

From 1948 until 1960, the SVP could claim to be the sole political representative of the German-speaking (and, with some qualifications, also of the Ladin-speaking) population. In 1964, a German-speaking rival, the Tiroler Heimatpartei (THP), entered the political arena for the first time. However, it only polled 2.4% of the South Tyrolean vote, and thus did not present a serious challenge to the SVP. The appearance of two further German-language social democratic parties in 1973 – the Soziale Fortschrittspartei Südtirols (SFP) and the Sozialdemokratische Partei Südtirols (SPS) – constituted more of a threat; they obtained almost 7% of the votes cast, and

nap new academic press

the SVP's vote-share fell below 60% for the first time in any provincial election. The SVP responded by establishing an allied group of SVP workers, called Arbeitnehmer in der SVP; this enabled the party to re-capture the votes lost to the new challengers. The party continued to poll around 60% of the vote in provincial elections until 1988.

A declaration by the United Nations in 1992 that the South Tyrolean conflict between Italy and Austria was officially at an end (the dispute on autonomy and minority protection had been pending since 1960) marked a new period in the SVP's electoral performance. In the 1993 provincial elections, the party saw its share of the vote decline to 52%. Although it recovered in subsequent provincial elections (see table 8.2), the party suffered a further decline in 2008 when its vote-share fell to 48.1%; although the SVP retained all of its seats, it nevertheless meant losing the absolute majority it had held in the Provincial Assembly since contesting the first elections in 1948.

Several explanations can be offered for this gradual electoral decline. Firstly, in 1989 there was a change of leadership in the provincial government and, in 1991, also in the party; this was due to the retirement of the SVPs charismatic and long-serving leader, Silvius Magnago. This saw the party lose an important electoral asset. Secondly, the SVP has been subject to increasing internal tensions and conflicts, with the party's representatives in elected positions being accused of nepotism. Such divisions have undermined the party's electoral appeal, especially among younger voters; its core electorate remains South Tyrolean farmers whose number is in decline. Thirdly, the ethnic composition of South Tyrol has altered gradually, with the number of German-speakers declining as the Italian and immigrant populations have increased (Landesinstitut für Statistik 2005: 112).[3] Finally, in the 2008 provincial election the SVP also faced competition from four other German-speaking parties, namely Die Freiheitlichen, Süd-TirolerFreiheit, Union für Südtirol and Bürgerbewegung (Atz and Pallaver 2009). The first of these polled 14.3% of the vote, whilst the others between them polled 8.4%.

---

[3] For example, whilst in 1900 the German-speaking community accounted for 88.8% of South Tyrol's population, this had declined to 69.4% in 2001. Over the same period of time, the Italian population had increased from 4.0% to 26.3%.

Table 8.2. *The SVP's electoral performance in provincial, state and European elections, 1948-2009 (% of votes in the province of Bolzano)*

Year	Provincial	State[1]	European
1948	67.6	62.4	
1952	64.7	60.1	
1956	64.4		
1958		60.1	
1960	63.8		
1963		56.6	
1964	61.3		
1968	60.7	58.5	
1972		59.0	
1973	56.4		
1976		59.6	
1978	61.2		
1979		62.9	62.1
1983	59.4	59.6	
1984			63.0
1987		58.3	
1988	60.4		
1989			53.0
1992		57.3	
1993	52.0		
1994		60.1	56.8
1996		28.0[2]	
1998	56.6		
1999			56.0
2001		60.5	
2003	55.6		
2004			46.7
2006		53.4	
2008	48.1	44.3	
2009			52.1

Source: Based on Südtiroler Landesregierung (2009: 75–90, 145–185).

Notes:
[1] Chamber of Deputies
[2] SVP/Partito Popolare Italiano (PPI)

Until the early 1990s, elections to the Italian parliament were conducted under a proportional electoral system. For elections to the Chamber of

nap new academic press

Deputies, South Tyrol constituted one single constituency; for elections to the Senate, the province was divided into two constituencies (three after new legislation was passed in December 1991). The proportional system guaranteed the SVP parliamentary representation; with two exceptions, the party had three seats in the Chamber of Deputies and two Senators between 1948 and 1994 (see table 8.3.).[4] For the 1994, 1996 and 2001 parliamentary elections, in contrast, a mixed electoral system was employed; this required three-quarters of the seats to be decided by majority and the remainder by proportional representation (PR), subject to a threshold of 4% of votes nationally (Pallaver 2005b). For elections to the Chamber of Deputies, South Tyrol was divided into four one-seat constituencies; together with Trentino, it constituted an electoral district. For Senate elections, the province was divided into three constituencies. Whilst together, South Tyrol and Trentino could elect seven seats, three of these were reserved for the each province, with the last seat allocated using PR and awarded to a candidate from either South Tyrol or Trentino.

In view of the new 4% threshold for achieving parliamentary representation, the SVP appealed to the Italian Constitutional Court, and subsequently the European Commission for Human Rights, on the grounds that this would discriminate against the German and Ladin-speaking minorities in South Tyrol. The SVP contended that the threshold would make it impossible for it to secure parliamentary representation. On both occasions, the party's appeal was dismissed on the basis that South Tyrol's ethnic composition guaranteed the SVP representation under the majoritarian provision of the electoral system (Peterlini 2009: 85–95). This meant that, in practice, only one seat in the Chamber of Deputies and one Senate seat were fully contested between the SVP and other parties (which represented the Italian-speaking majority in these specific constituencies).

The electoral reforms of the early 1990s forced the SVP, for the first time in its history, to ally itself with Italian pro-autonomy parties in order to secure representation at the state level. This was necessary both to both to overcome the 4% threshold in the proportional system and to contest the open electoral districts referred to above. In 1996, the SVP cooperated with Romano Prodi's PPI. However, the low visibility of the SVP's symbol on the PPI's electoral materials, as well as the nomination of an unknown candidate, contributed to a bitter electoral defeat (27.9% of the vote, compared to 60.1% in the previous parliamentary elections). The SVP retained its three seats in the Chamber and two in the Senate (in those electoral districts elected under a majority voting system) but failed to advance on this as a result of vote-allocation under the proportional provision of the

---

[4] During the 1979–1983 legislature, the party had four seats in the Chamber of Representatives; between 1992 and 1994, the party also had three seats in the Senate.

electoral system. For the 2001 parliamentary election, the SVP formed an electoral coalition with the centre-left alliance *Ulivo*. The SVP agreed not to contest one electoral district and supporting the *Ulivo* candidate instead; in the other electoral district, the *Ulivo* alliance supported the SVP candidate. This arrangement proved successful (see tables 8.1 and 8.2): the SVP dispatched three representatives to the Chamber of Representatives. In addition, an *Ulivo* representative was elected with the help of the SVP voters. In return, a third SVP Senator was elected with *Ulivo* votes.

Further electoral reform in 2005 replaced the mixed electoral system with a PR system with different thresholds and with a majority bonus for the party coalition with the relative majority (Pasquino 2006). A special provision relating to the representation of ethnic minority parties was also included. Such parties in regions with a special statute (providing distinctive measures for the protection of ethnic minorities) and which received at least 20% of valid votes in constituencies within their territories in elections to the Chamber of Deputies, could participate in the national distribution of seats (alone or within a party coalition). This provision only applied, however, to parties that did not run outside the regional territory. In Senate elections, the distribution of seats under the relative majority electoral system was retained (that is, 3 seats each for South Tyrol and Trentino, with a seventh seat allocated to one of these regions on the basis of PR).

In order to take advantage of the majority bonus provision in elections to the Chamber of Deputies, in 2006 the SVP signed a pact with *L'Unione* (successor to the *Ulivo* alliance), and won four seats in the Chamber of Deputies and three in the Senate. New elections followed in 2008 after the fall of the Prodi government. This time the SVP ran as a 'non-aligned' list, that is, without an electoral pact with a state-wide party; this was a choice based on the internal tensions caused by the party's previous alliance with Prodi (see below). Only in one Senate electoral district did the SVP form an alliance with Italian pro-autonomy parties (SVP-Insieme per le Autonomie), a tactical decision in order to prevent the victory of a centre-right candidate who was sceptical of the goal of greater autonomy for the region. Although this succeeded in blocking the latter's election, the SVP's go-it-alone strategy did not result in electoral gains. With only 44.3% of the vote in the election to the Chamber of Deputies, the SVP saw its number of representatives decline from 3 to 2; competition from other German-speaking parties contributed to this loss of votes. Potentially more serious, however, was the fact that across the Trentino-South Tyrol region, the SVP only managed to poll 23.96% of the vote; this was only just enough to overcome the regional threshold of 20% for the representation of ethnic minorities (see above). Any future electoral decline may thus jeopardise the SVP's presence at the state level (Peterlini 2009: 117).

Table 8.3. *South Tyrolean representation in the Italian parliament, 1948–2008*

		SVP	SVP-Ulivo/ Unione	SVP-Insieme per le Autonomie	DC	MSI/ AN	Greens	PCI/ PDS/ DS/PD	FI/PDL
1948	C	3			1				
	S	2							
1953	C	3			1				
	S	2							
1958	C	3			1				
	S	2			1				
1963	C	3			1				
	S	2			1				
1968	C	3							
	S	2							
1972	C	3			1				
	S	2			1				
1976	C	3							
	S	2							
1979	C	4							
	S	2							
1983	C	3			1				
	S	2							
1987	C	3				1	1		
	S	2						1	
1992	C	3				1			
	S	3							
1994	C	3				1			
	S	3							
1996	C	3				1			1
	S	2				1			
2001	C	3	1						
	S	2	1						
2006	C	3	1			1			1
	S	2	1						
2008	C	2		2					
	S	2				1		1	

Source: Compiled from data taken from the Südtiroler Landesregierung (2006; 2008).
Abbreviations: C: Chamber, S: Senate.

As a part of the SVP's strategy for achieving its autonomist goals, having a presence within the European Parliament has always been important for the party. The SVP has always declared itself in favour of the process of European integration, which it considered to have a political, territorial and an economic dimension (Di Sotto 2009). For these reasons, the SVP has contested every European election since 1979, and has had a Member of European Parliament (MEP) elected each time.

This electoral success can be explained as a result of the Italian electoral law that includes a special provision for the representation of ethnic minorities. With MEPs elected using a proportional electoral system, Italy's three ethnic minorities – the French-speakers in the Aosta Valley, the German-speakers in South Tyrol and the Slovenian-speakers in Friuli-Julian Venetia – are permitted to form joint lists with other parties. If an ethnic minority party candidate is not elected, but is on the list of another party that does secure representation, then the last place on the list is to be awarded the ethnic minority candidate (provided it won at least 50,000 preferential votes).

In European elections, the SVP competes in the North-East district, which comprises the regions of Venetia, Trentino-South Tyrol, Friuli-Julian Venetia and Emilia-Romagna. From the first elections in 1979 until 1988, the SVP formed a joint list with its ideological sister party at the state-level, the DC; in 1994 and 1999, the SVP ran together with the PPI, the DC's successor party. In 2004, the party changed alliances and competed as part of the *Lista Prodi*, whilst in 2009 it ran with the PD. Because of these state-level alliances, within the European Parliament the SVP sits with the European People's Party rather than the European Free Alliance (Pallaver 2007b).

Shortly before the 2009 European election, the electoral system was reformed and a 4% threshold for representation introduced. This innovation was not immediately problematic for the SVP; the fact that the party had always formed alliances with state-wide parties (as it did in 2009) meant that it did not struggle to attract sufficient votes to pass the new electoral threshold. This will only pose an obstacle in the event that, in future, the SVP prefers to ally itself with smaller centrist parties, with less electoral appeal. The SVP is also not constrained by the requirement for candidates for European elections to collect 30,000–35,000 signatures before they are authorised to compete. This has meant that many other smaller German-language parties have remained absent from this electoral arena, but the SVP, as it is already present at the supranational level, is not required to meet this criterion. The absence of its German-speaking competitors from European elections provides a further electoral boost for the SVP (Atz and Pallaver 2009).

8.2.3. The thresholds of relevance and government

Until the second Statute of Autonomy was passed in 1972, legal and administrative competences rested with the Trentino-South Tyrol region, comprising of the two provinces of Bolzano and Trento. The first Statute of Autonomy required the regional government to mirror the representation of the linguistic groups in the Regional Assembly. From the outset, therefore, the SVP – as the party representing German-speakers in South Tyrol – had a legal claim on governmental incumbency. On only one occasion did the party refuse to take up this role; this was in protest at the slow implementation of autonomy provisions between 1959 and 1969. Since 1972, the regional level of government has been weakened, with political authority increasingly concentrated in the Provincial Assemblies of South Tyrol and Trentino respectively. Since 2001, the Presidents of the two provinces alternate in the post of President of the Region; the SVP has always held this post within South Tyrol (see below).

At the provincial level, the SVP has been a party of government since the very first elections to the Provincial Assembly in 1948. In every legislature since then, the SVP has controlled an absolute majority of seats in both the parliament and the provincial government, and has thus always held the position of Governor (the head of the government). However, the SVP has been unable to govern alone. In accordance with the principles of consociational democracy and power sharing enshrined in the Statute of Autonomy, different linguistic groups must be represented in the provincial government in proportion to their representation within the parliament (Pallaver 2008).

At the state level, the SVP has been invited to participate in government alongside state-wide parties on several different occasions, although it has never taken up these offers (and thus has not passed the threshold of government at this level). In the 1990s, for example, the SVP refused a ministerial post in Prodi's first government in 1996, as well as in subsequent centre-left governments led by D'Alema and Amato. On these occasions, the party preferred to allow the representatives of other ethnic minority groups to take up the post on offer, namely that of Deputy Secretary of State for Linguistic Minorities. The SVP's refusal to participate in coalition government at the state level is based on the principle that doing so would be interpreted as a symbolic acceptance of South Tyrol's definitive incorporation into the Italian state.

The SVP has thus enjoyed considerable coalition potential at the state level. This is in spite of the fact that its numerical presence in this arena has always been relatively low; as noted above, on average since 1948 it has had three seats within the Congress of Deputies and two or three seats in the Senate. Up until 1992, and apart from the period 1955 to 1963 when Italy

nap new academic press

was governed by a centre-right coalition with the tacit support of the neo-fascists, the SVP was a reliable ally for incumbent Italian governments. On average in the Chamber of Deputies, it voted in favour of the government approximately 55% of the time, and against it only about 10%. In remaining votes the party abstained. The party's behaviour in the Senate over the same period was broadly similar (Sleiter 2000: 126–134). Having said this, the party was decisive on only one occasion: thanks to the SVP's support, the DC government headed by GiulioAndreotti secured a parliamentary majority (if only very briefly, since it remained in office only from 17 to 26 February 1972).

The SVP's relevance increased substantially from the early 1990s onwards. The small difference in seats between the two major state-wide parties of the left and the right meant that, on several occasions, the SVP's support was decisive in determining the composition of successive governments. This was the case for the Berlusconi I government in 1994 (which lacked a majority in the Senate), and the Prodi government between 2006 and 2008 (short of a majority in the Senate by two seats). During the latter period, the fact that the SVP presided over the group representing autonomist parties within the Senate meant it was in a key position to determine whether or not important laws would be approved by the chamber. This position enabled the party – that had formed an electoral alliance with the PD in the 2006 parliamentary election – to demand policy concessions from the government. Since the victory of the Berlusconi coalition in the parliamentary elections in April 2008, the SVP has maintained a 'non-aligned' position whereby it votes on a policy-by-policy basis in the Italian parliament, without committing itself to any coalition or agreement with state-wide parties. With the withdrawal of Gianfranco Fini and his supporters from the Berlusconi government in November 2010, the SVP was courted intensely in order to provide the latter with support during a vote of confidence. However, the SVP abstained. The SVP's votes continue to be crucial on two parliamentary committees, such that the party is in a strong position to push for its autonomy demands to be met (see below).

These observations suggest that the SVP's coalition potential varies depending on which state-wide party wins an election. In general, the party's support has been more forthcoming for centre-left governments, given their more pro-autonomy positions. Votes against centre-right parties have been motivated both by these actors' ideological unease with enhancing regional self-government and the fact that they have been closer to post-fascist forces opposed by the SVP. As a consequence of the increasing bipolarization of the Italian party system, and the resulting alternation between governing majorities, the SVP's relevance also varies (Massl and Pallaver 2010).

nap new academic press

8.3. Changes in party organisation

It is possible to identify three phases in the SVP's organisational development, which has seen it evolve from a party of notables, to a mass party, to a party more focused on electoral competition. These organisational developments are summarised in table 8.4.

Table 8.4. *Pressure for organisational change upon crossing thresholds*

Threshold	Provincial level	State level	European level
V			
IV-B			
IV-A			
III	**Medium** - additional human and financial resources - threat of losing electoral share in 1990s prompted expansion of party in central office	**Medium** - additional human and financial resources	
II			
I	**Strong** - creation of party organisation	**Strong** - creation of party organisation	

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

8.3.1. 1945–1964: A party of notables

The SVP was created from the top-down, through a process of territorial penetration (Panebianco 1988). The party's leadership aimed to put in place a mass party organisation, vertically structured across three territorial levels: local, district and provincial. Each level consisted of a leader, a commission and, on the district and provincial levels, an executive body (steering committees). The party's highest decision-making body was the Provincial Assembly to which delegates were nominated by local branches. By the summer of 1945, just a few months after the foundation of the party, local branches had been set up in most municipalities, as had party offices in all districts (Holzer 1991: 65). The frenetic zeal that the party exhibited in creating its organisation and in enlisting members was due to attempts by Italian parties to deny the SVP the political legitimacy to speak on behalf of the South Tyrolean population, on the basis that it did not have a

nap new academic press

structure or any members. The SVP's initial success at organisation building facilitated its passing of the threshold of representation (at the provincial, regional and state levels) and the threshold of governance at the provincial level.

After the approval of the region's first Statute of Autonomy in 1948, however, the SVP developed features of a party of notables, characterised by organisational weakness beyond the core leadership. The party's presence in the provincial institutional arena provided the party with additional organisational resources, such as employees and financing to support the work of the SVP's representatives. Beyond this, however, the party's contact with the party on the ground declined. This was a consequence of the political demobilisation of members and supporters once the goal of territorial autonomy for South Tyrol had been achieved.

8.3.2. 1964–1992: From a party of notables to a mass party

In 1964, a new party leadership undertook to reform the SVP's organisation, with the aim of creating a mass party. This change in leadership had taken place several years earlier, in 1957, when Silvius Magnago was elected party leader. The move was a response to slow progress in the implementation of the formal autonomy for the Trentino-South Tyrol region that had been agreed in 1948. Party members increasingly blamed the liberal and politically moderate urban bourgeoisie that led the SVP for this state of affairs. The new party leadership elected by the 1957 Provincial Assembly were more determined to push for the territorial rights of the region. In that same year, for example, they organised a large rally against the governing DC party in Trentino and the Italian government, demanding special autonomy for South Tyrol and independence from Trentino.

The main thrust of the internal reforms undertaken in 1964 was to create stronger ties with the organisations and movements within the party's sphere of influence. New organisational instruments in order to reach out to specific segments of society were also established, such as the women and youth organisations established in 1966. Professional organisations were also set up, not least in response to the electoral threat posed by the SPS in the early 1970s (see above). An association of SVP employees was established which, together with the German-speaking trade union Autonomer Südtiroler Gewerkschaftsbund (ASGB), founded in 1964, served to align workers' interests with the fight for territorial autonomy. These associations acted as recruiting reservoirs for candidates and suppliers of votes at provincial elections (Pallaver 2006: 179-183). The establishment and expansion of these left-wing associations linked to the SVP was thus highly successful in undermining the electoral appeal of the competitors such as SPS and the state-wide Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) (Gatterer 2007).

In general, organisational reforms also had a major impact on increasing the party's membership; as shown in figure 8.1, this increased continuously until 2002, and by 2008 was estimated to have reached approximately 60,000 (although this number declined to 51,000 by 2010).[5] In 1993, the SVP's ratio of voters to members peaked at 48.8%; this fell to 41.5% in 1998 and remained relatively stable during the 2003 and 2008 provincial elections (41.3% and 40.9% respectively). Thus almost one of every two SVP voters are also party members. In this respect, the SVP is a leader not only in South Tyrol but also in a broader European context.

Figure 1 *The SVP's membership (1945–2010)*

Source: Holzer 1991: 66–71; personal communication by the SVP.
Note:
No data available for the 1966–1998 period.

The internal harmonisation of different sectorial and societal interests with those of German-speaking members within the SVP was achieved due to the creation of a variety of mechanisms for conflict resolution, such as the Social and Economic Committee (created in 1965) and the Advisory Board on Agricultural and Social Affairs (set up in 1972) (Piras 1998; Pan 1989; Recla 2007). The primacy of the central party was also re-asserted, by replacing the institutionalised representation of associations on party organs with advisory bodies. Thus, in addition to internal sections representing different societal interests, the SVP also established three provincial boards serving as advisory bodies for farmers, employees and the business community.

---

[5]   It should be noted that official membership figures have always been considered to be exaggerated.

nap new academic press

These organisational reforms were undertaken for several reasons. Firstly, they represented an effort by the SVP to respond to major socio-economic changes in South Tyrol during the 1950s and 1960s. Whilst in 1951, 42% of the province's workforce – among them approximately 70% of German-speakers – were employed in agriculture, this had declined to 20.3% by 1971. Over the same period, the number employed in the tertiary sector increased substantially. The SVP needed to ensure its continued electoral appeal during this transition from an agrarian to a service society, hence its effort to connect with different social and sectorial groups.

Secondly, organisational change also sought to undermine the efforts of previous SVP leaders to regain lost political authority within the party. These individuals – also opposed to the SVP's re-assertion of its territorial demands – established an internal opposition movement called Aufbau; it proposed a more business-oriented response to South Tyrol's socio-economic transformation, with less emphasis on the autonomist dimension. Some of these internal dissidents would eventually abandon the SVP to form a rival party, the THP, which contested the regional and provincial elections of 1964 (see above). The social expansion of the SVP's organisation thus also served to limit the electoral threat posed by this new rival German-speaking party.

8.3.3. 1993 onwards: From mass party to a mass electoral party

The electoral setback of 1993 – when the SVP's provincial vote-share fell far short of the 60% received on average in previous provincial elections – and the analysis of its causes prompted the SVP to enlarge the party's central management. For example, the fact of having to operate in a media-centred democracy (Norris 1997; Plasser 2002) led to the expansion of the division on media and organisation. In 2003, a new policy division was also created, with responsibility for developing the SVP's political programme. In total, the number of employees in the party's central office nearly doubled between 1978 and 2010, from 14 to 26. In 2002, additional internal organisations were also created – for example, to represent senior citizens – in order to cover as many social segments as possible. Consultative bodies on important social issues were also established. These encompassed issues such as schools, culture, sports, municipal politics and the environment.

From 1997 onwards, the party also prioritised the development of its presence on the internet. It re-launched its website, and created autonomously administrated sub-sites for all associated organisations, districts and local branches. In contrast to many other political parties, however, the SVP has not renounced traditional communication through its own party newspaper. The party organ *Der Volksbote* was published from 1945 to 1993, and then replaced by the newsletter *SVP Mitteilungen*, which was

nap new academic press

delivered irregularly. Since 1997, *Zukunft in Südtirol* has been published as a new party newspaper, thanks to financial aid provided by the Italian government. In keeping with the trend towards a more professional approach in electoral campaigns and their management, the SVP engaged a German polling agency for the first time for the provincial elections in 1993 (Dapunt 2005). Constant polling on the popularity of political actors and different policy proposals have become a regular feature of the SVP's day-to-day activities and electoral campaigning.

Since the 1990s, the SVP has also experienced a shift in power relations within the party, in favour of the leadership. Since Magnago's retirement as party leader in 1991, four individuals have succeeded him in this post (Piattoni and Pallaver 2003). Whereas Magnago officiated both as a party President and Provincial Governor, his successor in the latter post, Luis Durnwalder, gradually gained in authority and prestige. He established himself – rather than the party President – as the person of reference within the SVP (he is simultaneously the party's deputy leader). During the 1990s, therefore, Durnwalder's imposing personality led to a shift in the centre of decision-making away from the party and to the provincial government. This shift was not unopposed within the SVP. Elmar Pichler-Rolle, the new President for the period 2004-2009, sought to strengthen his position in the party *vis-à-vis* the provincial governor by enhancing the importance of local branches. This was presented as 'ordinary citizens' within the party challenging 'those on top' (that is, top party officials and those in the provincial government). The SVP's group in the provincial parliament also experienced growing internal tensions after the loss of the party's absolute majority in 2008. Individual representatives defending different interests within the SVP have sought to take advantage of the party's precarious governing position by threatening not to vote with their party group if their interests are not taken into account. This has placed added pressure on the leadership of the SVP's parliamentary group to maintain unity in order to govern effectively.

Internal harmony between the party's sub-organisations has also been challenged since the 1990s. Whereas Magnago was always keenly aware of the need to maintain a careful balance between business, agricultural and employee interests within the party, this balance was undermined after his retirement. The growing influence of business interests led high-profile members of the employees' organisation to abandon the SVP in 1999 (Frasnelli 2000). Alongside the conflict between capital and labour, the SVP's women's section also challenged the power positions accrued by men within the party organisation. These tensions intensified after the SVP's heavy electoral defeat in the 2008 parliamentary and provincial elections. As a result of this in-fighting, the party-leader, Pichler-Rolle, lost his support within the party and was forced by the party executive to withdraw

from the running for the leadership. He was replaced by a leadership tri-umvirate, comprising one representative each of the employee, business and women sections of the party. This decision aimed to demonstrate that an intra-party equilibrium had been re-established. Since 2009, the employees' representative, Richard Theiner, has been the SVP leader, with the business and women representatives as his deputies.

At other territorial levels, the pressures for organisational change have been less evident, not least because of the limited number of SVP representatives in state and European arenas. With regard to the former, the SVP has always received organisational and financial support from the Rome office of the South Tyrol provincial government; the increase in the party's coalition potential since the 1990s (see above) has seen an increase in the level of resources received. Moreover, additional resources have been forthcoming from the fact that the SVP has formed a sub-group within the 'mixed faction' group in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate.[6] For example, during the 2001-2006 legislative period, SVP Senators – together with the Aosta Valley representative, the Democratici Europei and several senators-for-life – established the *Gruppo delle Autonomie* faction; this was repeated (with same membership changes) for the period 2006-2008 under the name *Gruppo per le Autonomie*. After the 2008 election, the group changed its name to *Gruppo UDC, SVP e Autonomie*. The latter's Vice-President is a SVP Senator, and in the second half of the parliamentary term the SVP assumed the Presidency of the group (Massl and Pallaver 2010). The relative organisational independence of the SVP's parliamentary representatives and the weak control exerted over them by the party's central organisation means that the former occasionally vote against their party's position. In recent years, this has led to tensions *vis-à-vis* the party leadership, although these have never escalated to such a degree as to pose a threat to the unity of the SVP.

8.4. Changes in party goals and the SVP's policy impact

The SVP was created as a party with a clear policy goal, namely the reintegration of South Tyrol within Austria. During its first years of existence, therefore, the party espoused irredentist ambitions However, the party simultaneously sought to push for internal self-determination for South Tyrol within the framework of the Italian state. In pursuit of this latter aim, the SVP also sought to maximise its electoral appeal in order to ensure a presence in the newly created regional and provincial institutions, as well as at the state-level. The party was successful in achieving this goal;

---

[6]   The SVP has never met the numerical requirements for forming its own parliamentary group, namely 20 seats in the Chamber of Deputies or 10 Senators.

nap new academic press

as noted above, the party immediately crossed the threshold of provincial government and secured representation at the state-level. A similar success was achieved upon the introduction of European elections several decades later.

As a result of these early achievements, for most of the SVP's lifespan, it has not altered its prioritisation of goals in response to changes in its operating environment. At the provincial level, policy, electoral and office goals have been pursued simultaneously, albeit with occasional shifts in favour of one over the other. For example, since the 1990s, the SVP's electoral decline has prompted the party to re-focus on improving its electoral appeal through the professionalisation of the party's organisation (see above). At the state level, the SVP has never been interested in being a member of a state-wide coalition government, and has thus focused exclusively on the goals of vote-maximisation and policy influence. The political context since the 1990s – and the SVP's acquisition of coalition potential in the eyes of state-wide parties – has been particularly conducive exercising the latter.

The SVP has, nevertheless, experienced the tensions that many autonomist parties face when pursuing goals at different territorial levels. For example, the decision to form an informal coalition with the Prodi government at the state level (2006–2008), with the party's votes guaranteeing the centre-left government's survival, generated internal divisions. In particular, business-orientated interests within the SVP were opposed Prodi's economic policies, and openly advocated an alternative alliance with centre-right state-wide parties. SVP Senators sympathetic to such a position also voted against their party group. The tension was resolved because Prodi sought to accommodate some of the concerns raised by the SVP's internal dissidents, and no serious damage was done to the party. However, as noted above, the SVP has since behaved as a non-aligned actor, refusing to cooperate with the main Italian parties since this is considered too risky. The party has also sought to push for new electoral reforms that would not require it to form coalitions with state-wide parties in order to ensure parliamentary representation at the state-level.

The fact that the tensions alluded to above related to the left-right alliances of the SVP is indicative of the way in which the party's ideological priorities have evolved over time. As already noted, the SVP was founded as a party with a clear territorial agenda. However, this profile has changed in two ways. Firstly, irredentism has been replaced by a territorial position that is more supportive of self-government within a federal framework (De Winter 1998; Pallaver 2006). This moderation in rhetoric has been the result of several external factors and the SVP's own policy successes. Thus, for example, the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement of 1946 between Austria and Italy allowed the Trentino-South Tyrol region to remain part of Italy

subject to certain autonomy provisions. These were set out in the region's 1948 Statute of Autonomy. In subsequent years, the SVP worked to ensure the implementation of autonomy and minority protection, both at the provincial and state levels. The SVP was also instrumental in pushing for a reform of the Statute, which was finally achieved in 1972; this saw the *de facto* division of the Trentino-South Tyrol region, with new political and financial autonomy granted to South Tyrol.

The 1992 declaration by the United Nations marked the final conclusion to the debate between Austria and Italy about South Tyrol's constitutional status. Although the SVP continued to formally claim the right to self-determination as a means of seceding from Italy, this demand ceased to be the party's main policy goal. Instead, the emphasis was shifted onto issues of domestic politics in South Tyrol. Since the 1990s, therefore, the party has been less focused on ethnicity-related issues, and more concerned with traditional policy issues, such as healthcare, economic and tax policies, the environment, transport and immigration. This policy shift is evident at both the provincial and state levels. With the autonomy of South Tyrol secured and the linguistic rights of its inhabitants protected, other interests have come to dominate within the party (such as business, employee and agricultural interests). In this respect, the SVP's ideological concerns have come to resemble that of traditional political parties that situate themselves on the left and the right of the political spectrum.

This does not mean that the SVP has abandoned its territorial agenda completely. The party continues to promote South Tyrol's self-government, especially within the context of the broader process of European integration. In 1997, the Schengen Treaty removed the internal borders between Italy and Austria, thus bringing South Tyrol a little closer to North Tyrol (Austria). The SVP conceives of the European Union as an ally *vis-à-vis* Rome, and believes that the process of European integration will help to undermine nation-states, and ultimately the power of the central government in Rome over South Tyrol.

8.5. Conclusion

As an autonomist 'catch-all' party representing the interests of the German and Ladin-speaking communities of South Tyrol, the SVP can be considered a successful party in at least three respects. Firstly, at the provincial level, the party succeeded in passing all the thresholds in a party's lifespan – from declaration to government – immediately upon its creation; the party has remained a party of provincial government for over fifty years. At other territorial levels, the party was also successful in passing the thresholds it aspired to cross. For example, whilst entering state-level government has always been shunned for ideological reasons, the party has

nevertheless used its coalition potential to extract important policy concessions from state-wide parties depending on the SVP's legislative support for the survival of their governments. This points to a second way in which the SVP has been successful namely in achieving its core autonomist goals. The SVP has not always been directly responsible for these achievements. The Gruber-DeGasperi Agreement of 1946, for example – which implied the *de facto* renunciation of self-determination – and the 1992 UN declaration were external developments that guaranteed the Trentino-South Tyrol region's autonomy. On other occasions, however, the SVP was a central actor in pushing for self-government for South Tyrol, not least during the processes of drafting the regions first and second Statutes of Autonomy in the late 1940s and early 1970s respectively. As noted above, the SVP also defended its autonomist interests at the state-level. Thirdly, however, the SVP has not become a victim of its own policy success, as have some other autonomist parties. Securing self-government has seen the party shift its attention to other policy issues more familiar to conventional left-right policy competition. In this respect, the SVP's political programme has been 'normalised' since the 1990s, but without the party's hegemonic position within South Tyrolean politics being jeopardised.

This is not to say that the party has avoided all of the trade-offs associated with crossing different thresholds and pursuing different policy goals at different territorial levels. As noted above, for example, the SVP's desire to influence policy at the state-level (and its decision to co-operate with the Prodi government in the mid 2000s) provoked internal tensions between different ideological factions within the party. However, it is also the case that, on the whole, organisational and party goal change was more a response to external factors, than to the fact of having crossed new thresholds (after all, these had been crossed very early on in the SVP's lifespan). For example, organisational reforms during the 1960s were a response to broader socio-economic changes and increasing competition from other German-speaking parties. Electoral decline from the 1990s onwards – and especially the threat of losing the party's absolute majority within the provincial parliament – prompted further internal changes. External factors affecting the SVP's electoral and political status also prompted a re-prioritisation of different party goals, for example to re-focus on vote-maximisation as a pre-requisite for office incumbency and policy influence. The extent to which these organisational and strategic responses will prove effective at recuperating the party's electoral support remains to be seen.

References

Atz, Hermann and Günther Pallaver (2009) 'Der lange Abschied von der Sammelpartei. Die Landtagswahlen 2008 in Südtirol', in: Ferdinand Karlhofer and Günther Pallaver (eds.), *Politik in Tirol. Jahrbuch 2009.* Innsbruck/Wien/Bozen: Studien Verlag, pp. 95–127.

Dapunt, Susanne (2005) *Der Landtagswahlkampf der Südtiroler Volkspartei 2003. Rahmenbedingungen – Politische Kommunikation – Strategie*, Unpublished Thesis, University of Innsbruck.

De Winter, Lieven (1998) 'Conclusion. A Comparative Analysis of the Electoral, Office and Policy Success of Ethnoregionalist Parties', in: Lieven De Winter and Huri Türsan (eds.), *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe.* London: Routledge, pp. 204–247.

Di Michele, Andrea, Francesco Palermo and Günther Pallaver (2003) *1992. Fine di un conflitto. Dieci anni dalla chiusura della questione sudtirolese.* Bologna: Il Mulino.

Di Sotto, Nicoletta (2009) *Dalla periferia all'Europa. I partiti etnoregionalisti e l'Unione Europea*, Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino.

Eisterer, Klaus and Rolf Steininger (eds.) (1989) *Die Option. Südtirol zwischen Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus.* Innsbruck: Haymon.

Frasnelli, Hubert (2000) *Die Herrschaft der Fürsten – Macht, Zivilcourage und Demokratie in Südtirol.* Klagenfurt: Wieser Verlag.

Gatterer, Claus (1968) *Im Kampf gegen Rom. Bürger, Minderheiten und Autonomien in Italien.* Wien: Europa Verlag.

Gatterer, Joachim (2007) "*rote milben im gefieder*". *Sozialdemokratische, kommunistische und grün-alternative Parteipolitik in Südtirol.* Unpublished Thesis, University of Innsbruck.

Heiss, Hans (2002) 'Jahr der Entscheidung. Zur Gründungsphase der Südtiroler Volkspartei 1945', in: Klaus Eisterer (ed.) *Tirol zwischen Diktatur und Demokratie (1930–1950). Beiträge für Rolf Steininger zum 60. Geburtstag.* Innsbruck: Studienverlag, pp. 267–290.

Holzer, Anton (1991) *Die Südtiroler Volkspartei.* Thaur: Kulturverlag.

Holzer, Anton and Barbara Schwegler (1998) 'The Südtiroler Volkspartei: A Hegemonic Ethnoregionalist Party', in: Lieven De Winter and Huri Türsan (eds.), *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe.* London: Routledge, pp. 158–173.

Landesinstitut für Statistik (2005) *Statistisches Jahrbuch für Südtirol.* Bozen, Athesia.

Lijphart, Arend (1977) *Democracy in Plural Societies. A Comparative Exploration.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Massl, Manuel and Günther Pallaver (2010) 'Interessenswahrnehmung selbständiger Landesparteien – Die Rolle der Südtiroler Volkspartei im römischen Parlament', in: Julia Oberhofer and Roland Sturm (eds.) *Koalitionsregierungen in den Ländern und Parteienwettbewerb.* München: Allitera Verlag, pp. 251–276.

Norris, Pippa (1997) *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Democracies.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Pallaver, Günther (2005a) 'The Südtiroler Volkspartei and Its Ethno-Populism', in: Daniele Caramani and Yves Mény (eds.) *Challenges to Consensual Politics. Democracy, Identity, and Populist Protest in the Alpine Region.* Bruxelles: Peter Lang, pp. 187-208.

Pallaver, Günther (2005b) *Wahlsystem und Parteiensystem in Italien*, Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft, 4, 39–56.

Pallaver, Günther (2006) 'The Südtiroler Volkspartei: From Irredentism to Autonomy', in: Lieven De Winter, Marga Gómez-Reino and Peter Lynch (eds.) *Autonomist Parties in*

nap new academic press

Europe: Identity Politics and the Revival of the Territorial Cleavage – Vol. II. Barcelona: ICPS, pp. 161–188.

Pallaver, Günther (2007a) 'La Südtiroler Volkspartei', in: Giuseppe Ferrandi and Günther Pallaver (eds.) *La Regione Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol nel XX secolo. I. Politica e Istituzioni.* Trento: Museo Storico in Trento, pp. 631–657.

Pallaver, Günther (2007b) *'Ethnoregionale Parteien im Europäischen Parlament',* in: Anton Pelinka and Fritz Plasser (eds.), *Europäisch Denken und Lehren. Festschrift für Heinrich Neisser.* Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, pp. 227–232.

Pallaver, Günther (2008) *'South Tyrol's Consociational Democracy: Between Political Claim and Social Reality',* in: Jens Woelk, Francesco Palermo and Joseph Marko (eds.) *Tolerance Through Law. Self Governance and Group Rights in South Tyrol.* Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, pp. 303–327.

Pan, Christoph (1989) 'Sozialpartnerschaft in Südtirol', in: Franz Hieronymus Riedl, Christoph Pan and Robert Gismann (eds.), *Tirol im 20. Jahrhundert. Festschrift für Viktoria Stadlmayer zur Vollendung des 70. Lebensjahres in Würdigung ihres Wirkens für das ganze Tirol.* Bozen: Athesia, pp. 147–158.

Panebianco, Angelo (1988) *Political Parties: Organization and Power.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Pasquino, Gianfranco (2006) *I sistemi elettorali.* Bologna: Il Mulino.

Peterlini, Oskar (2009) 'Südtirols Vertretung am Faden Roms. Die Auswirkungen von Wahlsystemen auf ethnische Minderheiten am Beispiel Südtirols in Rom von 1921–2013', in: Peter Hilpold (ed.) *Minderheitenschutz in Italien.* Wien: Braumüller, pp. 37–139.

Piattoni, Simona and Günther Pallaver (2003) 'Who Leads Regionalist Parties? A Comparative Exploration'. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Società Italiana di Scienza Politica. Trento, 14–16 September.

Piras, Alessandro (1998) *Die Beziehungen der Südtiroler Volkspartei zu den deutschsprachigen Wirtschafts- und Sozialverbänden*, Unpublished Thesis, University of Innsbruck.

Plasser, Fritz (2002) *Global Political Campaigning. A Worlwide Analysis of Campaign Professionals and Their Practices.* Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Recla, Martin (2007) *Sozialpartnerschaftliche Perspektiven in Südtirol* Unpublished Thesis, University of Innsbruck.

Sleiter, Tommaso (2000) *Die SVP im römischenParlament. Vertrauensdebatten und Abstimmungsverhalten einer ethnoregionalen Partei.* Unpublished Thesis, University of Innsbruck.

Stuhlpfarrer, Karl (1985) *Umsiedlung Südtirol 1939–1940 – 2 Volumes.* Wien: Löcker-Verlag.

Südtiroler Landesregierung (2005) *Das neueAutonomiestatut.* Bozen: Tezzele.

Südtiroler Landesregierung (2006) *Südtirol Handbuch.* Bozen: Tezzele.

Südtiroler Landesregierung (2008) *Südtirol Handbuch.* Bozen: Tezzele.

Südtiroler Landesregierung (2009) *Südtirol Handbuch.* Bozen: Tezzele.

Giulia Sandri

The Union Valdôtaine

9.1. Introduction

The Union Valdôtaine (UV) was founded in 1945. Rooted in resistance anti-fascist autonomist movements, the UV was created as a regionalist trans-party association and only become a fully-fledged political party in 1949. The association initially focused on a single basic goal: to negotiate a Statute of Autonomy for the Aosta Valley with the central government. Over a period of twenty years, the UV established itself as the main mouthpiece for autonomist political claims within this region. Later on, the party acquired a hegemonic position within the Aosta Valley's political system and secured a monopoly of the outward representation of the region's interests in the Italian and European parliaments.

The party's evolution as a dominant political force within the Aosta Valley has been accompanied by several waves of organisational adaptation, due to both internal and external pressures. On the one hand, crossing different thresholds at different points in time prompted both the centralisation power and later demands for internal democratisation. On the other hand, the UV has had to adapt its party structures to successive electoral reforms at the regional and state levels, as well as broader transformations in the Italian party system (in particular the dissolution and transformation of the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) and Democrazia Cristiana (DC) respectively). In response to fluctuations in its electoral support and coalition potential, the UV has also prioritised different goals during its lifetime; the party evolved from being a policy-seeking party, to a vote-seeking party, to consolidating its office-seeking ambitions. This chapter also argues that the UV has been very successful in achieving its core policy goals. Whilst the Aosta Valley was granted a Statute of autonomy in 1948, the legislation for implementing these statutory provisions had mostly been achieved by the mid-1990s. Most importantly, however, and unlike some other autonomist parties included in this volume, the UV's existence has not been threatened as a consequence of this policy success. Having achieved its main territorial goals, the party has simply pushed more autonomy from the central state. The UV's continued electoral and political hegemony thus rests on the party's ability to present itself as the champion of the Aosta Valley's financial and political autonomy against the centralising ambitions of the Italian state.

nap new academic press

9.2. The lifespan of the UV

9.2.1. The thresholds of declaration and authorisation

The UV was founded on 13 September 1945, with the legal permission of the Allied governments. It was largely formed by members of the main Italian parties, the DC and the Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI), and was conceived as an inter-party cultural and political association that admitted members "without distinction of political ideology" (Art. 2, UV Statute of 1945). The party established permanent organisational structures and mobilised within regional and state-level political arenas in order to contribute to discussions about the design of the new autonomous regional institutions.

However, it would be a further three years before the UV declared its intention to participate in elections. Initially constituted as a non-party association, the party did not possess either the personnel or the financial resources to compete directly in elections. Instead, it supported independent lists in the local elections of 1946.[1] A new Statute of Autonomy was approved by the Italian parliament in 1948; it provided a degree of self-government for the Aosta Valley region and guaranteed its bilingualism by law. However the Statute required several implementation laws in order to make the autonomy provisions effective. State-wide Italian parties seemed unable or uninterested in pushing for such laws to be adopted. Thus, in 1949, the UV changed its statutes to become an independent political party and announced its decision to participate in forthcoming regional elections. Shortly afterwards, the party presented its official symbol and the signatures necessary to obtain the legal authorisation to participate in elections (see table 9.1).

---

[1]   These independent lists were extremely successful. Under a pure PR electoral system, the electoral coalition formed by the PCI, the PSI and the Partito Repubblicano Italiano (PRI) gained the majority of votes in 8 out of 74 municipal councils, the independent lists supported by the UV gained the majority of votes in 55 municipal councils out of 74, whilst the DC won in 11 municipal councils.

Table 9.1. *The Lifespan of the Union Valdôtaine (1945–2006)*

a) Regional level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1946				UV		
1949						UV
1954				UV		
1959						UV
1966					UV	
	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1974						UV
1990					UV	
1992						UV
2003						UV

b) State level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1948	UV					
1949		UV				
1958			UV			
1968		UV				
1976			UV			
1999						UV
2000			UV			
2001			UV			
2006		UV				
2008			UV			
2010				UV		

c) European level

	I	II	III
1979		UV	
1984		UV	
1989		UV	
1994		UV	
1999		UV	
2000			UV
2004		UV	
2009		UV	

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

9.2.2. *The threshold of representation*

The UV passed the threshold of representation at the regional level in 1949. With a majority uninominal electoral system having been approved by the Italian parliament in January 1949,[2] the UV's list gained the majority of votes and obtained 28 out of 35 seats in the Aosta Valley's regional assembly. Since then, and in spite of variable electoral performances, the party has never lost its representation within this institution. The UV achieved very good results during the 1950s and the early 1960s (see figure 9.1). The party benefitted from the first-past-the-post system based on a single constituency whose boundaries overlapped with the territorial distribution of the region's French-speaking community. Nevertheless, the UV still formed electoral alliances with state-wide parties during this period in order to strengthen its organisational standing and improve its electoral prospects. During the 1950s, for example, the UV formed an ever-closer relationship with the DC; the fact that the UV had not fully completed the move from political movement to fully-fledged political party, in addition to the UV's Christian roots, made the latter a natural ally. With the DC's gradual rightward ideological shift by the mid-1950s, however, the UV shifted its preferences to co-operate with the PSI ahead of the 1958 general election. A UV-PCI-PSI alliance was also formed at the regional level, and went on to govern the regional assembly from 1959 to 1966.

Figure 9.1. *Electoral performance of UV (in % of Aosta Valley vote)*
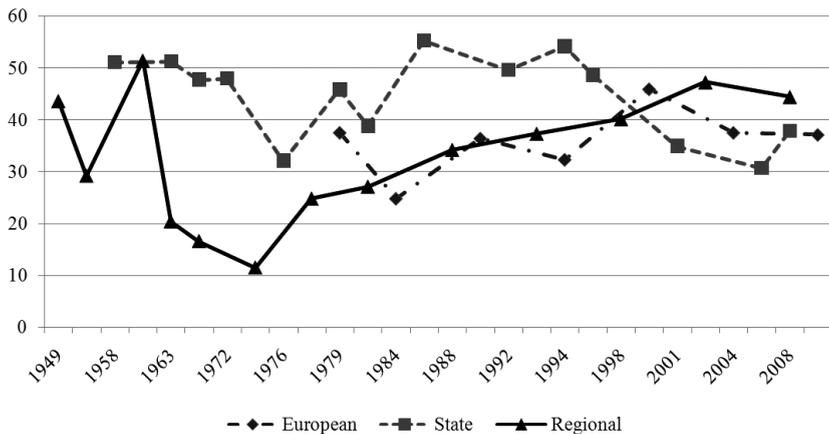
Source: Compiled from data from the Aosta Valley Regional Council (2010).

---

2   The uninominal majority system (also known as a first-past-the-post system) was corrected with the mechanism of panachage, which allowed the distribution of voter preferences among different lists. Voters could thus vote for one list as well as a specific candidate on a different list.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, the UV's electoral results declined and were the lowest in its history (see above, figure 9.1). One factor explaining this downward trend was the change in the electoral system to one of proportional representation (PR) in 1963. This had the effect of forcing the party to count only on its own electorate forces, as it could no longer rely on the votes allocated to its state-wide allies as had been the case under the previous electoral system. In 1966, and following political developments at the state-level, the regional branch of the PSI left the regionalist-left alliance and formed a new executive with the DC, the Partito Liberale Italiano (PLI) and the Partito Socialista Democratico Italiano (PSDI). In opposition and without the electoral incentive to form alliances as under the previous electoral system, co-operation between the UV and the PCI collapsed and the UV presented itself in subsequent regional elections. The Aosta Valley region obtained the competence to define its own regional electoral system in 1989; it chose to maintain the PR system adopted previously in 1963 and the indirect election of the President of the region.[3]

The UV's electoral performance was also affected, however, by the creation of new political parties that campaigned directly for the regionalist vote. Rival autonomist parties were established when internal factions within the UV split to create the Rassemblement Valdôtain (RV) in 1966, and the Union Valdôtaine Progressiste (UVP) in 1971. The UV also faced increasing competition from the regionalist wing of the state-wide DC. The regionalist faction of the DC split in 1970 to establish a new party, the Democratici Popolari (DP).

After a period of adaptation and transition, the UV began to increase its electoral share from the late 1970s onwards. The party regained control over the autonomist political space in 1976, with the reincorporation of break-away groups. Since then, the UV's regional electoral results improved continuously; the party succeeded in increasing its vote share by an impressive 36% in 25 years. Whilst it came close to securing an absolute majority of votes and seats within the regional parliament on several occasions since the 1970s, this was finally achieved in 2003.

However, renewed internal conflict within the party led left-wing internal factions to split and create Vallée d'Aoste Vive in 2005, and Renouveau Valdôtain (RnV) in 2006. Both new parties claimed to represent the original values and autonomist ideological positions of the early UV; the contemporary UV was deemed to have become too 'cartelised' and too right-wing in its positioning on socio-economic issues. Nevertheless, to date these new competitors have had a minimal impact on the UV's electo-

---

[3]   The President of the regional government is elected by the regional assembly from among its members by secret ballot and a simple majority vote.

ral standing, given that its vote-share in the 2008 regional election remained well above 40% (see above, figure 9.1).

At the state level, the UV began competing in elections to the Italian parliament in 1948. However, it only gained representation in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate in 1958; the representatives elected in the two prior legislatures were founding members of the UV that later chose to join the DC when the party constituted itself as an independent party in 1949. In 1958, the UV presented its own candidates for both chambers, and formed an electoral alliance with the main left-wing Italian parties (PCI and PSI). Since 1958, the UV has won at least one of the two seats reserved for the Aosta Valley constituency by the region's Statute of Autonomy (one in the Chamber of Deputies and one in the Senate). Results in state-level elections have generally been good, with the party regularly polling at least 30% of votes (on average, the UV gained 44.7% of votes between 1958 and 2006). This is mainly due to the first-past-the-post system used for these elections. Just as for regional elections until the mid-1960s, the fact that the Aosta Valley constituency overlaps with the UV's French-speaking electoral base facilitates the crossing of the threshold of representation at this level. The state-level electoral formula for the Aosta Valley constituency has not changed substantially since 1948, and has thus contributed to the stability of political representation at this level.[4]

Nevertheless, at the state level it is not possible to identify a pattern of electoral growth during the last thirty years similar to the one witnessed at regional level. The UV's results have fluctuated (even if generally remaining high), ranging from a minimum of 32% to a maximum of 55%. During the 1960s and early 1970s, greater electoral competition within the Aosta Valley (see above) impacted negatively on the UV's electoral performance, although the party's electoral share was recuperated by 1976. This marked the beginning of a thirty-year period of monopoly of outward representation in the Italian parliament. This was only compromised in 2006, when the UV's share of the regional vote fell from 35% to 30.7% (see above, figure 9.1). On this occasion, the Democratici di Sinistra (DS) – the social democratic heirs to the PCI – won the seat in the Chamber of Deputies whilst RnV – the party formed by ex-members of the VU, as noted above – won the seat in the Senate. The fact that the 2006 parliamentary election took place just

---

[4] In contrast, from 1948 until 1993 parliamentary elections elsewhere in Italy were organised on the basis of PR. In 1993, this was changed to a mixed majority electoral system, although the Aosta Valley region retained the first-past-the-post system. The region's votes were thus not taken into account in the distribution of the 155 seats to be allocated within the Chamber of Deputies according to the proportional element of the system, nor of the 83 seats allocated within the Senate under the same provision. Since the reform of Italian electoral laws in 2006, and the adoption of a new mixed-proportional system, the votes of the Aosta Valley are not counted in the allocation of the majority bonus either in the Chamber of Deputies or in the Senate.

a few months after the party suffered important splits (see above), and the competition from these new left-ring autonomist actors, go a long way towards explaining this result. However, this was a temporary set-back; the party recuperated its electoral losses at the 2008 general election, where it polled over 37% of votes.

At the European level, the UV has dominated electoral competition for the European Parliament since the first direct elections held in 1979. The UV has always polled over 30% of all votes cast in the Aosta Valley. However, due to the inclusion of the Aosta Valley region in the larger electoral constituency of North-west Italy, the UV's list has never passed the threshold of 50,000 votes necessary to gain a seat in the European Parliament on its own. Until 1999, the party formed electoral alliances with the Sardinian Partito Sardo d'Azione (PSdAz) as part of the list *Federalismo*. In 1999, the UV's candidate Luciano Caveri ran as part of the centre-left list *I Democratici*, because of his personal political links with the list's leader, Romano Prodi. Caveri entered the European Parliament in 2000 as a substitute for one of the resigning Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) of the Partito Democratico della Sinistra (PDS). This gave the UV, and the Aosta Valley, its first and only political representation at the European level.

In 2004, the electoral alliance between the UV, other small autonomist parties and the broad centre-left coalition *Ulivo* (within which *I Democratici* had merged) was renewed. However, the UV polled 8% less votes than in 1999. At the last European election held in June 2009, the party ran as *Vallée d'Aoste*, an alliance with two minor regionalist/Christian Democratic parties, Stella Alpina and the Fédération Autonomiste (its two coalition partners at the regional level since 2008). The *Vallée d'Aoste* alliance was linked to the right-wing state-wide party list Popolo della Libertà (PDL) within the North-West constituency. This choice of alliance represented an important strategic shift for the UV. As a traditionally left-of-centre party that had mainly formed electoral alliances with progressive left-wing parties for more than 50 years, the preference of right-wing election partners in 2009 reflected the UV's ideological evolution in recent years (see below).

The UV's strong electoral performance in elections at all three territorial levels has been the result of the transformation of the regional party system. The competitiveness of the party system from 1945 until the late 1950s was relatively high, with an average distance of 7.7% between the two main parties in terms of votes; it remained below 10% during the 1960s and 1970s (Tronconi 2005). This suggests that the fluctuating electoral results of the UV during this period were also the consequence of its nature as a new party entering the electoral arena. Electoral competition from 1990 to 2006 shows a different pattern. Party competitiveness in the Aosta Valley political system is now among the lowest in Italy. Since the 1990s, the distance

between the two main parties has increased from 8.5% to 22.7%; the UV has always been the party with the highest electoral results during this period. This suggests that the UV has become a dominant party within the regional political system.

9.2.3. The threshold of relevance

At the regional level, the UV crossed the threshold of relevance immediately after its foundation; the UV forced other parties to respond to its regional autonomy claims when it participated indirectly in the temporary regional government set up by the Italian Prime Minister in 1946.[5] In particular, the PCI, DC and PSI were compelled to take into account the existence of clearly defined regional autonomist demands, and to support negotiations with the central government for a Statute of Autonomy for the Aosta Valley. UV individuals formed part of the negotiating teams that travelled to Rome to discuss power sharing and self-rule mechanisms with the Italian Constitutional Assembly sub-committee in charge of drafting the Aosta Valley's Statute (Boiardi and Di Capua 1994: 51). Moreover, the UV strongly influenced the results of local and state-level elections in 1946 and 1948 by supporting independent and civic lists. In this sense, the UV can be said to have passed the threshold of relevance before it passed the thresholds of declaration, authorisation and representation.

After competing directly in the 1949 regional election, the UV participated in the formation of the first elected government, securing 3 out of 7 regional ministries and the Presidency of the regional government. Although the party was not in government from 1954 to 1959, and again from 1966 to 1974, the party retained its political relevance. For example, during the latter period, the UV was still considered as a possible coalition partner by other state-wide parties. This was due to the fact of having governed previously, and because the UV was willing to cooperate with parties of the left as well as the DC, both in terms of electoral alliances and governing alliances.[6]

At the state-level, the UV's minimal numerical presence in the Italian parliament never allowed the party to acquire coalition potential. In gene-

---

[5]   The first regional government was formed by 25 MPs nominated by the Italian Prime Minister, 5 each from the main Italian parties (DC, PCI, PSI, PSdAz, PLI). The UV's regional representatives were members of these mainstream parties and were nominated on the basis of their affiliation to the latter.

[6]   In fact, during this period the UV formed several parliamentary and governing alliances with the DC (in 1949 and 1975) but also with PCI and PSI (in 1954, 1959 and 1963). In general, parliamentary alliances within the Aosta Valley regional assembly corresponded to the governing alliances within the regional government, with the two exceptions of the UV's external support of the DP-PSI government (1970–1973) and of the DC's external support of the UV-PSI government (1974–1975).

nap new academic press

ral, the UV's representatives gave their support to the vast majority of the Italian governments in votes of confidence held between 1948 and 2006 (Cuaz *et al.* 2001). The UV's blackmail potential at the state-level has been also minimal, for the same reason. Nevertheless, the UV managed to work with mainstream parties, rather than other autonomist parties representing other linguistic minorities, to push its regionalist agenda. Thus, for example, the UV collaborated with state-wide parties (especially with PSI and PCI during the 1970s and the 1980s) for the legislative implementation of financial autonomy for the Aosta Valley. The political relationship between the UV's Luciano Caveri (Italian Deputy from 1987 to 2001) and the PC-PDS leadership (especially with the *Ulivo/I Democratici* coalition's leader Romano Prodi) strengthened the capacity of the UV to shape policy at the state level.

However, this special relationship between the UV and the centre-left has been severely weakened since 2001. The UV's then newly elected Senator, Auguste Rollandin – leader of the right-wing faction of the party – joined the mixed parliamentary group *Gruppo per le Autonomie*. Since then, stronger relations have been built with the right-wing coalition in government, led by Silvio Berlusconi. A new electoral coalition between UV and Berlusconi's PDL was formed for the 2009 European election and the 2010 local elections. This led to direct negotiations between the regional government, elected in 2008 and led by UV, and the state government, concerning the implementation of a new state law on fiscal federalism and devolution. The provisions would have seen several million euro cut from the Aosta Valley's regional budget (Riccarand 2010). However, the cuts finally implemented in November 2010 were considerably less (€ 130 million rather than the €312 first announced); this was in no small part a concession by the central government after the UV's Senator, Antonio Fosson, voted in favour of Berlusconi's government in a vote of no confidence on 30 September 2010.

9.2.4. The threshold of governance

With the exception of the 1954–1959 legislature and the period 1966–1974, the UV has always participated in the formation of governments at the regional level. Even though it has never formed a single party government, it has been the senior coalition partner in the majority of the 26 regional governmental coalitions in power up until 2010. Most recently, it has been supported in government by Stella Alpina and Fédération Autonomiste. Having moved from being a party of protest directly into government in 1949, the UV moved backwards over this threshold during the 1960s and the early 1970s, being excluded from executive formation seven times in twenty years. The threshold of governance is the only critical juncture that has been crossed backwards by the party at the regional level. In the last

seven cabinets, the number of portfolios allocated to the UV has grown rapidly and since 1993 the party has nominated 7 regional ministers out of 8. In the last fifteen years, the party has obtained 80% of government port-folios and all the presidency posts. This recent trend in the consolidation of the UV's regional political power is even more evident in comparison with the previous period. From 1946 to 1993 the party held 25% of the total amount of portfolios and 36% of the presidencies of the regional govern-ment. Since the 1990s, regional government has thus been identified almost exclusively with the UV. The party has also succeeded in penetrating regio-nal and local public administration, thus developing traditional "cartelisa-tion" mechanisms (Martial 1996; Curtaz 2006).

At the state-level, the UV's minimal numerical presence in the Italian parliament has largely prohibited the party from being part of a coalition government. Nevertheless, the party always sought to take advantage of its position in order to cross the threshold of governance. This was achieved only once, when the UV's votes were decisive for returning a vote of confi-dence in, and the parliamentary majority of, the D'Alema II government in 1999. From December 1999 to June 2000, the UV's representative in the Chamber of Deputies, Luciano Caveri, became the first and sole Aosta Val-ley member of the Italian government ever, after being nominated State Secretary for the Presidency of the Council.

9.3. Changes in party organisation

Upon its creation in 1946, the UV was required to create new organisatio-nal structures from scratch; these underwent several reforms during the party's lifetime. The main reforms undertaken as a result of passing diffe-rent thresholds are summarised in table 9.2.

The UV organised five party congresses between 1946 and 1947, with the participation of approximately 2,500 grass-roots members per con-gress. The aim of these meetings was to define the party's political pro-gramme, select candidates for local and state elections (who would run indirectly within mixed civic lists) and to aggregate social consensus on autonomy issues. The party on the ground played a major role in building these first organisational structures and in defining the UV's political goals. When it emerged victorious in the 1949 regional election, the party's internal organisation underwent a first and limited organisational change in order to manage its new political and administrative responsibilities. To this end, the secretarial staff of the party was increased, as well as the staff employed for parliamentary work.

Table 9.2. *Pressure for organisational change upon crossing thresholds: the Union Valdôtaine.*

Threshold	*Regional level*	*European level*	*State level*
V	**Medium** - Strengthening of the party in public office - Major role of MPs and Ministers within the party's executive organs		
IV-B			
IV-A			
III	**Strong** - Increase in number of staff (in central office and to support parliamentary work) - Increase in number and variety of tasks performed (political commissions) - Shift of power away from party on the ground to the party in public office	**Medium** - Secretarial support in Brussels - Intra-party EU policy-making mechanisms (specific committees) - Informal vertical co-operation between European, state and regional levels	**Medium** - Increase in secretarial support for parliamentary work Informal vertical - Co-operation between state and regional levels (weekly meetings)
II			
I	**Strong** - National congresses for mobilising supporters and formulating political programmes and policy goals - Important role of local sections (party on the ground)		

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

During the subsequent two decades (1950–1970), in contrast, wider transformations occurred within the party, resulting in a clear shift of power away from party on the ground to the party in public office. On one hand, the party was progressively endowed with a highly centralised decision-making structure. The main political decisions were taken directly by the

nap new academic press

President of the party and were implemented by the central bureaucracy with very little consultation with the general assembly of members. Indeed, until 1950, there was no distinction between the party's legislative and the executive branches (Boiardi and Di Capua 1994: 160). The UV gravitated around the charismatic figure of its first leader, Séverin Caveri, who held the post of President from 1946 to 1973. Some scholars have categorised the UV in its early years as a "liberal pre-fascist" organisation (Martial 1996: 833), because its organisational structure resembled that of liberal Italian parties of the nineteenth century. These parties had weak extra-parliamentary structures, strong leadership and assembly organs with limited powers. This centralised, hierarchical organisation with a weak role for party militants, typical of cadre or caucus parties, persisted over time.

On the other hand, since the 1950s the UV underwent important but informal and practical transformations. Whilst the cadre-party internal structure was consolidated, the party in public office progressively strengthened its position. By the end of the 1960s, almost all the members of the party's executive organs also held political mandates. The party in central office thus overlapped with the party in public office. This development was the direct result of the passing of the threshold of representation at the regional level: the UV chose to concentrate decision-making power in the hands of its President and its regional representatives in order to consolidate its fluctuating electoral results during the 1960s and 1970s. The regional parliamentary group were in control of defining the party's political agenda, and for several years the roles of party President and regional Prime Minister were held by the same person, namely Séverin Caveri.

From the outset, the main function of the UV's general assembly was to elect the Party Council. From 1949 to 1976, this body was formally responsible for decisions with regard to the UV's electoral programme, the selection of candidates and the election of the party leader. Moreover, the Party Council was headed by an Executive Committee composed of the President, three members elected by the Party Council, and all elected regional and state-level representatives. The Executive Committee could take decisions that would be ratified later by the Council, and in practice exerted leadership over the party that extended well beyond the day-to-day decisions that it was mandated to take. The weight of state and regional representatives within the Party Council and the Executive Committee was overwhelming, and the power of defining the party's political agenda and taking final decisions was monopolised by the party in public office through informal rules and procedures (Martial 1996: 823). However, as the latter only met at the will of the party's President, it was often compelled to implement political decisions taken directly by the President himself (Proment 1996: 64, 90).

Although this cadre party model may have facilitated the UV's smooth adaptation to political representation, it severely limited internal demo-

nap new academic press

cracy within the party, and proved unable to contain internal fights and party ruptures. These tensions occurred principally during the period of electoral instability in the late 1960s. They were linked, on one hand, to the vote-seeking goal of the party, and were prompted by a lack of agreement with regard to the best electoral strategy to be adopted in order to recuperate the party's electoral appeal. On the other hand, they also reflected opposition among some of the party elite to the authoritarian leadership of Séverin Caveri.

These tensions were an effective challenge to the UV's party organisation, since they prompted the third and most far-reaching wave of internal organisational reforms implemented by the UV. The party's statutes were reformed for the first time in 1974, when the posts of party President, President of the regional government, regional minister and state-level representative were made incompatible and could not, therefore, be held simultaneously. In 1976, at the time of the re-incorporation of three regionalist movements into the UV, further changes saw the party's assembly meet every five years, be designated as the highest organ and constitutive power of the party, and gain the formal power to decide the party's political programme and elect the President. Relations with local branches and civil society were also improved and their decision-making responsibilities increased. The number of elected members of the Party Council was also increased.

As a result of these organisational reforms, the UV became a considerably more complex political party. Nonetheless, the party in public office and the figure of the party President remained important features of the UV's organisational structure. The separation between the party in central office and the party in public office also remained weak. These reforms did, however, represent a significant change from a personalised and liberal pre-fascist organisation to a more modern and complex political party (Martial 1996: 833).

A last wave of organisational reform was implemented in 1996-1997. This was not the direct result of crossing any threshold; rather, it was prompted by a series of political scandals linked to the UV's intelligentsia that provoked a crisis within the party. The charismatic President of the Aosta Valley regional government, the UV's Auguste Rollandin, was involved in two major bribery scandals in 1991. These caused strong reactions of disillusionment among party members and elites alike with the UV's centralised mode of leadership. The need for a clearer separation between the purely political bodies of the party and the members charged with administrative tasks, and the elected officials of the party (regional and state-level representatives, members of regional government) was stronger than ever. Local branches, led by a the new party President Charles Perrin and federalist theoretician Bruno Salvadori, demanded the creation of a system

of balance of power between the party in central office and the party in public office. In the statute reform of 1997, the incompatibility of the posts of President of the regional government, regional minister, and regional and state-level representatives, was extended to all members of the executive committee. Also, the UV's Mayor of the main city of the region, Aosta, was banned from being a member of the Executive Committee (renamed the Federal Committee).

The 1997 reforms constituted a first attempt at reducing the power of the party in public office within the UV's organisational structure. However, after gaining an absolute majority in the regional assembly in 2003, the statutes of UV were changed again to allow the party in public office to further strengthen its power: the President of the regional government, state-level representatives and the party chairmen within the regional assembly became 'members by right' of the Executive Committee, while regional representatives, regional ministers and the Mayor of Aosta could participate but without the right to vote.

9.4. CHANGES IN PARTY GOALS

The UV has pursued different goals at different stages of its lifespan. The party was founded in 1945 as a national movement in which the pro-autonomy wings of mainstream state-wide parties worked together in order to achieve the goal of political autonomy for the Aosta Valley. The movement's ideology was strongly linked, in its early years, with the values of Catholic anti-modern traditionalism. References to culture and identity were defined by a set of values founded on the protection of the French language and on social conservatism. Moreover, its main territorial demands were focussed on securing administrative autonomy for the French-speaking minority. It was only during the 1960s and 1970s that a more ethnic dimension would be added to this discourse, which defined the people of the Aosta Valley as a distinct national group. Having started its political career at the margins of the party system, the UV was thus a policy-seeking party during the first years of its existence.

After deciding to compete in elections at the regional level in 1949, the UV's goal changed from policy-influence to vote-maximisation. In order to meet this goal, the party understood the need for differentiating itself from mainstream parties; it thus undertook to situate itself more clearly on the centre-periphery cleavage, whilst its competitors continued to be defined primarily in terms of their position on the left-right ideological axis. The UV modified its territorial demands and, whilst the party's aim had always been the achievement of territorial autonomy and the protection of bilingualism, the party isolated its irredentist and pro-annexationist factions (Pallaver 2006). The UV continued to prioritise vote-seeking when it began to

compete in state elections in 1958 and in European elections in 1979. Thus, whilst initially policy influence from outside political institutions was the priority for the UV, the decision to compete in elections at different territorial levels increased the importance of gaining electoral support in order to exercise policy influence within regional and state-level democratic institutions.

Once political representation had been secured at all three territorial levels – regional (1949), state (1958), and European (2000), as seen above in table 9.1 – the party further adapted its political goals to its new status. At the state and European levels, the party continued to prioritise electoral success, because its relative weight within these arenas was minimal and it did not possess the negotiating power necessary to influence policy outcomes or to enter government. At the regional level, in contrast, the UV mainly pursued policy goals, in order to shape regional decision-making so that the legal provisions of the Statute of Autonomy could be implemented as quickly as possible. As noted above, in 1949 the UV rapidly moved from opposition to potential and actual government within the regional political arena. With the goal of office incumbency having been achieved, the UV had a major role in shaping policy-making within the regional assembly. These goals were periodically re-assessed as a result of the UV's fluctuating electoral fortunes in the subsequent twenty-year period; when the UV did not take part in the formation of the regional government between 1954 and 1974, vote-seeking became once again a priority, as a means of re-entering government and re-gaining control over the regional policy agenda.

Being in government, however, had negative consequences for the UV's electoral performance. After having been the senior coalition partner in the 1949-54 and 1959-66 regional cabinets, the party suffered a series of electoral failures at the regional and state levels. As noted above, one consequence of this was to trigger the emergence of internal tensions over the UV's electoral strategy that, in turn, led to several groups splitting from the UV to form rival autonomist parties. The creation of the DP in 1970 placed new pressure on the UV to re-examine its political programme. The DP proposed a political project that conceptualised the Aosta Valley as a society without any ethnic or linguistic distinctions; in its electoral programme, it emphasised territorial specificity rather than ethnic distinctiveness, although it still demanded greater autonomy for the region. This diverged from the UV's programme of defending the linguistic minority's interests through autonomist claims. The UV's response was to redefine its ideology and political demands in order to restore internal order and recover its power position within the regional political system. As such, the UV began to adapt to power only after having lost it, as a direct consequence of electoral failures and the passing back over the threshold of governance. The

nap new academic press

UV thus reacted to competition from the DP with the radicalisation of its own ideology.

Between 1966 and 1976, the UV defined a new political programme that would be elaborated over the next thirty years. The shifts in party ideology and in party goals proceeded in parallel. The party's new discourse was based on three constitutive elements: the Aosta Valley's historical and cultural *particularisme*, federalism, and the construction of a separate ethnic identity for the region (Salvadori 1968). In fact, there were new attempts to re-assert the sense of distinctiveness, in such a way that contradicted the DP's territorial and non-ethnic claims. Federalist theories – especially those associated with the figure of Emile Chanoux, a federalist intellectual killed by the fascists in 1944 – inspired the UV to formally commit itself to 'global federalism' in its 1976 party conference. With the launching of a process of regionalisation in Italy in 1970, the UV demanded a federal structure for the Italian Republic. This cause was taken up again in 1991, when the UV's state-level representatives presented an independent proposal for the federalisation of Italy. However, the party's demands did not have much effect; discussions of the legislation on this issue reached a deadlock in the Constitutional Committee of the Italian Parliament. On this occasion, therefore, the UV lacked policy influence at the state-level.

Moreover, the concept of ethnicity became the main feature of the UV's political programme in subsequent years. The region's autonomist tradition was thus linked to the existence of a specific ethnic group and not only of a linguistic minority.[7] The concept of Aosta Valley's native 'people' was also further developed during this period, as was the theme of an external threat to this regional identity from the centralist Italian government, unaware of or uninterested in the Aosta Valley's specificity. The UV claimed not to belong to the right or left flanks of the political spectrum – "ni droite ni gauche" (neither left nor right) – but to the federalist and ethnic political tradition. This process of ideological change was also explicitly linked to the party's electoral goals, namely the conquest of regional power and the achievement of an absolute majority at the regional level, in order to become the "maîtres chez nous" (masters of our own land) (Martial 1996: 830).

This process of ideological re-positioning did not generate tensions between vote-seeking and the dilution of core party values. On the contrary, the UV's programmatic changes served to strengthen its electoral position, and the party rapidly re-gained access to regional government and stabilised its political representation at regional and state level from the late 1970s

---

[7]   For instance, regional historical archives published between 1973 and 1975 proposed a series of historical reviews that sought to define the Aosta Valley's traditions based on the ethnic nature of regional identity (AAVV, 1973-75).

nap new academic press

onwards. Upon first consideration, this is surprising not least because, during the last 50 years, Italian immigration into the Aosta Valley has increased substantially, and has significantly transformed the linguistic make-up of the region. The UV's re-assertion of the historical, linguistic and ethnic particularity of the Aosta Valley thus coincided with a trend whereby the traditional elements of the regional identity begin to lose their actual weight (Cuaz 2003: 8).

The tension between office and policy goals was also largely avoided when the party entered a government coalition at state level in 1999. The party played on the centre-left governmental coalition's weak parliamentary majority to strengthen its relevance within this arena. However, instead of supporting the new government without entering directly the governing coalition and exploiting this pivotal role in terms of policy influence, the UV preferred to appoint one of its representatives to ministerial office. Eager to gain, at last, new policy responsibilities at the state level, the UV entered into government. However, this experience only lasted for a year due to the party's government Minister, Luciano Caveri, becaming an MEP in 2000 upon the resignation of the previous seat-holder. In the subsequent general election in 2001, the party suffered a severe loss of votes, from 48% to 35% (although its performance at the regional and European levels remained stable). This result was arguably due more to the specific profile of the parliamentary candidate for the Chamber of Deputies in 2001, rather than a punishment of the UV's time in government. Overall, therefore, the UV's brief experience of state-level government was not too costly.

9.5. The policy impact of the UV

As noted above, the UV was created in 1945 with the aim of securing autonomy for the Aosta Valley within the Italian state. However, the first provisions for the Aosta Valley's administrative, fiscal and economic autonomy were passed by the Parri Government on 7 September 1945, before the establishment of the UV. These acts were the result of negotiations between the Aosta Valley maquisards,[8] the Liberation Committee and the Allies during the last months of the Second World War. Nevertheless, the privileges granted to the region were substantially more limited than those requested. The UV was established on the basis of popular discontent with the autonomy settlement, and the perception that the statute had been imposed upon the region by the Italian state, rather than negotiated with the region's inhabitants.

---

[8]   These were the French speaking resistance fighting German occupation during World War II.

new academic press

The UV's role in negotiating changes to the Aosta Valley's Statute of Autonomy between 1945 and 1948 was important, but not decisive. Although the party played a role in shaping the final content of the statute eventually adopted in 1948, the most important contribution to the negotiations at the state-level was made by Federico Chabod (Partito d'Azione*).* Chabod was President of the temporary regional government between 1946 and 1947 and was very well connected with the Italian political elite in Rome. It was he who formally led negotiations within the Constituent Assembly in 1947 (Boiardi and Di Capua 1994). The Italian Parliament adopted the new Statute of Autonomy for the Aosta Valley on 26 February 1948, thus increasing the scope of the exclusive competences of the Aosta Valley region. Nevertheless, thanks to the UV's excellent communication strategy, this success was widely publicised, and later recognised, as the result of the work of the elites that participated in the foundation of the UV, thus disregarding the significant role of President Chabod. The UV was thus able to present itself as the main actor in the negotiations, and claimed the merit for the adoption of the Statute of Autonomy.

However, as noted above, the Statute required several implementation laws in order to make the autonomy provisions effective. According to a judgement by the Italian Constitutional Court issued in 1963, the region could exert the administrative competences attributed on the basis of its Statute only when the Italian parliament has adopted framework laws concerning these competences. The UV played a major role in the negotiations at state and regional levels to ensure such laws were passed. This was particularly the case with regard to securing financial and administrative competences for the region. Enhanced financial autonomy was achieved with the adoption, in 1981, of legislation that designated that nine-tenths of the fiscal revenues collected by the state in the Aosta Valley territory should be returned to the region. The regional budget, negotiated every year with central government, increased from 188 million lire in 1980 to 2,778 million in 1998, and to €1,939,000 in 2003 (Cuaz 2003). These legal provisions finally allowed the region to have complete control over the administrative competences allocated by the Statute.[9] With regard to enhanced administrative autonomy, the UV's elected representatives at the state-level mobilised in order to push the Italian parliament to adopt the implementation laws necessary for the effective enforcement of the provisions of the Statute. These were adopted between 1978 and 1989. In 1993, the Aosta Valley's Statute of Autonomy was reformed again, compelling central

---

[9]   The Aosta Valley region is competent for the direct management of health services, educational institutions (including the Aosta Valley University established in 1998), local government and transport.

government to adopt the implementation regulations necessary for the harmonisation of state and regional legislation.

It is important to underline the fact that the UV succeeded in meeting all of its goals relatively early within its lifespan, with the adoption of the Statute of Autonomy in 1948. However, and unlike the Volksunie (which has been a victim of its own success – see De Winter, this volume), the UV has not faced a challenge to its survival as a result of its policy success. Rather, by continuing to campaign for the implementation of the statutory provisions, the party retained its control of the autonomist agenda within the regional political arena. Later on, the UV modified its ideology in order to radicalise its territorial demands. Having achieved its main goals, the party simply pushed for further autonomy from the central state. This strategy has paid off in electoral terms because the UV has consolidated its hegemony within the regional political system and monopolised the representation of the Aosta Valley within the Italian parliament. Undoubtedly, the success of this ideological radicalisation is also linked to the progressive cartelisation of the party and to the parallel process of economic growth in the Aosta Valley region. By always insisting on the external threat posed by the central state to the Aosta Valley's autonomy, the UV has guaranteed its political survival. It has also been able to prevent its autonomist agenda from being co-opted by state-wide Italian parties. By maintaining this differentiation, the party has protected and consolidated its electoral hegemony within the Aosta Valley.

9.6. Conclusions

The UV is a relatively young party, founded almost a century after the creation of traditional Italian parties during the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the party lifespan model outlined in the Introduction to this volume, it can be described as an extremely successful party. The UV's policy goals were implemented during the first twenty years of its presence in the Aosta Valley political system. Most of the critical junctures in a party's lifespan were crossed in a relatively short period of time, and most comprehensively at the regional level. In terms of vote-seeking, after its fluctuating results during the 1960s and the 1970s, the party has become a market leader at regional level and consolidated its monopoly over the outward representation within the Italian parliament during the 1980s. The electoral success and consequent dominant position of the party at regional level remains solid today. The party has also been very successful in terms of office seeking: the UV was the majority party in the last six regional cabinets and has dominated the government formation processes since 1974. Therefore, the UV can be described as a dominant autonomist party within the Aosta Valley.

The UV's lifespan prompted the party to adapt its organisational structures and party goals at different junctures in its evolution. Thus, for example, whilst crossing the threshold of representation led to the dominance of the party in public office, subsequent electoral decline during the 1960s and 1970s prompted attempts at democratising the UV's internal organisation. In essence, however, the UV retains many of the features of a cadre party – weak extra-parliamentary structures, dominant party leadership and limited assembly organs. During these two decades, the UV also re-prioritised its party goals, between office-seeking and vote-seeking (the latter being emphasised when the party failed to retain its government office at the regional level). These adjustments to government when out of office, plus the development of deep roots in society and an appeal to immigrants, have been the most important factors in enabling the UV to retain its hegemonic position within the Aosta Valley, despite its key territorial demands having been achieved very early on in its lifetime.

References

AAVV (1973–75) *Cahiers sur le Particularisme Valdôtain, Vol. I–XV.* Aosta: Imprimerie Valdôtaine.

Boiardi, Franco and Giovanni Di Capua (1994) *Grande Enciclopedia della Politica. L'Union Valdôtaine.* Roma: Ebe Edizioni.

Cuaz, Marco (2003) 'La valle d'Aosta. Un'identità di frontiera tra Italia, Europa ed etnonazionalismi', in: Gaspare Nevola (ed.) *Altre Italie. Identità nazionale e Regioni a statuto speciale*. Roma: Carocci, pp. 1–18.

Cuaz, Marco, Paolo Momigliano Levi and Elio Riccarand (eds.) (2001) *Cronologia della Valle d'Aosta.* Aosta: Stylos.

Curtaz, Carlo (2006) *Accanto al potere. Sette anni e mezzo a Palazzo regionale.* Aosta: Tipografia La Vallée.

Martial, Enrico (1996) 'Un dopoguerra lungo cinquant'anni', in: John Stuart Woolf (ed.), *Storia d'Italia, Le Regioni dall'Unità ad oggi, La Valle d'Aosta*. Torino: Einaudi, pp. 775–843.

Pallaver, Günther (2006) 'The Südtiroler Volkspartei: From Irredentism to Autonomy', in: Lieven De Winter, Marga Gómez-Reino and Peter Lynch (eds.), *Autonomist Parties in Europe: Identity Politics andthe Revival ofthe Territorial Cleavage – Vol. II.* Barcelona: ICPS, pp. 161–188.

Proment, Emile (1996) *Une vie pour l'idéal. Vie de l'Union Valdotaine.* Aosta: DUC.

Riccarand, Elio (2010) *Storia della Valle d'Aosta contemporanea 1981–2009.* Aosta: Stylos.

Salvadori, Bruno (1968) *Pourquoi être autonomiste.* Aosta: Musumeci Editore.

Tronconi, Filippo (2005) 'Party Systems and Party Competition in European Regions: a Comparative Exploration'. Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Session of Workshops, Granada, 14–19 April.

nap new academic press

Elise Féron

The Social Democratic and Labour Party

10.1. Introduction

The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) is one of the two main nationalist parties in Northern Ireland, representing those, mainly Catholic, who are in favour of the reunification of Ireland by peaceful means. The party was considered to be one of the major architects of the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement signed in April 1998 between the main actors of the Northern Irish conflict.[1] In this respect, the SDLP contributed to a lasting solution to the conflict that emerged in the late 1960s between the protestant/unionist and catholic/nationalist communities of Northern Ireland.

After its creation in 1970, the SDLP experienced a period of rapid electoral growth, which it sustained over more than two decades. Since the signing of the 1998 peace agreement, however, the party has suffered continuous electoral decline, in spite of efforts at organisational adaptation and expansion. The chapter argues that, paradoxically, this loss of electoral status coincides with the SDLP's policy success, as most of the party's ideas and proposals for resolving the conflict in Northern Ireland have been adopted by its political allies – mainly its main nationalist rival, Sinn Féin – as well as by some of its political adversaries, such as the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP).

10.2. The lifespan of the SDLP

10.2.1. Crossing the thresholds of declaration, authorisation and representation

The SDLP was formed by six Members of Parliament (MPs) and one Senator on 21 August 1970. The party rapidly gained support from former voters and members of the two nationalist parties that already existed in Northern Ireland, namely the Nationalist Party and the Nationalist Democratic Party (which dissolved themselves soon afterwards). The SDLP was conceived as a constitutional democratic party that sought to achieve the unification of Ireland by consent. The party thus continued in the tradition of Irish constitutional nationalism that had, since the nineteenth century,

---

[1] With the exception of Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which initially refused to support the Agreement.

opposed the republican tradition of using force in order to reach the same goal. From the outset, the SDLP was supported mainly by middle-class and working-class Catholics. The party crossed the threshold of declaration in November 1970 with a recruitment campaign in local newspapers, thus signalling its intention to participate in all elections held in Northern Ireland, whether local, regional (Northern Irish Assembly), national (Westminster) or European. The SDLP also had no difficulties in crossing the threshold of authorisation, which was achieved at the same time as the threshold of declaration (see table 10.1).

The first elections in which the SDLP participated were the local elections of May 1973. As these were held nearly two years after its creation, the party had reached a level of organisation and structuring which allowed it to contest all seats. The party gained a significant share of the vote (13.4%) and won 83 seats throughout Northern Ireland. In the June 1973 regional elections, the SDLP almost doubled its share of the vote, winning 22.1% of all votes cast and 19 seats in the Northern Irish Assembly. In less than three years, therefore, the SDLP had succeeded in passing the threshold of representation at both local and regional levels.

The 1970s was also a period of consolidation and strengthening for the party at the state and European levels. In the 1974 general election, the SDLP secured its first MP, through the re-election of Gerry Fitt in West Belfast (previously elected under the Republican Labour Party banner).[2] Elections to a newly established Constitutional Convention in May 1975[3] saw the SDLP achieve its best electoral performance up to that point, securing 23.7% of the vote. This result was only ever surpassed in European elections. In 1979, John Hume, then deputy leader of the SDLP, secured 25% of the Northern Irish vote and won one of three Northern Irish seats within the European Parliament. As a consequence of these electoral successes, by the end of the 1970s the SDLP was represented at local, regional, state and European levels. This representation was particularly strong at local level, where several SDLP councillors were elected, and the party rapidly gained positions of power in several cities and districts, amongst them Northern Ireland's second largest city, Londonderry.

This early electoral success can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the SDLP benefited from voter disillusionment within the nationalist movement. On the one hand, the SDLP profited from a growing distrust of con-

---

[2] The party has retained representation at the state-level ever since and, since the electoral collapse of the UUP at the 2005 general election, has become the main Northern Irish party to be represented at Westminster. Although Sinn Féin has contested and won seats in the House of Commons, the party has always refused to take up this representation.

[3] After the collapse of the power-sharing executive in 1974, the British Government established an elected Constitutional Convention in an effort to foster agreement among Northern Ireland's political parties on a form of government for the territory.

ventional politics among republican voters. The SDLP's rejection of political violence, in contrast to republican nationalists, provided an attractive alternative to republican voters who increasingly disagreed with the latter's strategy. On the other hand, the SDLP also attracted voters who disagreed with the old Nationalist Party's policy of abstaining from institutional representation (with elected representatives choosing not to take up their seats). This policy had been pursued since the creation of Northern Ireland, but was increasingly viewed with scepticism by its supporters. By the late 1960s, however, the Nationalist Party was finding it difficult to provide leadership in a context of growing social unrest in Northern Ireland. The short-lived National Democratic Party (1965–1970) sought to push for reform of the Nationalist Party, although it failed to appeal to voters as a real alternative. Given the inefficacy of existing nationalist organisations, the creation of the SDLP filled a political void within the nationalist political space. Many Nationalist Party and National Democratic Party militants joined the SDLP upon its creation.

Secondly, the SDLP benefited from electoral reform in the early 1970s. Demands for electoral reform had been a key theme of civil rights demonstrations in Northern Ireland towards the end of the 1960s. The electoral system in place at that point had led to unionist dominance of politics in Northern Ireland, facilitated by gerrymandering and the restriction of voting rights. For example, in local elections up until the early 1970s, the electoral franchise was determined on the basis of ratepayer suffrage and on the company vote. This meant that only owners or tenants of a dwelling were entitled to vote in local government elections. Thus many adults, amongst them a majority of Catholics – who were on average a lot poorer than their protestant counterparts, who were not the owners of their dwelling or were still living with their parents – did not have the right to vote. At the same time, a number of company directors (overwhelmingly protestants) were entitled to more than one vote. The British government's overhauling of the electoral system saw the creation of 26 new district councils and the introduction of universal franchise. The first local elections held under this new system were held in May 1973, which were also the first elections in which the SDLP ever participated. The SDLP benefited substantially from the extension of voting rights to large numbers of Catholics.

However, the SDLP's electoral status was challenged during the 1980s, not least due to the emergence of Sinn Féin as a serious political actor in Northern Irish politics. Although pursuing the same goal of the reunification of Ireland, Sinn Féin differed to the SDLP in its espousal of a dual strategy of armed struggle and participation in elections (the so-called "ballot box and armalite" strategy). Sinn Féin was therefore competing for the support of the same nationalist electorate as the SDLP, and successfully

encroached on the latter's political terrain. This encroachment was limited to a certain degree by the fact that Sinn Féin attracted some of the voters who had continued to abstain from electoral participation in the tradition of the then defunct Nationalist Party, and who had not hitherto participated in elections. Nevertheless, the SDLP's average vote-share for that decade dropped to 19.33%, compared to 21.08% during the 1970s.

The 1980s were also characterised by a hardening of the British government's double strategy of the criminalisation of paramilitary groups and the "Ulsterisation" of the Northern Irish question (that is, presenting the conflict through a local, rather than an "all-Irish" lens as favoured by many republicans). This, coupled with several dramatic events such as the hunger strikes of 1981 during which 10 republican prisoners died, provoked a radicalisation of the nationalist electorate, and the increasing appeal of Sinn Féin's strategy. Indeed, the decade saw the entrenchment of both nationalist and unionist communities, as testified by the growth of more radical parties such as Sinn Féin and the DUP, and the relative stagnation of the other, more moderate, political parties such as the SDLP and the UUP. This change in the political context in Northern Ireland thus also contributed to undermining the SDLP's electoral appeal.

However, a closer look at electoral results during this decade reveals a more nuanced picture, with the SDLP performing better in some elections than in others. Thus, for example, the party has always achieved the best electoral performances at the European level. During the 1980s, the party's best results were in the 1984 and 1989 European elections, where it won 22.1% and 25.5% of the vote respectively. This trend was confirmed in subsequent European elections until 2004, when the Sinn Féin candidate performed better. The party's average vote-share in European elections has been 23%, compared to just below 20% for state-wide elections and around 19% for regional and local elections. European elections were thus undoubtedly the SDLP's favourite political battlefield. As is noted below, the party capitalised on this European platform to gain international attention and to build bridges with other like-minded political parties in other European countries. Contrary to its republican rivals Sinn Féin, the SDLP has always courted a high European profile, advocating the creation of a Europe of the Regions, and favouring greater co-operation between the north and south of Ireland as part of a more general process of European functional integration.

10.2.2. Crossing the thresholds of relevance and government

In the early 1970s, the specific political context in Northern Ireland enabled the SDLP to establish itself as a highly relevant political actor. The SDLP emerged as the only internal party in a position to push for a new peace

agenda after several years of political stalemate and civil unrest. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, the SDLP did not abstain from participating in elections; after the dissolution of the Nationalist Party and the Nationalist Democratic Party, the SDLP was the only nationalist party taking part in conventional political activities. Secondly, the party could claim to represent a large part of the nationalist electorate. Thirdly, the SDLP's leaders were willing to discuss with all relevant actors, including the unionists and the British government. This was in contrast to Sinn Féin which, up until the beginning of the 1980s, stuck to its strategy of military struggle against the British troops and interests. Finally, the party put forward proposals that provided the basis for future peace negotiations; it was thus important in shaping the political agenda in Northern Ireland. The SDLP held its first annual conference in 1971, and in the following year published one of the first major proposals for achieving peace in Northern Ireland, "Towards a New Ireland". The document proposed British and Irish joint sovereignty over Northern Ireland, with an elected Assembly and executive chosen by proportional representation. This document helped establish the SDLP as a key interlocutor in the eyes of the British and Irish governments. The SDLP thus participated as soon as 1973 in negotiations aimed at setting up a power-sharing government between nationalists and unionists; the result was the so-called Sunningdale Agreement of December 1973, which sought to replace the majoritarian model of government adopted by the old Stormont regime. The SDLP also acquired coalition potential when it was considered by the British and Irish governments to be the only acceptable nationalist voice within such a power-sharing executive.

The Sunningdale Agreement allowed the SDLP to take part in the short-lived power-sharing executive that lasted from January to May 1974, granting it access to regional government for the first time. The power-sharing executive included six SDLP Ministers – Gerry Fitt (Deputy Chief Executive), Austin Currie (Housing and Local Government), Ivan Cooper (Community Relations), Paddy Devlin (Health and Social Services), John Hume (Commerce) and Eddie McGrady (Planning and Co-ordination). This experience of being in government, albeit brief, would not have happened had a system of majoritarian rule been maintained. The SDLP's crossing of the threshold of governance was thus the result of a highly favourable political context rather than electoral gains or strategic alliances with other nationalist or even unionist actors. Being in regional government nevertheless had a major impact on the SDLP's subsequent development, as it gave it respectability in the eyes of the British and Irish governments, as well as of its political opponents; the experience also drove a further institutionalisation of the party (see below). However, the collapse of the agreement in May 1974

and the reinstatement of direct rule from London, saw the SDLP passing back over the threshold of government, once more a consequence of external factors rather than its own electoral performance (which remained stable).

The failure of the Sunningdale Agreement, which the SDLP had supported fervently, contributed in no small part to the erosion of the party's relevance in Northern Irish politics during the 1980s. The response of the British and Irish governments was to abandon the idea of rapidly reinstating autonomy at the regional level, adopting instead an intergovernmental approach which *de facto* excluded Northern Irish actors. This shift in approach was reflected in the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, which was negotiated in the absence of parties such as the SDLP. However, this absence from negotiations did not mean that the SDLP had lost all kind of influence on decisions affecting the future of Northern Ireland. In fact, the 1985 Agreement marked the acceptance by the British government of some of the SDLP's arguments about the causes of the Northern Irish conflict and how best to resolve it. Most importantly, it was recognised that the conflict had an Irish dimension and could not be resolved in the absence of a commitment by both Irish and British governments. However, the Agreement did not include the provisions for another power-sharing government that would have allowed the SDLP to have a continuing and direct influence on policy-making in the territory.

With the SDLP less able to influence political discussions directly within Northern Ireland, the party sought to use its presence at the European level to give new visibility to the region's problems and the SDLP's proposals for their resolution. In his capacity as a Member of the European Parliament (MEP), John Hume played a major role in attracting the attention of European authorities towards the situation in Northern Ireland. For example, in 1980, just one year after his election as an MEP, Hume successfully tabled a motion in the European Parliament on European Community (EC) regional funds for Northern Ireland, which finally led to a financial package of £63 million for the region (Murray and Tonge 2005: 95). More importantly, Hume succeeded in getting the EC involved in the resolution of the Northern Irish conflict, through the publication in 1984 of the Haagerup Report, which partly endorsed the SDLP's views on the conflict. Thus the report advocated an "Irish dimension" to the resolution of the conflict, for Anglo-Irish cooperation, and for power sharing between unionists and nationalists (Hayward 2006). In sum, Hume's activism at the European level brought a European dimension to the Northern Irish question; such a dimension was crucial in securing various peace programmes funded by the European Commission in Northern Ireland.

The launching of another round of peace negotiations at the beginning of the 1990s, however, altered the political climate in the province, and the

nap new academic press

SDLP rapidly re-gained a crucial role in negotiations. This was due to its ability to engage in dialogue with both British and Irish governments, but also because of its pivotal position *vis-à-vis* more radical nationalist actors, most notably Sinn Féin. Integrating Sinn Féin into the peace process was seen as necessary by the British and Irish governments, but also by the SDLP's leadership; all parties agreed that no progress towards peace was possible in the absence of those who were still waging a war in Northern Ireland. In the late 1980s, John Hume, then leader of the SDLP, engaged in secret talks (later labelled as the Hume-Adams dialogue or the Hume-Adams initiative) with Gerry Adams, Sinn Féin's leader. Hume aimed to convince Adams and his party of the necessity and inevitability of engaging in a peace process with the British government. These secret talks, which lasted several years before they were made public, allowed for significant exchanges of ideas and strategies between the two main nationalist parties. The SDLP's protagonism reflected the party's determination to play a major role in the political future of the province, even if it meant taking politically risky decisions such as engaging in discussions with republicans that had not yet renounced the use of violence. In recognition of these efforts, John Hume (along with David Trimble, the leader of the UUP) was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1998.

The SDLP remained a central actor when a new and official round of peace negotiations was opened in 1994. They resulted in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which once again included provisions for a power-sharing executive. The setting up of new devolved institutions in 1999 allowed the party to enter government at the regional level for the second time. However, because of difficulties in the implementation of the 1998 Agreement (especially regarding the provisions on the decommissioning of weapons and policing), the settlement was once again short-lived, and the Northern Ireland Assembly was suspended by the British government in October 2002. Nearly five years passed before a new agreement between nationalist and unionist representatives enabled another devolved government to be formed, in May 2007. During this time, however, the SDLP's share of the votes at the regional level had declined, and Sinn Féin had replaced it as the principal mouthpiece of nationalist voters. With only one ministerial portfolio in the new executive,[4] compared to 5 in 1974 and 3 in 1999 (in addition to the position of Deputy First Minister) the SDLP's governmental presence is considerably lower than in the past. The SDLP can no longer be said to be the main nationalist party in Northern Ireland.

---

[4]   This position was first occupied by Margaret Ritchie, who stepped down in February 2010 following her election as the SDLP's first female leader, and was replaced by Alex Attwood.

Table 10.1. *The lifespan of the SDLP (1970–2010)*

a) Regional Level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1970		SDLP				
1973					SDLP	
1974						SDLP
1994					SDLP	
1999						SDLP
2007						SDLP

b) State Level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1970		SDLP				
1974–2010			SDLP			

c) European Level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1979–2009			SDLP			

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

10.3. The SDLP's organisational adaptation

The SDLP's predecessor, the Nationalist Party, was characterised by a very weak organisation. It had no party headquarters, no paid employees and, until November 1964, did not even have a party programme. In contrast, the founders of the SDLP believed that a strong and visible organisation was crucial for electoral success. The party was thus established with a clear ambition to develop a strong party structure. However, for a year after its creation, it remained without constituency branches or a constitution. It was not until its first Annual Conference in 1971 that the SDLP adopted a written constitution and established an executive committee. The former document committed the party to maintaining internal democratic politics, and designated the annual conferences as the principal forum for discussing and deciding key party policies and strategies.

nap new academic press

However, as a result of the party's passing of the threshold of relevance in 1973, the power of some party's leaders, such as Gerry Fitt, increased considerably. This provoked tensions between the leadership and party members, with the latter insisting on the importance of internal democracy in determining party strategy as stated in the party's founding statutes (Murray and Tonge 2005: 59-66). For example, whilst Fitt was keen on participating in every round of talks organised by the British government, party members favoured taking part only if certain fundamental principles were acknowledged, such as the recognition of an Irish dimension to the conflict.[5] These tensions led to the departures of Paddy Devlin in 1977 and Gerry Fitt in 1979, as well as to heated debates within the party's ranks.

Under John Hume's leadership from 1979 onwards, this centralising trend continued, with Hume often taking important decisions about the future of the party without consulting the party's members. Securing representation at the state level in 1974 and at the European level in 1979 reinforced this trend, especially with Hume using the latter as a means of securing international visibility for the Northern Ireland conflict. Representation in these new arenas also saw the party's internal complexity increase, with secretarial support being appointed to assist with the activities of the new MPs and MEP, and in order to support the development of alliances with other like-minded European political actors.[6]

The period of relative electoral stagnation during the 1980s was not, however, a period of complete stagnation for the SDLP. Rather, it was a period that saw the increasing institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of the party, mainly as a consequence of the electoral successes of the previous decade. Rapid changes in the party's organisation undergone during the 1970s were thus consolidated and fine-tuned, with the result that the SDLP was transformed from a modest nationalist party into a modern political machine well-placed to play a key role in Northern Ireland's constitutional and political future. Changes occurred both in organisational complexity and in magnitude. SDLP elected local councillors acted as relays for the party's statements and manifestos, and helped structure the party on the ground. Moreover, the nomination of SDLP members to ministerial portfolios in the power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland (albeit for only a very brief time) and representation in the House of Commons required the party to create internal com-

---

[5]   The "Irish dimension" refers to the idea that the conflict in Northern Ireland is not purely internal, but also has a cross-border dimension. In November 1979, for example, the British government published a Working Paper for a conference on the restoration of local powers to Northern Ireland that did not include the "Irish dimension" as a topic for the debate. While Fitt welcomed this Working Paper, it was strongly rejected by party members.

[6]   For example, the party was a member of the Socialist International and the Confederation of Socialist Parties of the European Community.

nap new academic press

missions dedicated to specific policy fields such as social affairs, education and trade. Such developments represented the growth and increasing importance of the "party in central office", at the expense of the "party on the ground" (Katz and Mair 1993). This gradual centralisation of political authority led some observers to identify an estrangement between the party and its electoral support base, with one consequence being that the party was increasingly out of touch with younger voters (Hancock 2008).

Another important factor for understanding the organisational changes inside the SDLP at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s was undoubtedly the launching of a peace process of an unprecedented scale. As noted above, the SDLP played a major role in bringing Sinn Féin into this process and, subsequently, in signing the 1998 Agreement. Hume's strategy of secret talks with Sinn Féin also reinforced a key feature of his leadership, namely a high degree of autonomous action with little consultation with grass-root militants (Murray 1998). Hume was convinced not only of the legitimacy and efficacy of his strategy, but also of its moral and ethical necessity, and for strategic reasons believed that the process would be better served if these talks were kept secret. However, many SDLP militants, unaware of the extent of the discussions, were already fearing the consequences of bringing Sinn Fein to the negotiating table (Tonge 2005). Disapproval of their leader's strategy was articulated within the party; however, this had little impact on Hume's actions. The peace process period thus accelerated a trend that had been initiated during the 1980s, namely the downgrading of the 'party on the ground', to the benefit of the 'party in central office'. Hume's other positions of authority, such as being an MEP, reinforced this concentration of power. The fact that his strategy was also viewed positively (even if sometimes unofficially) by the British and Irish governments gave additional external validation to the SDLP leader's increasing autonomy from his political party.

Participation in the power-sharing executives of 1974, 1999 and 2007 further impacted on the SDLP's internal organisation. As suggested above, the SDLP's ministerial portfolios within these regional governments increased the number and variety of tasks performed by the party considerably. There was a strong pressure to develop its political programme and expertise beyond the core issue of the constitutional future of the province. Even if the 1974 and 1999 experiences of power-sharing did not last long, the party had to prepare, discuss and publish policy documents on all of the policy issues within the remit of the regional government, as well as choose spokespersons for each of these fields. Since 2007, the SDLP's responsibility for the Social Development portfolio within the Northern Irish government has seen the party develop further expertise on issues such as housing programmes and urban regeneration policies. In short, crossing the threshold of governance at the regional level has further contributed to the comple-

xity and magnitude of the SDLP's party organisation. The effects of threshold crossing on the party's organisational structure are summarised in table 10.2.

Table 10.2. *Pressure for organisational change upon crossing thresholds*

Threshold	Regional level	State level	European level
V	**Medium** - substantial increase in number and variety of tasks performed		
IV-B			
IV-A	**Strong** - downgrading of the party on the ground - increased centralisation		
III	**Strong** - increase in the number of staff employed - increased internal complexity - structuring of the party on the ground	**Medium** - secretarial support in Westminster	**Medium** - concentration of power in the hands of elected politicians - secretarial support in Brussels
II			
I			

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

10.4. Changing party goals and the cost of policy success

The SDLP's evolution has been characterised by a permanent tension between electoral success and the achievement of policy objectives. From the outset, the SDLP used the power and influence acquired thanks to its good electoral results, particularly in European elections, in order to gain influence in other territorial arenas, and especially during peace negotiations. The SDLP has always sought to maximise its share of the votes, as well as to secure office positions. However, as soon as the threshold of representation was crossed, the priority of the SDLP leadership was to impact on policy, even if this was damaging to the party's electoral results or to its

nap new academic press

public. This tension between the party's electoral and policy objectives has been constant since the election of the first SDLP representatives to the regional Assembly in 1973. It became particularly salient after the failure of the Sunnindale Agreement in 1974, which led to heated internal debates, for instance about whether or not to take part in further elections in the absence of any provision for power-sharing structures and/or an Irish dimension to peace-building efforts (Murray and Tonge 2005: 50). Fearing that the party would completely disappear, the party membership eventually rejected this strategy of abstention. However, tensions continued to exist, for instance between the party's programme, designed in order to appease the unionist electorate, and the wishes of the party's own electorate, often much more radical. As stated by John Hume during his address to the Party Conference in 1981, **"**the fact is that the Anglo-Irish strategy in its original SDLP conception was designed, primarily, not to further SDLP priorities but to accommodate…the fears and anxieties of...Unionist politicians...The purpose was to meet, comprehensively and transparently, all the Unionist objections to any dialogue with their neighbours in Ireland". This altruistic position informed the numerous peace proposals launched by the SDLP, as well as its efforts to engage Sinn Féin in a pan-nationalist dialogue in the late 1980s. The purpose of such a dialogue was to encourage republicans to abandon political violence, although this would ultimately have damaging consequences for the SDLP's status within the nationalist movement.

The collapse of the power-sharing experience in 1974 prompted a "greening" of the SDLP's ideology, with an increased emphasis on nationalist ideology (green being the colour associated with Ireland) over other socialist values espoused by the party since its creation (Evans *et al.* 2000). The SDLP's socialism aimed to attract voters from both catholic and protestant backgrounds. However, the centrality of the goal of Irish unification in the party's programme meant it had only ever had a limited appeal to protestant voters; socialist principles were thus progressively downplayed (although not completely abandoned) in the party's rhetoric. This change in the ideological orientation of the party did not contribute to the SDLP's electoral progression; it did, however, modify the image of the party significantly, both internally within the nationalist movement and externally (Tonge 2005: 103-111). The change represented a convergence between the two traditions of Irish nationalism, republicanism and constitutional nationalism; this "pan-nationalist" front gave the SDLP added weight during peace negotiations and helped to convince British and Irish governments that a purely internal solution for Northern Ireland, as advocated by unionists, was not viable. In other words, the SDLP's ideological adaptation, whilst not directly contributing to vote-maximisation, did enable the party

to cross the threshold of relevance in Northern Ireland and to wield influence in on-going efforts to resolve the conflict in the province.

In this respect, it is arguable that the SDLP was highly successful in meeting its core policy goal. The 1998 Good Friday Agreement reflected much of the SDLP's political thinking and influence. John Hume in particular is widely recognised as having been a key player in this process, having worked continuously to convince his political opponents of the virtues of power-sharing arrangements as had been originally featured in the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement.[7] Among his most significant achievements, as noted above, was bringing Sinn Féin to the negotiating table, and getting them to sign up to the 1998 Agreement. This process represented a "nationalist convergence" between the SDLP and Sinn Féin; the latter was increasingly convinced of the validity and efficacy of the SDLP's strategy and modified its radical position on the Northern Irish question. In this way, Sinn Féin acquired new respectability in the eyes of both the British and Irish governments and of nationalist voters. Paradoxically, however, the SDLP had also created the conditions for its own political relevance to be undermined. The SDLP had facilitated the entry of Sinn Féin into the new Northern Irish power-sharing institutions, and the latter party's growing electoral support signalled a shift in the balance of power within the nationalist movement.

This shift in power was not immediately evident. After the signing of the Agreement, it was the SDLP that remained the most trustworthy and respectable nationalist interlocutor. Also from an electoral perspective, the 1990s was a period of relative success for the SDLP; as noted above, in the 1994 and 1999 European elections the party polled its best ever results. The party polled an average of 23,81% in all elections during this decade, a performance which confirmed its central status in the Northern Irish, and even British, political arenas. After the signing of the 1998 agreement, the SDLP campaigned for a 'Yes' vote in the subsequent referendum in May 1998, a campaign that proved successful with the majority of nationalist voters endorsing the agreement. At the subsequent elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly in June 1998 the party also commanded a respectable 21.96% of votes, and emerged as the second largest party in the province behind the UUP. These good electoral results were crucial for consolidating the SDLP's position within the forthcoming power-sharing executive. When power was devolved to the regional Assembly a year later (December 1999) the SDLP secured four government posts, including the highly coveted position of Deputy First Minister. At first glance, good electoral results

---

[7] The SDLP's Deputy Leader, Seamus Mallon, even described the 1998 Agreement as "Sunningdale for slow learners".

nap new academic press

had therefore translated into the crossing of the thresholds of relevance and governance.

However, the seeds for the party's decline had already been sown. As noted above, the SDLP's policy impact up until the 1990s had depended on the party's ability to push forward the peace agenda, to argue for moderation, tolerance, dialogue and accommodation. Implementing the 1998 Agreement, however, proved to be extremely difficult. For example, unionists refused to establish the power-sharing executive until paramilitary groups (and especially the Irish Republican Army (IRA)), had begun to decommission their weapons. The SDLP found itself in a position of having formally crossed the threshold of governance at the regional level, but being unable to execute its new functions effectively due to the persistent problems in the functioning of the devolved institutions. As in 1974, the party was thus granted access to government, but could not use this experience to demonstrate itself to be a capable and efficient political actor. Moreover, the SDLP's moderate stance began to appear inappropriate, and even naive, in the eyes of nationalist voters who increasingly turned to Sinn Féin for a solution to the province's growing constitutional crisis.

The British government suspended devolution to Northern Ireland in October 2002, and the SDLP was once again denied the opportunity to be a party of government. New regional elections were held in March 2007. By this time, however, the SDLP had lost its pre-eminence in the nationalist camp; the party polled a disappointing 15.2% of the vote. In the appointment of a new devolved government in May 2007, the party had to cede several key ministerial portfolios to Sinn Féin, including the post of Deputy-First Minister. Thus, far from leading to electoral growth, the SDLP's success in meeting its policy goal had created the conditions for the electoral and political pre-eminence of its nationalist rival, Sinn Féin. The latter, although it fully accepted the 1998 Agreement, had kept its distance *vis-à-vis* the unionists and the British government, and maintained a more cautious attitude towards certain arrangements like those dealing with decommissioning or the reform of the police service. In other words, Sinn Féin remained more radical than the SDLP; it succeeded in portraying itself as the true heir of Irish nationalism and republicanism, whilst at the same time abandoning some of its core principles. The SDLP's image of moderation was less well suited to the political climate in Northern Ireland by the first decade of the new millennium. This allowed Sinn Féin to attract those nationalist electors who feared that the concessions made to the unionists in the 1998 Agreement were too great, whilst not alienating more moderate voters who did not want a return to full-scale violence. In comparison, "what [the SDLP] offers is little more than a homeopathic version of the Sinn Féin manifesto, served up with a bit less gusto and certainty" (Larkin 2007: 8).

Voter disaffection with the SDLP was translated almost immediately into electoral results; during the 2000s, the party polled an average of 17.34% over different elections, its lowest average per decade since its creation. Sinn Féin, in contrast, has experienced a period of sustained electoral growth; in the 2010 general election, it became the most important party in Northern Ireland, with 25.5% of all votes cast. The SDLP has thus experienced the trade-off outlined in the Introduction to this volume, between policy and votes, whereby policy success has translated into electoral decline. Having played a role in delivering the 1998 peace agreement, the SDLP (as well as the moderate UUP) has been forced to hand over protagonism in Northern Irish politics to more radical actors on both sides of the political divide (Sinn Féin and the DUP), actors who were initially opposed to any peace agreement.[8]

The SDLP's electoral and political decline has had implications for the party's internal functioning. After the 2001 general election, the SDLP's figurehead, John Hume, retired as leader of the party. The departure of the individual who had embodied for several decades the party's ideology, its genuine will to promote peace in Northern Ireland, and an altruistic strategy towards the other parts of the nationalist political scene, prompted a crisis of legitimacy inside the party. The SDLP lacked a clear political direction. The new leader, Mark Durkan, failed to halt the party's electoral decline; in the 2003 and 2007 elections to the Northern Irish Assembly, the party could only poll 16.99% and then 15.20% of votes, which translated into 18 and 16 seats respectively. Durkan's troubled time as party leader led to his replacement by Margaret Ritchie in 2010; however, both individuals lacked John Hume's charisma and international profile.

One other major development that contributed to the SDLP's decline was the decommissioning of IRA arms in the summer of 2005. It was a process that was considered by many observers to confirm Sinn Féin as a respectable and moderate political actor. Most importantly, however, decommissioning made it all the more difficult to differentiate the ideologies of two parties that had historically assumed very different positions on the questions of the role of military struggle and consent in the pursuit of Irish unification. Sinn Féin had come to accept the consent principle enshrined in the 1998 Agreement and arms decommissioning, whilst at the same time retaining a hint of radicalism and romanticism that the SDLP lacked. For this reason, the SDLP leadership has accepted that it will never regain the electoral edge over its nationalist rival whilst maintaining the same ideological profile. The party has thus undertaken to modernise its

---

8   A similar and parallel ideological and electoral decline has affected the other main architect of the 1998 agreements, namely David Trimble's UUP, to the benefit of its traditional adversary, the DUP.

programme in order to differentiate itself from Sinn Féin, and to attract a new, younger electorate. The emphasis has been placed increasingly on themes such as global justice, environmental protection and sustainable development, whilst re-emphasising core left-wing values and downplaying nationalist issues. Whilst the electoral appeal of this programmatic shift has yet to be seen, it demonstrates the SDLP's desire to re-prioritise vote-maximisation as a means of regaining a central role in Northern Irish politics.

10.5. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the SDLP has been highly successful in meeting its core policy- goal, as its territorial ambitions were largely included in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement which provided the basis for relative peace in Northern Ireland. However, this success has not been without cost; policy success has undermined the SDLP's electoral standing, with the result that it is no longer the predominant nationalist political actor in the region. Policy success has also not been straightforward with regard to the SDLP's other goals. The difficulties encountered in implementing successive peace agreements in the 1970s and the 1990s have continually frustrated the party's office-seeking ambitions. For example, between 1999 and 2003 – the first term of the Northern Irish Assembly elected under the provisions of the 1998 agreement– it was impossible for the SDLP to undertake the official governmental responsibilities assigned to it effectively. The decline in the party's electoral and political status in Northern Ireland has led it to initiate a process of ideological renewal in an effort to re-gain electoral support and a role in regional government.

This case study also demonstrates the extent to which the SDLP's electoral fortunes and political influence depended on factors exogenous to the party, not least its relationship with other nationalist and external actors. In other words, the SDLP's electoral appeal and relevance were maximised when its legitimacy as a political actor was sanctioned by the British and Irish governments during peace negotiations, and when its capacity to represent and defend the interests of the nationalist electorate was not being challenged by other actors (such as Sinn Féin). During the 1980s and 1990s, these factors contributed to the SDLP's capacity to perform well in elections and provided a platform for internationalising the Northern Irish conflict. The changing political context in Northern Ireland post 1998– with the ideological and strategic moderation of Sinn Féin bringing it a new legitimacy in the eyes of both voters and external governmental authorities– undermined the SDLP's role as a central political interlocutor. As noted above, the party is still struggling to define its role in a context where the balance of power has shifted in favour of actors that were historically

nap new academic press

ideologically opposed to the power-sharing framework advocated by the SDLP, and which currently frames the dynamics of Northern Irish politics.

References

Evans, Jocelyn, Jonathan Tonge and Gerard Murray (2000) 'Constitutional Nationalism and Socialism in Northern Ireland: The Greening of the Social Democratic and Labour Party', in: Philip Cowley, David Denver, Andrew Russell and Lisa Harrison (eds.), *British Elections and Parties Review 10*. London: Frank Cass, pp. 117–132.

Hancock, Landon E. (2008) 'The Northern Irish Peace Process: From Top to Bottom', *International Studies Review*, 10: 2, 203–238.

Hayward, Katy (2006) 'Reiterating National Identities. The European Union Conception of Conflict Resolution in Northern Ireland', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 41: 3, 261–284.

Katz, Richard and Peter Mair (1993) 'The Evolution of Party Organizations in Europe: Three Faces of Party Organization', *American Review of Politics*, 14, 593–617.

Larkin, Phil (2007) 'What Future for the SDLP?', *Fortnight*, November: 8–10.

Murray, Gerard (1998) *John Hume and the SDLP. Impact and Survival in Northern Ireland*. Dublin: Irish Academy Press.

Murray, Gerard and Jonathan Tonge (2005) *Sinn Féin and the SDLP. From Alienation to Participation*. Dublin: O'Brien Press.

Tonge, Jonathan (2005) *The New Northern Irish Politics?* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

nap new academic press

Peter Lynch

The Scottish National Party

11.1. Introduction

During their lifetime, political parties face a range of strategic dilemmas. Some involve the dilemma between vote, office and policy success (Strøm 1990; De Winter 1998: 238–40). Some revolve around the exact nature of party goals, policies or coalition strategies. However, in some cases, parties also face some fundamental strategic and organisational choices about whether to become parties at all in terms of standing candidates at elections, establishing distinct party platforms and operating exclusive membership through an organisation that is independent of other political parties. As will be discussed below in the case of the Scottish National Party (SNP), such strategic and organisational choices are by no means straightforward but can involve vigorous internal debate, divisions and splits. Such choices might also not be one-off events, but rather recurrent due to fluctuating levels of electoral success and occasions when alternative strategies appear attractive. Both endogenous and exogenous factors are responsible for such developments in the life of a party, as they face strategic choices and organisational challenges (McAllister 1981: 238).

To make sense of such strategic and organisational choices and their effect on party development, this chapter applies Pedersen's model of party lifespans to the SNP. It will examine the impact of passing through Pedersen's different lifespan thresholds on SNP organisation (the party on the ground, party in central office and party in public office) and party goals. It will also focus on key events in relation to the SNP's success in passing the thresholds of representation and relevance/governance, which came in 1999 in the shape of electoral reform and the establishment of the regional level of government in Scotland. In doing so, it recognises that Pedersen's model was a heuristic device (Pedersen 1982: 3), so that there will be no exact conceptual or chronological fit between the model and the SNP's political development. Indeed, the manner in which the SNP passes through the various thresholds is definitely not chronological or sequential, though it does occur at the national level of elections (1934–97) and only latterly at the regional level (1999–2007). In addition, the party's success in surpassing the various thresholds is accompanied by organisational growth and a level of institutionalisation, and without electoral alliances with other political parties, even when it formed the government in Scotland in 2007. Furthermore, in

Pedersen's human terms, the party's birth and infancy lasted a relatively long time and it faced possible death in the 1950s and from 1979-84, only to experience a dramatic resurgence in the 1990s that led the party into minority government in the Scottish Executive in 2007. These latter facts illustrate its existence as a mature, electorally successful party within the autonomist party family.

11.2. THE LIFESPAN OF THE SNP

In the absence of a regional level of government until relatively recently (1999), the lifespan of the SNP is characterised by several decades of struggling to pass the thresholds of declaration and authorisation at the state-level. Stable representation followed from the 1970s. However, it is only with the creation of the Scottish Parliament that the SNP could complete the threshold cycle outlined by Pedersen (1982), becoming a party of regional government in 2007 (see table 11.1). The following sections consider the SNP's lifespan in more detail.

Table 11.1. *The lifespan of the SNP*

a) *Regional level*

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1999					SNP	
2007						SNP

b) *State level*

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1934		SNP				
1970			SNP			
1974					SNP	
1979-2010			SNP			

c) *European level*

	I	II	III
1979-2009			SNP[1]

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

Note
[1]   The SNP had a nominated MEP in the European Parliament before the first direct elections in 1979.

nap new academic press

11.2.1. The threshold of declaration

Whilst the threshold of declaration sounds straightforward in theory, in the SNP's case, the exact moment of threshold-crossing is difficult to discern both in the sense of the declaration itself but also the fact that the declaration was rhetorical rather than real. For example, a range of pressure groups merged together to form the National Party of Scotland (NPS) in 1928. This party was the outcome of the failed non-electoral strategy of the Scottish Home Rule Association in the 1920s – especially the strategy of holding a constitutional convention (Keating and Bleiman 1979; Mitchell 1996). The formation of the NPS did lead to electoral contestation as it passed the threshold of declaration to contest 15 seats in the years 1929 to 1933 (Lynch 2002: 37). By contrast, when the SNP was formed in 1934, it contested relatively few elections between then and 1964 – 43 seats contested in all – with only one electoral success in the special conditions of World War Two.[1] Instead, it faced internal conflicts over electoral versus non-electoral strategies and over its political goals.

In the immediate period following its establishment, the SNP faced internal conflicts over whether it should exist as a political party or a cultural movement and then whether it should contest elections or operate as a cross-party pressure group. First, there were internal divisions and expulsions of some prominent SNP members from the party's cultural wing, who were not committed to an electoral approach but who saw the party as a cultural movement (McAllister 1981: 239). Second, a more serious challenge to the threshold of declaration came with the secession of John MacCormick and a number of SNP activists to form the cross-party Scottish Convention in 1942. This secession involved the abandonment of an electoral strategy completely, in order to create a cross-party pressure group with the aim of establishing a constitutional convention to design a self-government policy involving Scotland's political and social elites (Mitchell 1996: 123). MacCormick had attempted to convert the SNP to this strategy in the 1930s. However, having failed to convert, he led a group of nationalists out of the SNP and into the Convention.[2] The new organisation – and the subsequent Scottish National Assembly and National Covenant Association – provided an alternative route for nationalists in this period. It made life both difficult and easy for the SNP. Difficult because it created a competitor for activists, resources and political attention that lasted for ten years.

---

[1]   The absence of a general election between 1935 and 1945 is part of the reason for electoral contests in this early period.

[2]   The effect on the SNP organisation is difficult to discern. Brand (1978: 243) calculated that the Scottish Convention had 743 members in March 1943, most coming from the SNP and the Liberals. However, the SNP reported 30 active branches in 1944 and had appointed a full-time organiser, with membership of 1228 by May 1946 (Lynch 2002).

nap new academic press

Easy, because it removed opponents of the electoral strategy and of independence from the SNP, so that it became easier for the party to surpass the threshold of declaration as internal opposition was now muted. Thus, when the SNP came to write its new constitution in 1948, it was able to establish a new organisational structure that enforced an exclusive membership on the SNP for the first time (McAllister 1981).[3] The party was also now run by a younger generation of nationalists, committed to both independence and to a long-term approach to electoral politics.

However, though the SNP reached the threshold of declaration in 1948 in more concrete terms than it did at any time since 1934, declaration was just that. It did not mean that the SNP actually could contest elections. Indeed, the striking thing about the SNP's electoral fortunes after 1948 was that they were so poor despite passing the threshold of declaration. The period following the threshold of declaration saw the SNP contest its fewest numbers of Westminster seats, a total of 26 between 1934 and 1948 but only 13 between 1948 and 1960. The SNP was also not particularly active in local elections in this period either, meaning it contested very few local wards and gained little success – 11 contests in 1949, reaching a peak of 34 in 1957 (mostly in Glasgow) and then only 2 contests in 1959 (Lynch 2002: 83). Thus, not only was the party failing to make any progress in surpassing the threshold of declaration in general elections, it was also failing to do so at local elections. Some of the endogenous reasons for this situation will be dealt with in relation to the threshold of authorisation in the next section. However, it is also necessary to consider the political climate at the time, as an exogenous explanation for the SNP's performance in this period. The 1950s in particular can be viewed as the highpoint of two-party politics, class-voting and economic concerns, especially as the United Kingdom (UK) emerged from wartime conditions and rationing. In contrast, the late 1940s and early 1950s was a period of nationalist mobilisation in relation to the National Covenant and the retrieval of the Stone of Destiny from Westminster Abbey in London by a group of student nationalists in December 1950.[4] Both of these events attracted considerable publicity and support within Scotland. Thus the early 1950s were not a 'dead' period for Scottish nationalism in general, only for the SNP specifically, with considerable nationalist activism and prominence not feeding into electoral support for the SNP at local or general elections (Lynch 2002: 77–9).

---

[3]   This change led to the resignations of Douglas Young, party chairman from 1942 to 1945 and Roland Muirhead, who left to establish the cross-party Scottish National Congress in 1950.

[4]   The Stone of Destiny was the coronation stone of the Scottish kings, taken by Edward I of England in 1296 and placed in Westminster Abbey. Its removal by a group of nationalists gained widespread publicity. The National Covenant was a highly popular petition signed by about 2 million Scots that called for a Scottish parliament.

11.2.2. The threshold of authorisation

As noted in the Introduction to this volume, the threshold of authorisation refers to the capacity of a political party to comply with the legal and procedural requirements for contesting elections. In this sense it combines exogenous rules and requirements set by the state and administered by local government with endogenous organisational capacities within political parties (not least in relation to financial resources). In the UK, these legal regulations were fairly limited until quite recently. Before 2000, electoral rules were determined by the various Representation of the People Acts passed by the UK parliament, with implementation by local authorities. However, since 2000, a new regime has been added to this, with the creation of the Electoral Commission through the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act. This legislation gave the Electoral Commission a range of functions such as monitoring electoral law and elections, maintaining data on party donations and spending to ensure parties remain within electoral law, overseeing a formal process for party registration and reviewing parliamentary boundaries.

Before 2000, electoral rules contained details for candidate nominations, election finance and electoral deposits that had to be met if a candidate (and party) was to contest a particular constituency at elections. Candidates would require an official election agent who would be responsible in law for a variety of administrative and financial functions on behalf of the candidate (and effectively the party) – such as gathering and lodging nomination forms, organising printing and publishing of election material, completing the election expenses and so forth. Thus, organisationally (as well as financially), political parties needed a local organisational structure with a modest level of competence to stand candidates at election time.

There were several aspects to the SNP's organisational capacity in the period from 1934 to the mid-1960s that limited its ability to pass the threshold of authorisation and onto that of representation. These were closely connected to the weakness of the party in central office and on the ground. First, there is the fact that general elections in Scotland involved contests in 71 constituencies, with a first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system in single member constituencies. However, the SNP's organisation fell far short of competing in all constituencies. For example, the SNP reported having 28 branches representing 1228 members in May 1946 (Lynch 2002: 66-7), and 2460 members organised into 45 local branches and groups in May 1950 (*ibid*.: 73). In 1960, the party reported only 23 functioning local parties in Scotland and this even declined to 18 in 1962 (*ibid*.: 108). After that, party membership and local organisation rose dramatically and the SNP was capable of emerging as a credible

election-fighting machine in many areas. By 1965, the party had 140 branches, and 484 branches by 1968 (*ibid*.: 108); by the end of 1968 it also claimed to have 125,000 members. Notably, local parties were increasingly able to fight elections without financial or organisational assistance from the central party organisation. However, this had taken forty years to achieve.

Second, for general elections, from 1918 onwards – meaning the whole life of the SNP – candidates/parties were required to lodge an electoral deposit to contest a seat. This deposit was £150 and it would be forfeited if the party gained less than 12.5% of the vote. From 1985, the deposit was changed to £500 and 5% of the vote (and £1000 for European Parliamentary candidates).[5] Providing the deposit and coming up with election campaign funds was a persistent problem for the SNP, especially in the 1940s and 1950s. For example, the party had only £470 to fund the 1950 election campaign and had to subsidise local parties to fight the few seats contested (*ibid*.: 75). In 1951, the two seats contested cost £501 and £492 each, for a party constantly in debt and losing money, with an overdraft of £1457 in 1952 for the national party organisation (*ibid*.: 92). In terms of the election deposit, the SNP's share of the vote frequently fell below the 12.5% hurdle, meaning that every contest yielded few votes but generated costs that had to be met by the local party or the central organisation (see table 11.2). Throughout this period, the SNP was electorally and organisationally static and arguably in danger of dying on its feet. It lacked major sponsors to finance its elections, such as the trade unions supporting Labour and the business community for the Conservatives. It also had a small membership and organisation to sustain campaigning. One way out of such difficulties involved electoral alliances. This strategy was favoured and pursued by one party insider in the 1930s – John MacCormick (MacCormick 1955) – but not by the party. When the issue was discussed in a more serious way in the 1960s, with the proposal for the SNP and Liberals to stand down in favour of each other's candidates in some seats, both leaders and activists in the SNP were opposed (Wolfe 1973), not least because the SNP was doing so well compared to the Liberals.

---

5   If, for example, a party were to contest all of the Westminster parliamentary seats in Scotland in 1983, it would cost £10,800 in deposits, with some prospect of losing this money if support in a constituency fell beneath the 12.5% threshold. In 1987, by contrast, a party needed £36,000 to contest all of the Westminster seats in Scotland, though had a greater likelihood of seeing this money back given the 5% threshold per constituency. There was no deposit system for local elections making, them, conceivably, cheap for small parties to contest, though the requirements for nomination, election agents and expenses remained in place, so some level of party organisation was required.

Table 11.2. *SNP electoral contests and lost deposits at general elections, 1935-70*

Election Year	Seats Contested	Lost Deposits
1935	8	6
1945	8	6
1950	3	3
1951	2	1
1955	2	1
1959	5	3
1964	15	12
1966	22	10
1970	65	43

However, after 1960, the party entered a dramatic growth phase in relation to electoral success, organisation, membership and finance. Growth in support at a few by-elections in the early 1960s, central party reorganisation and the appointment of a full-time party organiser (self-funded) combined with more favourable political circumstances to help the SNP grow. Nevertheless, the threshold of authorisation remained a challenge (see table 11.1). For example, in 1964, the SNP contested its largest number of seats – 15 – but lost deposits in 12 of them. All seats were contested for the first time in February 1974.[6] Thus, it took 40 years for the SNP to exist as a truly *national* party, capable of contesting seats across Scotland and emerging as a genuine national force. Of course, whilst the SNP coped with the threshold of authorisation more easily as the party grew in membership and electoral support – meaning it could afford campaign costs and lost deposits – the situation was rather different when the party faced a severe downturn in its fortunes. For example, after the electoral disaster of 1979 – proposals for devolution were defeated in a referendum and the SNP lost 9 of its 11 seats in the general election held a few months later – the party faced difficult times. Internal divisions led to a loss of electoral support and a decline in membership and money; this meant that lost deposits were more likely and less affordable. At the 1983 election, for example, support for the SNP fell to 11.8% with the loss of 54 deposits.[7] Much of the period that followed in the 1980s was taken up with recovering from this period of severe downturn in the party's fortunes.

---

[6] The SNP contested all Westminster seats from this election onwards, except in 1987 when it did not contest Orkney and Shetland in order to give a free run to the Orkney and Shetland autonomy movement.

[7] The change of rules concerning election deposits in 1985 had benefits for the SNP in 1987. At that election, the party lost only one deposit (where it gained less than 5%) in the constituency of Roxburgh and Berwickshire. Had the old rules applied – which required 12.5% – the party would have lost 37 deposits.

11.2.3. The threshold of representation

In the case of the SNP, the state level was really the only level that mattered in terms of securing representation, as Scotland did not feature regional-level elections until 1999. Whilst the party's difficulties in surpassing the thresholds of declaration and authorisation hold part of the key to the party's inability to pass through the threshold of representation, the FPTP electoral system and the nature of party competition provided further major obstacles to electoral representation. The SNP's first electoral success at a general election was in 1970, with victory in the Western Isles seat (see table 11.3). However, the SNP had won two Westminster by-elections in quite different political conditions in 1945 and 1967. The 1945 victory was at a by-election in Motherwell and Wishaw whilst the Second World War was ongoing. The SNP succeeded as the Conservatives did not contest the Labour-held seat as part of the war-time pact between the main parties not to fight by-elections. The party's second by-election success in Hamilton in 1967 came in more normal political conditions and at a time of dramatically increasing SNP support. Here the party won 46% of the vote and took the seat from Labour, which was in government. Significantly, the SNP's victory allowed it to cross the threshold of relevance as the main parties began to address the issue of Scottish self-government. However, just as with Motherwell and Wishaw in 1945, Hamilton was lost at the subsequent UK general election, so that crossing the threshold of representation was fleeting.

The limited ability of the SNP to break through the threshold of representation changed markedly in 1974 (see table 11.3). The SNP won 21.9% of the vote and 7 seats in February and then 30.4% and 11 seats in October. The October election was the SNP's electoral peak in terms of share of the vote and placed the party second to Labour. And, whilst numerical representation at Westminster was limited by the FPTP electoral system, it did result in a range of policy measures to address Scottish issues including legislation to create a regional assembly in 1978 – again crossing the threshold of relevance. Had this regional institution been established, it would have had a transformational effect on the political opportunity structure of the SNP. However, it was not to be. The Yes vote was 51.6% but the devolution proposal failed as less than 40% of the registered electorate voted Yes. Though the SNP declined dramatically at the 1979 and 1983 general elections, retaining two seats on each occasion, the party did not disappear. Indeed, whilst these were the party's worst years in recent times, a slow recovery was evident from the mid-1980s and especially at the 1992 and 1997 general elections as support for the party sat at just over 20%.

Table 11.3. *Election results in Scotland, 1945–2010*

Year	Conservative		Labour		Liberal Democrats		SNP	
	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats
1945	41.1	27	49.4	40	5.0	0	1.2	0
1950	44.8	32	46.2	32	6.6	2	0.4	0
1951	48.6	35	47.9	35	2.7	1	0.3	0
1955	50.1	36	46.7	34	1.9	1	0.5	0
1959	47.2	31	46.7	38	4.1	1	0.5	0
1964	40.6	24	48.7	43	7.6	4	2.4	0
1966	37.7	20	49.9	46	6.8	5	5.0	0
1970	38.0	23	44.5	44	5.5	3	11.4	1
1974 (Feb)	32.9	21	36.6	41	8.0	3	21.9	7
1974 (Oct)	24.7	16	36.3	41	8.3	3	30.4	11
1979	31.4	22	41.5	44	9.0	3	17.3	2
1983	28.4	21	35.1	41	24.5	8	11.7	2
1987	24.0	10	42.4	50	19.2	9	14.0	3
1992	25.7	11	39.0	49	13.1	9	21.5	3
1997	17.5	0	45.6	56	13.0	10	22.1	6
1999 (S)	16.0	18	39.0	56	14.0	17	29.0	35
2001	16.0	1	43.0	55	16.0	10	20.0	5
2003 (S)	16.5	18	35.0	50	15.0	17	24.0	27
2005[1]	16.0	1	29.0	40	23.0	11	18.0	6
2007 (S)	16.6	17	32.0	46	16.0	16	32.9	47
2010	16.7	1	42.0	41	18.9	11	19.9	6

Notes:
(S): Scottish elections, only constituency vote % is reported.
[1]   Number of Scottish seats at Westminster reduced from 72 to 59.

The SNP also developed a profile at the European level by winning a seat at the European elections in 1979 and retaining representation within the European Parliament continuously since then. The real effect in 1979 was to give a boost to party morale following the devolution debacle and the loss of 9 Westminster seats. However, the result also gave the party a third full-time elected politician, as well a resources and research-support during a time of severe contraction. However, real advances in relation to the threshold of representation came in 1999 with the first elections to the new Scottish Parliament, which employed an Additional Member System. This combined FPTP and regional top-up lists (allocated on a proportional basis) and provided the SNP with 35 seats out of 129, second place at the election and a role as the main opposition party in the parliament. This

nap new academic press

situation continued in 2003 in spite of a considerable loss of support and seats for the SNP – the first constituency vote fell to 24% and the party lost 8 seats – before a resurgence in 2007. In the latter election, the SNP became the largest party in the Scottish Parliament in terms of seats (47), first constituency vote (32.9%) and second regional vote (31%) – the first time it has come first at any election in its history – and established a minority government in Edinburgh.

11.2.4. The threshold of relevance

Pedersen's notion of the threshold of relevance offers a key question for autonomist parties such as the SNP, namely what difference to they make to politics and policy in their region or in the wider state? The impact of the SNP has been felt through politicising the national question and mobilising it into Scottish and UK politics. In this way the SNP has been policy-relevant. As regional government has only been in existence in Scotland since 1999, governmental opportunities have been limited. However, the SNP has exhibited both blackmail and coalition potential in relation to the party system (Sartori 1976), with coalition potential occurring in two distinct formats at Westminster and then in Edinburgh since 1999. Blackmail potential was evident in both the late 1960s and in the mid-1970s as the party crossed the threshold of representation. The SNP's rise in by-elections in the second half of the 1960s – and winning Hamilton in 1967 – created a political impetus for the party's opponents to address Scottish issues. Plaid Cymru's performance in Carmarthen in 1966 (see Elias, this volume) also influenced both Labour and the Conservatives to address the devolution issue. Labour announced it was to create the Royal Commission on the Constitution to examine the issue of devolution in 1968 as a means to head off the rise of the nationalists (HMSO 1973). The Conservatives responded with their Declaration of Perth, which committed the party to establish a legislative assembly for Scotland. This proposal was examined by an internal constitutional committee from 1968 onwards, leading to the publication of Scotland's Government in March 1970 (Mitchell 1990: 58). The committee proposed a directly-elected Scottish Convention, with powers similar to the Scottish committees already in existence at Westminster, but the issue was not pursued with any great conviction when in government from 1970-74.

Whilst such limited accommodations with nationalism aided the main parties at the 1970 election, renewed support for the SNP at by-elections and at the two general elections of 1974 brought clear examples of blackmail potential and policy responses by the main parties. Of the two parties, Labour was the most forthcoming in relation to accommodating nationalism. Not only had the Royal Commission on the Constitution reported in favour of legislative devolution in 1973, but also Labour stood to lose consi-

nap new academic press

derable seats and votes to the SNP unless it addressed the devolution issue. Though it was the Conservatives who lost most seats to the SNP in 1974, it was Labour that stood to lose support in its electoral heartlands and, along with it, the seats needed to form a majority in the House of Commons. Thus, the minority Labour government formed in February 1974 announced its intention to bring forward proposals for devolution in the government's legislative programme in March, followed by a government paper on alternatives for devolution in June 1974 (Lynch 2002: 129). This document was followed by the commitment to create a Scottish Assembly in the Labour manifesto for the October 1974 general election (Labour Party 1974). Labour's support for devolution helped the party to retain support and seats in Scotland; electoral support was down only -0.3% compared to February and the party actually gained one seat. However, the SNP was close behind Labour in share of the vote and in many seats, meaning that the devolution issue required follow-through by Labour in government. Labour dealt with devolution as legislation in two different ways. Initially, Labour introduced a joint devolution bill for Scotland and Wales in 1975, which was rejected and withdrawn in the House of Commons in 1976. Separate bills for Scottish and Welsh devolution were then created in 1977 and the Scotland Act was passed in 1978 – albeit subject to a referendum.

Whilst the devolution referendum failed in 1979, the devolution issue did not disappear entirely from the political agenda. The SNP's blackmail potential was tamed for a time, not least as the party descended into internal conflict over strategy and ideology. However, the devolution issue returned after the 1987 general election, with pressure on Labour to make bolder commitments to a Scottish assembly. Following the SNP's by-election victory in Glasgow Govan in November 1988, there was renewed pressure on Labour to promote devolution. This led to its participation in the Scottish Constitutional Convention during 1989-95, which designed a compromise devolution policy amongst political parties, trade unions, local authorities and a range of civic organisations. Much of the Convention's scheme was instituted in the Scotland Act 1998, following the devolution referendum of 1997. Thus, in 1999, the SNP's blackmail potential manifested itself in the creation of a devolved Scottish Parliament. This constitutes the party's most obvious institutional impact on Scottish and UK politics to date.

Whilst the SNP has manifested blackmail potential on several occasions since the 1960s – and seen some policy success as a consequence – coalition potential has been more elusive. The SNP was able to exhibit some coalition potential in the 1974-9 period, when it was involved in sustaining Labour in government after it lost its majority. However, the real coalition potential here was exhibited by the Liberals, who established a formal pact with Labour to sustain it in government in exchange for limited policy con-

nap new academic press

cessions. However, this pact did not involve government office or Ministers for the Liberals, just an agreement that the party would provide Labour with a parliamentary majority when necessary. This situation was quite exceptional in post-war UK politics and has not been seen since.

The creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 increased the SNP's coalition potential as coalition government became the norm in the new regional multi-party system. However, the SNP did not enter into coalition discussions after either the 1999 or 2003 Scottish elections, nor was it in a position to do so as secure deals were made between Labour and the Liberal Democrats without reference to other parties. The situation was quite different in 2007, however. The SNP was the leading party after the Scottish election, winning marginally more votes and seats compared to Labour for the first time ever. This placed it in pole position to form a government. However, attempts at forming a coalition administration failed when the Liberal Democrats refused coalition talks. The outcome was an SNP minority government, established with the acquiescence of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats as well as the active support of the Greens. The new government proceeded to deal with policy and legislation on an issue-by-issue basis, negotiating with opposition parties in the parliament on legislation and budgets. And, of course, this development meant that the SNP passed through the threshold of relevance in relation to blackmail potential and coalition potential, whilst also crossing the threshold of governance – though not in a majoritarian or coalition situation. The minority government was relatively popular in opinion polls in Scotland from 2007 to the autumn of 2009, by which time support for the SNP had eroded. Incumbency was made difficult by the economic situation from 2009, as well as the shift in political focus to the UK level of political action due to the 2010 UK general election, at which the gap between the SNP's popularity at the UK and Scottish levels was even more apparent (the party scored 32.9% in 2007 but only 19.9% in 2010). These incumbency effects also had some effect on the party on the ground, with many party activists drawn into local government and the Scottish Parliament in 2007, making for a rather muted campaign at the UK election in 2010.

However, government status was a key development for the SNP, not merely in historic terms as its first time in government since its establishment in 1934, but also in relation to its attempts to build a credible position as a governing party as well as to lead the constitutional debate on independence and more powers for the Scottish Parliament. The SNP government hosted a National Conversation on constitutional change from 2007-2009. This involved consultation events on further devolution and independence across Scotland, as well as discussions with a variety of pressure groups and the publication of a wide range of government policy documents related to constitutional change, the economic powers available

nap new academic press

under devolution, media and broadcasting policy, and so forth (Harvey and Lynch 2010). Around the same time, the Unionist parties in the Scottish Parliament and at the UK level agreed to establish the Commission on Scottish Devolution to examine the case for more devolved powers for Scotland. The Commission report in 2009 proposed a range of minor legislative powers be transferred to Scotland in addition to the creation of a controversial new tax-sharing arrangement (Commission on Scottish Devolution 2009). Implementation of these proposals was promised by the UK coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats after the 2010 UK election, with a new Scotland bill published in autumn 2010.

11.3. CHANGES IN PARTY ORGANISATION

Changes in the SNP's organisation during its lifespan are summarised in table 11.4. For the SNP, passing the thresholds of declaration, authorisation and representation were rather drawn out affairs; they were in fact processes rather than events. However, the period that preceded the party's electoral growth and its arrival in electoral politics as a serious force in 1974 involved extensive organisational growth and membership expansion in the 1960s; these changes were necessary precursors to the crossing of the threshold of representation.

The SNP's organisation had fluctuated at a relatively low level from 1934 into the mid-1960s. The party had a functioning central office for some of this time, but very limited membership, finance and organisational capacity. In the 1960s, that all changed dramatically as both the party on the ground and the party in central office expanded rapidly. Firstly, the party organisation was overhauled following an internal report in 1963, with a restructuring of office-bearers and elected positions within the party. The intention was to make party structures more concerned with policy and strategy rather than with routine administrative matters (Lynch 2002: 106). Secondly, a full-time national organiser was appointed (and self-funded) to oversee organisational growth and this individual adopted a hands-on approach to growing the party's membership and building branches across Scotland.

However, what was key to these two organisational developments was the level of popularity for the SNP and for Scottish autonomy in the changed economic and political circumstances of the 1960s. For example, competing organisations to the SNP in the national movement had declined and disappeared by the 1960s, leaving the SNP as the sole surviving organisation of a national movement that had its origins in the 1920s (Brand 1978). Moreover, the SNP focused on contesting by-elections and gained new levels of support as a more attractive third party alternative to Labour or the Conservatives. It did so through addressing socio-economic con-

nap new academic press

cerns at a time when the condition of the Scottish economy was an important issue; it was especially important in Labour constituencies in a period of Labour government from 1964 on. Therefore internal and external developments combined to produce a positive political opportunity structure for the SNP.

Organisational growth at this stage was dramatic. As noted above, the number of party branches grew rapidly during the 1960s (Lynch 2002: 109). The impact of this on party organisation was threefold. Firstly, it improved the party's election-fighting capacity across Scotland, meaning that it allowed the party to contest some seats for the first time, fulfilling the threshold of declaration in concrete terms. Secondly, the influx of members provided funds for fighting elections, campaigning between elections and also expanding the party's central organisational capacity, in the form of central offices compromised of policy and communications staff rather than purely administrators. Resources were spent on developing and communicating policy (Müller-Rommel 2002), with the production and distribution of party literature across Scotland; the SNP's professionalisation even eclipsed the capacity of the other parties in some areas. Thirdly, these developments helped the party to cross the threshold of representation at the Hamilton by-election in 1967, local council elections in 1968 then the general election in 1970 when the SNP won its first seat outside of a by-election (and continuous electoral representation at Westminster ever since). Though membership, local organisation and finance all dipped after the late 1960s growth spurt, the party was on an entirely different footing after this period and experienced a second growth period in the mid-1970s as the party won 7 then 11 seats in 1974 and the issue of Scottish devolution made the SNP policy relevant in the 1974-9 period.

Of course, the SNP's electoral peak in the 1970s was not without its downside. Organisationally, the 1974 election victories created competing leaderships in the SNP at Westminster and in Scotland, with limited communication between them. This meant that internal party life became dominated by conflicts between the party in central office and in public office, which spilled over to include the party on the ground after 1979. These debates involved the relationship between the party and the Labour government, attitudes to devolution and in time, the ideological positioning of the SNP. On the one hand, a group of Members of Parliament (MPs) in London was dealing with life at Westminster for the first time, sustaining or opposing a weak Labour government to help bring about legislation to create a Scottish assembly. The voting behaviour of the group on legislation at Westminster was under the spotlight, with divisions within the group about devolution and whether to support Labour policy in other are-

as.[8] On the other hand, there were the party's elected office-bearers and National Executive members in Scotland, the central organisation. These had to deal with issues in Scotland, had limited contact with the parliamentary group and sought to see the party advance against Labour by adopting centre-left positions that the MPs might have opposed in votes at Westminster.

When the SNP faced this situation again after 1999 – when it again had a substantial body of elected members – the difficulties of a dual leadership were avoided as most of the existing party office-bearers and National Executive members became Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). Moreover, having the parliament in Edinburgh made contact with the rest of the party much easier as did the need to keep party activists onside to gain prominent positions on the regional electoral lists. The overlap of the party in central and public office was successful in avoiding conflict, until after the 2003 Scottish election, when a downturn in electoral support for the SNP undermined the party leader, John Swinney, leading to the return of former leader, Alex Salmond. Though Swinney resigned as leader in 2004, he was instrumental in making organisational changes to the SNP. Swinney orchestrated reforms in internal party democracy that replaced delegate-voting with the one-member-one-vote procedure to select party leaders and parliamentary candidates. Before the 2003 Scottish election, several prominent SNP MSPs had been effectively deselected by the actions of local parties with small numbers of members, giving them a disproportionate impact on selecting MSPs. The 'one-member-one-vote' policy was seen to remove this problem. Swinney also altered the SNP's rules to make it more difficult to challenge the party leader, in order to prevent the destabilisation of the leadership. When Swinney was challenged as SNP leader in 2003, the challenge came from an ordinary party member (not an MSP) who only needed the nomination of one local party organisation to stand. From 2004, any candidate for the SNP leadership or deputy leadership would require the support of 100 members from at least 20 local branches to be nominated.

In addition, whilst the SNP's organisational expansion preceded electoral representation in the 1960s and 1970s, the party's electoral decline (along with the fall in importance of the devolution issue in 1979) saw organisational losses and something of a battle for survival for the SNP as the party declined at all levels. The party's central office shrank to the bare bones – losing communications and policy staff – and saw its branch organisation collapse from around 500 in 1980 to a much more concrete 281 branches by

---

8   The minutes of meetings of the parliamentary group at Westminster were kept private to avoid leaks to the media, as many votes were 6 to 5, which would have demonstrated how divided the MPs were.

nap new academic press

1988.[9] Membership also dropped, from 28,558 in 1980 to 12,060 in 1985, and fundraising was a problem until the 1990s, with the party losing most of its staff and had few funds for organisational modernisation or campaigning. Election of an MEP in 1979, rising to 2 MEPs in 1994, did provide some research and office resources related to the European Parliament, though insufficient to compensate for the loss of MPs and central office capacity. By the late 1990s, the SNP had recovered from the post-1979 crisis, with increased levels of electoral support, more stable membership, increased finances and also a rebuilt central office – comprised of research and communications staff rather than simply administrators. Moreover, much of this organisational capacity was maintained from 1999 to 2007, with more focus on campaign activity through the SNP's call centre, and enhanced policy capacity through the creation of a central research unit of 7 staff in the Scottish Parliament as well as MSPs' researchers.

Whilst the 1990s saw gradual organisational and electoral improvements for the SNP, it was the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 that transformed the SNP's political status, electoral fortunes, financial resources and organisational capacity. In this sense, access to this new institutional level had a radical effect on the party unlike anything seen at the state-wide and European levels. Three things are worth pointing out about the post-1999 development of the SNP.

Firstly, the party's electoral success produced the highest number of full-time elected members, provided them with prominent positions in the parliament and media, and also generated parliamentary resources for local offices and research and administrative staff. The party had 6 MPs and 2 MEPs before devolution; after devolution it also had 35 MSPs and a lot more staff.[10] The SNP suddenly looked bigger and more of a force across Scotland. This phenomenon was even more pronounced after the 2007 election, when the SNP won FPTP seats in some areas for the first time and had a total of 47 MSPs elected to the Scottish Parliament.

Secondly, the party's electoral strength coupled with changes to arrangements for state funding for parties ensured a significant growth in resources for the SNP as a result of devolution. Under existing funding rules, the SNP received public funds to support its MPs at Westminster (known as Short money). This scheme became operational in the Scottish Parliament after 1999 and was accompanied by new money to support policy development. These changes transformed the resource base of a party that had previously relied on individual donations and found itself unable to compete with

---

[9]   105 of these branches had less than 30 members and 15 were single constituency branches (Lynch 2002: 163).

[10]   There was 336 full and part-time MSP staff on the Scottish Parliament's payroll on 31 March 2000 (Scottish Parliament 2000). How many worked for the SNP was difficult to determine, though the party had 35 of the 129 MSPs.

Labour and the Conservatives in general election campaigning as a result. For example, from March 2001 to March 2007, the combined income from public funds totalled £1,688,961.49 (total registered donations to the SNP were £3,152,255.58 in this period). Public funding plus increased individual donations helped the SNP to outspend Labour at the 2007 Scottish election by £1,383,462 to £1,102,866. The improvement in finances was especially important because SNP membership actually declined in this period to 8,209 (at the time of the 2004 leadership election), before recovering to 13,236 in 2007 after a central membership scheme was instituted. In January 2010, the SNP announced its membership had risen to 15,644.

Thirdly, as discussed briefly above, the post-devolution period saw two shifts in power within the SNP. Leadership and policy influence passed to the MSPs after 1999, though these were tightly integrated in the pre-1999 leadership and National Executive. Then in 2007, such powers passed to the party in public office much more directly as the SNP formed a minority government in the Scottish Executive. Because of the overlap and integration of the MSPs within existing party structures, there was little conflict compared to the 1970s,[11] and government office has not really altered this situation. Despite problems in governing, there has been little internal conflict within the SNP, perhaps aided by a minority government that has not involved fundamental policy trade-offs with coalition partners. This situation contrasted very dramatically with the period of internal conflict that ripped through the party after the failed devolution referendum and the 1979 UK election. In any case, the party in central office is now less important than it was before 1999. The shift of power from the party on the ground and in central office was well-managed by the party's political elites.

---

[11] Despite the relative peace within the party at large, 3 different MSPs left the party or were expelled due to indiscipline and sat in the Parliament as independents.

nap new academic press

Table 11.4. *Pressure for organisational change upon crossing thresholds*

Threshold	Regional level	State level	European level
V	**Medium** - Shift of power to the party in government		
IV-B			
IV-A			
III	**Strong** - New staff and resources - Shift of power to the party in public office	**Medium** - Increase of staff and resources - Conflict between central office and public office	**Medium** - Increase of staff and resources
II	**Medium** - Candidate selection and policy-making procedures	**Strong** - Creation of local and central organisation and resources	
I		**Strong** - Creation of local and central organisation and resources	

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

11.4. Changes in party goals

Party goal change within the SNP has been limited in recent years. Debate over party goals was most pronounced in the period from the 1930s to 1940s, when there was strategic differences within the SNP over contesting elections versus focusing on cross-party initiatives. Both goals and strategy became clearer after the split in the party in 1942, when a group of activists left to form the Scottish Convention (see above). After this departure, the SNP became more party-oriented in terms of trying to focus on elections to combine a vote-seeking and policy-seeking approach, with the goal being independence for Scotland. This situation lasted until the 1970s, when the SNP was caught up in debates on devolution and, most notably, in supporting devolution (not independence) in the House of Commons from 1974-78 and at the devolution referendum of 1979. This development did not involve goal change as such – as the SNP still supported independence – but caused strategic disputes within the party over how to respond to intermediate institutional reforms short of independence. The problem here was the party losing support and internal coherence from becoming involved in another party's constitutional

goals, as opposed to independence. These disputes were deep and damaging, especially after the 1979 referendum debacle. After this, the SNP entered a period of internal fighting over attitudes to devolution versus independence; gradualists who supported devolution as a first step to independence were opposed by fundamentalists who adopted an 'independence nothing less' attitude. In the short-term, the fundamentalists were victorious after 1979, before the gradualists reasserted themselves. This division was accompanied by ideological factionalism over the extent of the SNP's centre-left identity from 1979-84, which was linked to but not synonymous with the gradualist-fundamentalist divide in the party. However, the effect was that the party's internal life and external political status became contaminated by conflict over goals and ideologies. As a consequence, the party lost both members and voters.

The votes versus policy dilemma is a useful means of understanding the SNP's problems during these years. The party had gained electoral support as a result of popular support for Scottish autonomy in the broad sense, rather than independence. In that sense votes translated into policy, but not influence over the exact contents of policy (a not dissimilar situation occurred from 2007-10). After the 1974 elections, SNP MPs at Westminster, and the party at large, found itself caught up in debates about the details of Labour's devolution legislation in 1976 and 1978 as well as tangled up in the referendum campaign in 1978-9. The party was unable to play a decisive role in shaping devolution policy from 1974-9. Moreover, it was left with the choice of supporting a Labour minority government in delivering a flawed devolution policy or, alternatively, defeating the government and losing the prospect of a Scottish assembly altogether. However, after 4 years of debate on devolution and a government troubled by economic and political crises, the momentum behind constitutional change had receded by 1979, though there was an expectation that devolution would actually be delivered at the referendum. The SNP's subsequent losses at the 1979 general election cannot be understood in relation to the trade-off between policy and votes as the context of the 1979 general election was so different from 1974. The devolution agenda had run its course by 1979, with voters using the SNP as a vehicle for constitutional change in 1974 then switching back to their partisan preferences on other issues in 1979, especially government performance and the state of the economy.

History did not repeat itself in subsequent years. The SNP altered its independence policy in the late 1980s in favour of an explicit policy of independence within the European Union. The goal of independence was thus Europeanised at a time of important advances in supranational integration (Lynch 1996). This policy change was popular and was part of the reason for increased SNP support in the late 1980s. The party also resisted becoming involved with its opponents in designing a common policy for devolu-

tion in the shape of the Scottish Constitutional Convention (1989-1995). Staying away from the Convention cost the SNP popularity in the short-term, but it meant that its independence in Europe policy remained pure, thus avoiding the post-1979 difficulty of being co-opted into supporting devolution rather than independence. The party retained this position until after the publication of the Labour government's white paper on a Scottish parliament in July 1997. This meant the SNP could campaign for independence in Europe at the 1992 and 1997 general elections, and maximise the pressure on Labour over devolution and its delivery after 1997. The SNP did come to support devolution at the 1997 referendum, and participated in cross-party campaigning in support of the Yes vote. Crucially, in contrast to 1979, the referendum was a success, with the Scottish Parliament established in 1999.

Institutional change in the shape of the Scottish Parliament radically altered the political opportunity structure for the SNP. Devolution meant that Scotland had a regional level of government for the first time and a context in which the SNP was set to do well. Not only did devolution allow the SNP the best forum in which to campaign on Scottish issues and the constitution, but the electoral system for the parliament (using a combination of FPTP and PR) was also likely to deliver many more seats for the SNP compared to the FPTP system used in general elections. This development affected the SNP in two ways in relation to party goals. First, the parliament provided an institutional mechanism with which to hold an independence referendum – a democratic mandate and trigger for independence. SNP policy goals were therefore strategically softened to promise an independence referendum rather than immediate independence. This was an attempt to appeal to soft nationalist voters concerned about the rush to independence, allowing voters to support the SNP as the main opposition party knowing that they would have a future opportunity to decide on Scotland's constitutional future. Second, this approach dovetailed with the SNP's attempts to cast itself as a party of government. The party adopted a range of policies and personnel with the explicit goal of entering the Scottish Executive.

These new goals required the SNP to mature as a party, be less oppositional and more focused on policy and institutions rather than the constitutional issue alone. This focus on office success did not work in 1999 or most obviously in 2003, but succeeded in 2007 when the SNP overtook Labour as the leading party for the first time ever. This reality increased the primacy of the regional level of government over the UK-level and notably, the SNP did not see any electoral benefits from regional office at the UK election in 2010. In addition, the SNP contributed to advancing the issue of regional autonomy whilst in government but failed to hold an independence referendum due to lack of support in the Scottish Parliament. There was also no evidence of increased support for independence amongst

nap new academic press

Scottish voters during the SNP's time in regional office. The party did not change its fundamental goal of independence, instead it used regional office to attempt to steer the debate on greater autonomy for the devolved institutions and took a consensual approach to change through its three-year National Conversation consultation.

11.5. The policy impact of the SNP

In terms of policy impact, there are three interconnected areas that merit consideration. Firstly, there is the general issue of territorial/constitutional politics that the SNP elevated onto the political agenda. Whilst there was a national movement in Scotland before the 1960s, the constitutional issue was rarely prominent and issues such as the economy and employment, were seldom viewed through a distinctive Scottish lens. However, this began to change from the 1960s onwards. Constitutional politics came to the fore – though fluctuating in intensity and importance – whilst Scottish issues or a Scottish variant of UK issues came to be addressed by the other political parties. Indeed, the other political parties began to stress their Scottish identity in this period, producing distinctive Scottish manifestos (Labour only did this for the first time in October 1974), changing party names, symbols and organisations to reflect the Scottish dimension. Thus the SNP helped to bring about changes in the nature of party competition as well as the party system itself.

Secondly, although the SNP sought to get the issue of independence onto the political agenda, its real success was getting devolution onto the agenda, as the other parties responded to the SNP's electoral success by formulating their own policy on Scottish self-government. In the case of Labour, this meant legislating for devolution in government in 1978 and 1998, with the Scottish Parliament established in 1999. Thus the SNP's success saw two waves of institutional development in favour of Scottish autonomy. Since then, the SNP helped to advance the debate for greater policy autonomy for the devolved parliament. The SNP proposed fiscal autonomy from 2002, whilst the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats also moved to support greater powers for the Scottish Parliament (Scottish Liberal Democrats 2006). After the 2007 Scottish election, all of the main parties proposed institutional change to the Scottish government and parliament, with the SNP holding its National Conversation during 2007–9 and the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats publishing the results of their Commission on Scottish Devolution in 2009.

Third, there is the impact of the SNP in government in Scotland for the first time since May 2007. Most importantly for the party is the constitutional issue, with the SNP looking to advance independence through using the government machine to produce a draft white paper on independence and

nap new academic press

an independence referendum. The party also sought to cooperate with other political parties to gain more policy powers for the parliament. Some progress on the independence would thus seem to be essential during the SNP's period in government; if office success means no policy success in this key area, then activist and voter dissatisfaction would be the likely result, even if soft nationalist voters like some of the SNP's policy success in other areas of government. The SNP's performance here was mixed, with no referendum being held during the 2007–2011 legislature.

The SNP has also tried to advance Scottish interests and make Scotland appear more state-like. There was intergovernmental cooperation with other devolved institutions in the UK, such as collaboration with Northern Ireland in pursuit of taxation powers, and Wales in an effort to seek more legislative powers. The SNP also sought more Scottish input into EU policy and tried to develop more formal mechanisms for interacting with the UK government. This was the first time in which the SNP governed Scotland and it spanned two different UK governments. Relations between the SNP government and UK government under Labour were relatively poor at the public level but more positive in the early period of the UK Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010.

Third, there is the 'good government' dimension, meaning producing a situation in which the SNP is seen as a success in office in domestic policy areas such as education, policing, environment and health, in addition to the economy (Scottish Government 2007, SNP 2007).[12] Improving Scotland's economic performance was not just an important aspect of the SNP's plan for government, but also intrinsic to promoting independence itself: with Scotland strong enough economically to succeed as an independent state. However, some of the policy performance began to be undermined with the onset of economic recession, as proposals that required public investment (such as increased police numbers, a local council tax freeze, free prescription charges, free personal care for the elderly and so forth) came under financial pressure. The SNP government had to alter its expansive approach to public services and the economy from 2007 to a more defensive strategy to manage recession in 2008–9 (Scottish Government 2009). However, one significant area of success for the SNP government was in the area of renewable energy. Not only did the government assist in levering investment into this area to expand renewable energy in Scotland, but it also arguably came to control part of a policy area – energy – even though it was reserved to the UK government under the Scotland Act 1998.

---

[12]   The Scottish Executive established a Council of Economic Advisors in June 2007 to advise on economic policy, chaired by the former head of the Royal Bank of Scotland, George Mathewson. This initiative became controversial due to the cost of the organisation.

11.6. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the SNP's lifespan since its formation, focusing on key internal and external events and developments that have assisted – and at times prevented – passage through different thresholds towards electoral success and relevance as a political party. Passing through the different thresholds has also been connected to organisational changes and changes in party goals. Key to such developments have been the relatively late transformation of the SNP's political opportunity structure in the shape of the creation of a Scottish level of government in 1999, using an electoral system that facilitated effective vote-gathering. At the same time, this institutional change boosted the party's coalition potential and its prospects of obtaining government office. This was achieved for the first time in 2007: a grand total of seventy-three years after the party was founded in 1934 (a long time to wait for office success compared to many other autonomist parties). However, the effect of government office on party organisation and goals remains to be seen.

There are a number of specific concluding points to be made about the SNP's development and its ability to cross Pedersen's thresholds within the lifecycle of political parties. First, whilst the threshold of declaration appeared as the most simple of thresholds to cross, the level of strategic contestation within the Scottish national movement made this threshold highly problematic for the SNP. For example, the threshold of declaration was highly contested in the national movement and then within the SNP after 1934. The SNP only passed the threshold in 1948. Even then, it did not become a reality until the 1960s and the SNP fought all Scottish seats for the first time in February 1974. Thus it effectively took 40 years for the threshold of declaration to become organisationally complete. Second, the threshold of authorisation was legally straightforward with few legal obstacles to the SNP in participating in elections. However, organisational obstacles stood in the SNP's way here – meaning lack of members, limited local party organisation, financial costs of election campaigning and the need to fund an election deposit for each party candidate. These internal factors were responsible for the SNP's weak capacity to contest elections and also for the fact that its ability to cross the threshold of declaration was solely rhetorical and acted as a blockage to surpassing the thresholds of representation and relevance.

In relation to the threshold of representation, the electoral system as well as party organisation and finance placed limits on the SNP's development and performance. Representation was achieved sporadically at by-elections in 1945 and 1967, before the party was able to secure electoral representation at a general election in 1970. Since then, the SNP has had continuous state-level representation, peaking in 1974. Moreover, the

nap new academic press

party's best performances saw it cross the threshold of relevance in relation to blackmail potential in the late 1960s and mid-1970s. Devolution itself in 1999 was also an example of the SNP's blackmail potential being fulfilled. Moreover, the new institution increased the SNP's relevance as the electoral system for the Scottish Parliament made single party majoritarian government highly unlikely; coalition or minority government became the norm, as the SNP discovered in 2007. In this context, the SNP succeeded in becoming a party of government at the regional level. However, crossing this threshold had limited effects on the SNP. It brought about little internal organisational change or tensions and had modest effects on policy change and performance. Support for the party has fluctuated in government although has remained relatively strong. Office allowed the party to help build support for greater autonomy but not independence. Public support for independence has remained low and no independence referendum has been held. In this respect, the SNP has to date been unable to use government office to deliver on its key territorial goal.

References

Brand, Jack (1978) *The National Movement in Scotland*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Commission on Scottish Devolution (2009) *Serving Scotland Better: Scotland and the United Kingdom in the 21st Century*. Edinburgh: HMSO.

De Winter, Lieven (1998) 'Conclusion: A Comparative Analysis of the Electoral, Office and Policy Success of Ethnoregionalist Parties', in: Lieven De Winter and Huri Türsan (eds.), *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe*. London: Routledge, pp. 190–235.

Harvey, Malcolm and Peter Lynch (2010) *From National Conversation to Independence Referendum?: The SNP Government and the Politics of Independence*. Paper presented at the Political Studies Association annual conference, Edinburgh, 29 March – 1 April.

Keating, Michael and David Bleiman (1979) *Labour and Scottish Nationalism*. London: Macmillan.

Labour Party (1974) *Powerhouse Scotland*. Glasgow: Labour Party.

Lynch, Peter (1996) *Minority Nationalism and European Integration*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Lynch, Peter (2002) *SNP: The History of the Scottish National Party*. Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press.

MacCormick, John (1955) *The Flag in the Wind*. London: Gollancz.

McAllister, Ian (1981) 'Party Organization and Minority Nationalism: A Comparative Study in the United Kingdom', *European Journal of Political Research*, 9: 3, 237–56.

Mitchell, James (1990) *Conservatives and the Union*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Mitchell, James (1996) *Strategies for Self-government*. Edinburgh: Polygon.

Müller-Rommell, Ferdinand (2002) 'The Lifespan and the Political Performance of Green Parties in Western Europe', *Environmental Politics*, 11: 1, 1–13.

nap new academic press

Pedersen, Mogens (1982) 'Towards a New Typology of Party Life-Spans and Minor Parties', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 5: 1, 1–16.

HMSO (1973) *Royal Commission on the Constitution*. HMSO: London.

Sartori, Giovanni (1976) *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scottish Government (2007) *The Government Economic Strategy.* Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Scottish Government (2009) *Progress on the Scottish Economic Recovery Programme.* Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Scottish Liberal Democrats (2006) *The Steel Commission: Moving to Federalism – A New Settlement for Scotland*. Edinburgh: Liberal Democrats.

Scottish Parliament (2000) *Scottish Parliament Statistics 1999–2000.* Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament.

SNP (2007) *SNP Manifesto 2007.* Edinburgh: SNP.

Strøm, Kaare (1990) 'A Behavioral Theory of Competitive Political Parties', *American Journal of Political Science*, 34: 2, 565–598.

Wolfe, Billy (1973) *Scotland Lives.* Edinburgh: Reprographia.

Anwen Elias

Plaid Cymru

12.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the evolution of Plaid Cymru (PC), from its creation in 1925 as a Welsh-language protest group with very little electoral appeal, to becoming a party of coalition government in Wales in 2007. This transition from protest to power has proceeded with different speed at different times, as well as across different territorial levels. For most of PC's political life, achieving representation at the state-wide level was the party's main concern, even though it struggled with the programmatic, organisational and systemic challenges of passing the threshold of representation and sending representatives to the House of Commons. Upon finally achieving this goal in the mid 1960s, PC's ability to pass further thresholds was constrained by the short-term difficulties of organisational adaptation, and the longer-term constraints of the nature of the British political system and the limited opportunities for influencing the policy agenda within this political arena.

Against this background, 1999 represented a turning-point in PC's evolution as a political party. As well as securing representation within the European Parliament for the first time ever, the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) created a new opportunity structure for PC to seek political representation directly at the regional level. Whilst the former achievement was symbolically important for a party committed to a vision of Wales as part of a regional Europe, the latter provided a new political arena within which PC swiftly demonstrated its potential to be both a relevant political actor and a party of regional government. PC passed the threshold of government for the first time in its history when it agreed to a deal to govern with the Welsh Labour Party in July 2007. However, the chapter argues that despite the new opportunities for PC to evolve as a political organisation within post-devolution Wales, the party has also faced many of the same adaptational pressures that were experienced upon crossing the threshold of representation at the state level several decades previously. These pressures illustrate the challenges faced by many of the autonomist parties studied in this volume: internal tensions arising from changing power relations within the party, and the electoral and organisational recriminations of failing to meet stated party goals. These tensions have been exacerbated, whilst new trade-offs have also had to be confronted, as a consequence of becoming a party of regional government.

12.2. Mapping the lifespan of PC

The lifespan of PC is summarised in table 12.1. The party's success in passing different thresholds has varied greatly over time and across different territorial levels. For most of the party's lifetime, elections to the House of Commons were the only game in town. However, whilst PC committed itself to competing in general elections from the outset, it struggled for several decades to pass the thresholds of authorisation and representation at this level. With representation having been won from the 1960s onwards, the party then faced difficulties in exerting policy influence as a small political actor in an arena dominated by larger state-wide parties usually with equally large governing majorities. Similar challenges were faced in passing the threshold of representation at the European level, which was not achieved until 1999. It was only with the creation of a regional tier of government in 1999 that PC was able to complete the lifespan phases outlined in the Introduction to this volume. In relatively rapid succession, PC not only secured representation within the NAW, but also became a highly relevant actor and a party of regional government. By 2007, therefore – over eighty years after its creation – PC had completed the transition from protest to power.

Table 12.1. *The lifespan of Plaid Cymru*

b) *Regional level*

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1999				PC		
2007–2010						PC

a) *State level*

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1925		PC				
1966			PC			
1974				PC		
1979			PC			
1992				PC		
1997–2010			PC			

c) *European level*

	I	II	III
1979		PC	
1999–2010			PC

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

12.2.1. The threshold of declaration

Upon PC's establishment in 1925, the party formally accepted the principle of electoral competition as the most appropriate means for advancing its political project, in spite of some activists who advocated non–democratic methods of political activity (Davies 1983: 151–168). In the 1960s, some voices once again demanded that electoral politics be abandoned in favour of non-constitutional modes of action as a more effective means of advancing the cause of Welsh nationalism.[1] However, the insistence of then leader Gwynfor Evans that political participation within the constitutional arena should be PC's exclusive *modus operandi* re-affirmed the party's commitment to electoral participation (Evans 2005: 107).

However, differences of opinion remained over the most appropriate territorial level upon which to focus. According to the party's President from 1926-1939, Saunders Lewis, PC should spurn all contact with 'English' central government, and focus its political activities on local elections in order to build the Welsh Wales from within Wales itself (Davies 1983: 131). If PC participated in general elections to the House of Commons, this was merely a means for Welsh voters to formally convey their rejection of the Westminster regime; the party had no intention of taking up any seats in the House of Commons were it to obtain sufficient votes. However, having failed to make any impact in the first local or general election contested by the party, PC's parliamentary boycott was abandoned in 1930. Moreover, it was finally accepted that the issue of territorial reorganisation could only be put on the British political agenda through articulating demands for greater autonomy for Wales at the state-level.

It was not until the introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979, and the creation of the NAW in 1999, that PC was able to adopt a multi-level electoral strategy. For these supranational and regional elections, the question of the appropriateness and value of electoral competition did not arise; in this respect, the passing of the threshold of declaration on these distinct territorial levels was automatic.

12.2.2. The threshold of authorisation

PC was thus committed to electoral competition from the outset. However, crossing the threshold of authorisation for participation in general elec-

---

[1] Frustration with PC's perceived lack of progress in achieving its political demands led many individuals to question the continued appropriateness of its electoral strategy. These internal dissentions led some party members to establish Cymdeithas yr Iaith, a group committed to carrying out acts of civil disobedience in defence of the Welsh language. The following year a paramilitary group calling itself the Free Wales Army was established, demanding independence for Wales (Butt Philip 1975: 88–89; 92–93).

tions was a recurring problem for the party until the early 1970s. An acute lack of financial resources often meant that it was impossible to raise the deposit required for candidates to be accepted for electoral competition. This, combined with a shortage of individuals willing to stand as PC representatives, forced the party to focus its resources and activities on contesting a small number of seats in predominantly Welsh-speaking Wales. Until 1939, this meant the two constituencies of Caernarfon and the University of Wales, Aberystwyth (Davies 1983: 190). In 1945, the party fought eight seats, increasing to 11 in 1955: almost a third of Welsh seats (Butt Philip 1975: 74). It would take PC until 1970 to have sufficient financial, human and organisational resources to be able to contest all 36 of Wales's parliamentary seats in a general election for the first time. Though the party continued to struggle with organisational and financial problems in subsequent decades, these were not of a magnitude to impede the passing of the threshold of authorisation in supranational and, more recently, regional elections. For these latter competitions, this threshold was passed without problem.

12.2.3. The threshold of representation

Despite PC's long-held commitment to participating in elections, it would take over 40 years for the party to finally manage to cross the threshold of representation at the state-level, with the election of the party's leader, Gwynfor Evans, as Member of Parliament (MP) for Carmarthen in 1966. This seat was lost in the general election four years later, although parliamentary representation was secured once more in 1974 when three PC MPs were elected to Westminster. Since then, the party has maintained a continuous presence in the House of Commons, although this number has never surpassed a total of four MPs (between 1992 and 2004). PC's performance in state-wide elections is summarised in table 12.2.

Several factors affected PC's ability to secure representation at the state level. Some were one-off factors limited to the particular conditions in which individual elections took place. Thus, for example, Gwynfor Evans's electoral breakthrough in 1966 can be attributed to the specific local context at the time of the election. The by-election was held due to the sudden death of the previous Labour MP, Megan Lloyd George. An unprepared and internally divided local Labour party, an unpopular Labour candidate, and Gwynfor Evans's efficient electoral campaign tailored to specific issues of concern to the community, combined to enable PC to poll an incredible 16,179 votes (39.0%), compared to the 7,416 votes (16.1%) the party had received in the same constituency in the general election a few months previously (Evans 2005: 271-279). In the absence of such fortuitous circumstances in the general election four years later, PC failed to keep

Table 12.2. *Plaid Cymru general election results, 1929–2010*

Year	Votes	% Welsh vote	MPs elected
1929	609	0.0	0
1931	2,050	0.2	0
1935	2,534	0.3	0
1945	16,017	1.2	0
1950	17,580	1.2	0
1951	10,920	0.7	0
1955	45,119	3.1	0
1959	77,571	5.2	0
1964	69,507	4.8	0
1966	61,071	4.3	0 (1) [1]
1970	175,016	11.5	0
1974 (Feb)	171,374	10.8	2
1974 (Oct)	166,321	10.8	3
1979	132,544	8.1	2
1983	125,309	7.8	2
1987	123,599	7.3	3
1992	154,947	8.9	4
1997	161,030	9.9	4
2001	195,893	14.27	4
2005	174,838	12.3	3
2010	165,394	11.3	3

Sources: Thrasher and Rallings (2007), The Electoral Commission (http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk).

Note:

[1] Gwynfor Evans was elected as MP in the Carmarthen by-election held on 14 July 1966, just over three months after the general election.

hold of its first parliamentary seat (Evans 2005: 306). Local factors also played a role in enabling PC to cross the state-wide threshold of representation for the second time in 1974.[2]

In addition, however, structural factors pertaining to the nature of the electoral system, and factors internal to the party itself, have had a more sustained impact on PC's fortunes in crossing the threshold of representation at the state level. First and foremost, the electoral rules determining

---

[2] In particular, the changing socio-economic context and the threat to the Welsh language helped secure success for Dafydd Wigley and Dafydd Elis Thomas in the constituencies of Arfon and Meirionydd respectively in north Wales (Wigley 1992: 203-206).

entry into the state-wide political arena constrained PC's ability to translate votes cast for the party into representatives in the House of Commons. The first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system used in British general elections has always produced highly disproportional results which reward the winner generously whilst punishing all other parties, regardless of the number of votes they gain. In the Welsh context, this led to a general pattern of political representation that favoured the Labour Party (well-organised and established in the majority of Welsh constituencies), at the expense of other, less-territorially homogenous political parties. PC was only able to pass the threshold of representation at the state level in constituencies where it had a strong support base: the Welsh-speaking rural areas of north and west Wales. In other areas of Wales where its support was less entrenched, notably the English-speaking urban areas of north-east and south Wales, PC failed to return MPs to Westminster, though the party's electoral performance in these areas steadily improved from the late 1980s onwards.

Secondly, PC's attempts to cross the threshold of representation at the state-wide level were repeatedly hampered by internal party factors. At different points in the party's history, the nature of its political programme, inadequate organisational structures and acute financial difficulties all played a role in undermining efforts to secure the kind of territorially concentrated support base necessary to overcome the structural constraints imposed by the electoral system. In its earliest years, for example, PC's politics was very much the product of a highly educated elite, the party being so "extremely respectable in terms of its membership that it was impossible for the majority of common people to feel comfortable in their midst" (Wyn Jones 1999: 171). In spite of attempts to change PC's image from 1945 onwards – by developing more detailed socio-economic and constitutional policies anchored in non-conformist and pacifist values more likely to appeal to the Welsh electorate – "Plaid Cymru and its leading figures remained too controversial to sway the hearts and minds of many Welsh people" until the 1960s (Morgan 1998: 256). In addition to this lack of programmatic appeal, a lack of money and poor organisation hindered the effectiveness of the party's electoral campaigns for the first 40 years of its existence. Gwynfor Evans identified these two aspects as key to improving PC's electoral fortunes, and oversaw several attempts to improve the party's financial standing and organisational apparatus throughout the 1950s and 1960s (see below). Indeed, such developments were important in signalling the modernisation of PC as a serious political party capable of responding to the demands of competitive electoral politics. This process of internal reorganisation, combined with the far-reaching reassessment of PC's programmatic profile during the 1980s (Wyn Jones 2007: 184-265),

contributed to the party's electoral growth in the closing decades of the twentieth century, and consolidated its presence at the state-level.

And yet, even this programmatic and organisational adaptation could only do so much to counteract the enduring obstacle constituted by the electoral system. The significance of this systemic factor can be appreciated when one considers the party's fortunes in crossing the threshold of representation at other territorial levels. Firstly, at the European level, PC had been competing in elections to the European Parliament since 1979. Moreover, due to the second-order nature of these elections, the party's share of the Welsh vote was consistently higher than in state-wide elections (see table 12.3). In an illustration of the multi-level effects of electoral competition, these better-than-average results in European elections were instrumental in driving PC's ideological reorientation during the 1980s, which in turn underpinned the party's improving performance in state-wide elections from the mid-1980s onwards (Elias 2008: 61-63). However, until 1999, the party was not successful in translating its vote-share in European elections into seats in the European Parliament. The use of the FPTP electoral system, combined with the fact that the four European constituencies in Wales did not overlap with the territorial distribution of support for PC, made it impossible for the party to acquire sufficient majorities in any constituency to elect MEPs. In 1999, the introduction of a proportional electoral system and the creation of a fifth Welsh constituency, removed two major obstacles to PC's attempts to pass the threshold of representation at the European level. As a result, two PC MEPs were elected to the European Parliament.

Table 12.3. *Plaid Cymru European election results, 1979–2009*

Year	Votes	% Welsh vote	MEPs elected
1979	83,399	11.7	0
1984	103,031	12.2	0
1989	115,062	12.9	0
1994	162,478	17.1	0
1999	185,235	29.6	2
2004	159,888	17.4	1
2009	126,702	18.5	1

Source: European Parliament (http://www.europarl.org.uk).

Secondly, the creation of a regional tier of government in Wales in 1999 represented a significant new opportunity structure for PC to pursue and achieve its nation-building project. The Government of Wales Act 1998 created the 60-member NAW which, although lacking the primary legislative and tax-raising powers granted to a Scottish Parliament, would be respon-

nap new academic press

sible for a number of policy areas previously allocated to the Secretary of State for Wales in London.[3] The change in the electoral system to a partially proportional one[4] played no small part in securing PC 17 out of the 60 seats up for grabs within the NAW (see table 12.4).

Table 12.4. *Plaid Cymru results in National Assembly for Wales elections, 1999–2007*

Year	1st Vote		2nd Vote		AMs elected
	Votes	%	Votes	%	
1999	290,572	28.4	312,048	30.6	17
2003	180,185	21.2	167,653	19.7	12
2007	219,121	22.4	204,757	21.0	15

Sources: Wyn Jones and Trystan (2000); Wyn Jones and Scully (2004); Scully and Elias (2007).

Other factors also contributed to PC's electoral breakthrough in the first Assembly elections. For example, the professionalisation of the party's electioneering machine and the development of a comprehensive policy manifesto meant that PC approached polling day with the best possible chances of a good result (Elias 2011). Moreover, there is evidence that differing patterns of voter behaviour displayed in regional elections advantaged PC, based on a popular perception of the party as the best suited to represent Welsh issues within the NAW (Wyn Jones and Trystan 2000: 16). In other words, whilst the second-order nature of European elections benefited PC at the European level, the 'regional parties for regional issues' rationale identified in the Introduction to this volume contributed to PC's success in the first elections to the NAW.[5] In summary, a combination of factors (electoral system, campaign strategy and voter behaviour) saw PC cross the threshold of representation at the regional level at its first attempt, in stark contrast to the protracted difficulties of achieving the same goal at the state and the supranational levels.

12.2.4. The thresholds of relevance and government

At the state-wide level, PC has never possessed coalition potential. The two-party system produced by the FPTP electoral system, with the largest parties often enjoying substantial majorities within the House of Com-

---

[3] These policy areas included education, the environment, leisure, culture, the Welsh language, health, transport, tourism, agriculture, town planning, economic development, industry, local government, housing and social services.

[4] Of the Assembly's 60 seats, 40 represented individual constituencies and were elected using the same FPTP system as used for general elections. The remaining 20 were selected from party lists in five larger regional constituencies using the d'Hondt formula.

[5] This trend of multi-level voting has also been in evidence in subsequent elections.

mons, meant that there was usually no need to enter into formal coalitions in order to form a government. Nor has PC possessed blackmail potential at the state-wide level due to its anti-systemness; the party has never formally endorsed violence as a means to secure outright independence for Wales, nor can it be described as having held xenophobic positions which have forced other political parties to respond to such radical policy stances. It is also doubtful to what extent PC has been relevant in the broader sense of bringing the issue of territorial reorganisation onto the British political agenda. Whilst authors have argued that the Labour Party's embracing of devolution for different regions and nations within the UK can be explained as a response to the growing political salience of the Scottish National Party (SNP) from the 1960s onwards (Geekie and Levie 1989; Mitchell 1998; Lynch, this volume), no comparable influence can be attributed to PC. On the contrary, the presence of a PC MP in the House of Commons during the period 1966-1970 had the paradoxical effect of undermining the party's ability to put Welsh issues – and especially the idea of self-government – on the political agenda (Evans 2005: 296). This was due to the hardening of anti-Welsh sentiment on the part of the Labour Party, 'with everything Welsh…being interpreted as a concession to nationalism' (*ibid*.). This sentiment, in turn, diminished PC's ability to dictate the policy agenda when it came to Welsh issues. Similarly, the re-emergence of devolution onto the British political agenda in 1997 was the result of the Labour Party's 18 years in opposition, combined with the renewed electoral appeal of Scottish nationalism, rather than a response to autonomist demands from the Welsh periphery (Geekie and Levie 1989; Mitchel 1998). More is said below on the limited success of PC in putting the issue of territorial reorganisation on the political agenda of successive British governments.

Having said this, there were two discrete instances when PC can be said to have possessed strong blackmail potential at the state level, in the sense that the party was able to extract policy concessions that otherwise would not have been achieved. Firstly, when the general election in October 1974 gave the Labour Party a bare majority of three seats in the House of Commons, PC's three MPs and the SNP's 11 MPs together used the threat of bringing down the government to extract a commitment from the latter to hold a referendum on devolving power to Scotland and Wales, through the establishment of directly elected institutions. PC's decision to vote with the Conservative party in a motion of no-confidence in the Labour government in July 1976 led David Rosser in the *Western Mail* to claim that "the trio of Plaid Cymru MPs are emerging as a pocket power block with grim and purposeful determination...Rightly and judiciously too, they are playing the artful dodger to Michael Foot and the government's other managers to

no mean effect".[6] Secondly, in 1992 PC exchanged parliamentary support for the Maastricht Treaty for a number of policy concessions from the Conservative government at the time (Wigley 1993: 415-433). Beyond these examples, however, PC's relevance on the state-wide level has been very limited.

In contrast, PC recently passed the threshold of relevance at the regional level. Firstly, when the May 2007 elections to the NAW failed to give any single party a clear majority to form a government, PC was considered a potential coalition partner by the majority Labour Party, as well as by Conservatives and Liberal Democrats as part of a tri-partite 'rainbow' coalition. After two months of intensive negotiations, PC succeeded in turning this coalition potential into a coalition deal, entering into government with the Labour Party in July 2007. For the first time in its history, therefore, PC crossed the threshold of government. The party was able to do so for two reasons. Firstly, electoral support lost in the 2003 election had been partially recuperated by 2007. This was in no small part due to a process of image revamping in the intervening period that had seen the party adopt a new logo and undertake broad policy consultation across Wales as the basis for a political brand that would be less of a risk for voters to support (Elias 2011). PC was thus once again able to re-assert itself as a serious player within the NAW. Secondly, during the second legislative term, PC sought to cooperate more closely with other state-wide parties to form different alliances at different points in time. This served to nurture the party's reputation as a reliable political partner, a sound basis upon which to assert its coalition credentials when the opportunity arose. At times, this strategy also enabled PC to exercise important blackmail potential, for example when it supported the minority Labour government's proposed budget in December 2006 in exchange for concessions in education policy (Elias 2011).

PC's blackmail potential within the NAW has also been more diffuse. This can be seen in the way the party has forced the gradual re-alignment of competitive party politics in Wales, with the increasing salience of the territorial dimension in Welsh political debate. This is best reflected in the way in which state-wide parties have undertaken to give their programmes more of a 'Welsh face' since devolution. Thus, for example, in February 2000, the new leader of the Welsh Labour Party, Rhodri Morgan, re-launched his party under the slogan 'Welsh Labour: The True Party of Wales'. This was a move clearly aimed at taking on the challenge posed by PC (Osmond 2000). There were even voices within the Conservative Party in Wales suggesting that the party should acknowledge that devolution was not necessarily a threat to the historical unity of the British state, and

---

6   David Rosser, Western Mail, 9 July 1976, quoted in Evans (2005: 374).

should develop a distinctly Welsh conservative political agenda.[7] In short, if prior to devolution PC could legitimately claim to be the only 'party of Wales', by 2010 all partisan forces in Wales were laying claim to this title.

12.3. Crossing thresholds and the impact on the internal organisation of PC

12.3.1. The thresholds of declaration and authorisation

As noted in the Introductory chapter to this volume, upon crossing the threshold of declaration, a whole new set of organisational challenges arise related to the task of competing in elections. For PC, the difficulties of meeting these challenges dominated the first half of the party's existence, as successive attempts were made to put efficient and well-resourced election-related structures into place in order to cross the threshold of representation at the state level. The organisational challenges of electoral competition were taken particularly seriously by Gwynfor Evans, who took over the party leadership in 1945. His efforts at improving PC's preparedness for electoral competition included moving the party headquarters from Caernarfon in north Wales to Cardiff in the south, establishing a new research unit and improving the party's money-raising initiatives (Evans 2005: 18). As noted above, continued frustration with the failure to run successful political and electoral campaigns led to further internal re-organisation at the end of the 1950s,[8] and again in the mid-1960s (Butt Philip 1975: 103). On both occasions, attempts were made to clarify the division of labour and individual responsibilities within the party executive, improve grassroots organisation, refine the policy formulation process and augment efforts to raise funds for the party's coffers. The latter aspect in particular was especially important in enabling PC to satisfy the financial requirements of the threshold of authorisation for state-wide elections in the UK.

In contrast, crossing the thresholds of declaration and authorisation at the supranational level generated very little pressure for organisational change, with the only innovation being that of formulating new procedures for the selection of candidates to contest European Parliament elections.[9] Campaign organisation and financing followed procedures already in place for state-wide electoral contests (Elias 2006: 98). PC's declaration of intent to participate in regional elections, however, had more significant organisational implications. The particular nature of the electoral system – espe-

---

[7]   See, for example, Melding (2003).

[8]   *Annual Report* 1959–60, Plaid Cymru Archive (G194), pg. 57.

[9]   Whilst local party organisations were usually responsible for the selection of candidates for state-wide elections, the organisation of constituencies for European elections meant a greater role for central party organs in the candidate selection procedure.

cially the use of regional lists for electing some NAW members – also required the formulation of new procedures for selecting candidates to contest NAW elections. In addition, however, new structures were established to improve the party's policy-formulation procedures ahead of the first election to this institution, and new techniques such as telecampaigning and voter profiling were adopted for the campaign (Elias 2011). These innovations reflected the considerable professionalisation of the PC party machine over the previous thirty years, but they were also driven by the particular significance of these elections for the party. For PC, doing well in these elections meant creating new opportunities to influence decision-making within the national territory, the 'core level' for any autonomist party (Introduction, this volume). For this reason, the pressure for organisational change arising from the ambition to cross the threshold of representation at the regional level was greater than at either the state or supra-national levels (see table 12.5).

12.3.2. The threshold of representation

The election of Gwynfor Evans to the House of Commons in 1966 posed new organisational questions for PC. Foremost among these was adapting to the breadth of issues that Evans would face in parliamentary debate; in practice, this meant having to adopt a position on a number of issues which had hitherto not featured in the party's manifestos. In 1966, therefore, a new research group was established. Its remit included developing a raft of detailed policy documents, compiling statistical data on various aspects of Welsh society, and providing the substance for the parliamentary questions put down by Evans in the House of Commons (Wigley 1992: 65–66). However, this first success in passing the threshold of representation at the state-level also generated new tensions within the party, consistent with the notion of changing power relationships between the different 'faces' of party organisation (Katz and Mair 1995). The shifting responsibility for policy-making and strategic debates away from the party as a whole in favour of Gwynfor Evans and a small group of advisors,[10] combined with the new focus of party activities on the Westminster arena, fuelled criticism from PC members about the distancing of the party in public office from the party on the ground.[11] This backlash from the grass-roots against the over-concentration of party functions in the hands of the party leadership intensified after the failure to recapture the party's only

---

[10]   This new locus of power within PC was informally referred as 'Llys Llangadog' (the Court of Llangadog) – named after Evans' home village in Carmarthenshire – and referred to meetings often held there between Evans and a small group of select advisors (Evans 2005).

[11]   *Conference Resolutions* 1969, Plaid Cymru Archive, G74.

parliamentary seat in 1970. The organisational structures created in response to the party's parliamentary representation were not abolished as a result of this crossing back over the threshold of representation; however, steps were taken to democratise internal party decision-making in order to redress the changing balance of power within PC as a result of having achieved parliamentary representation.[12]

Crossing the threshold of representation for the second time in 1974 required PC to once again consider how to adapt its organisational structures in order to maximise the efficiency of its parliamentary presence. Changes were implemented with respect to the organisation of the PC group within the House of Commons, and the organisation of vertical relations between the party in parliament and the party in central office/party membership. With respect to the former, new research and secretarial staff (based in Westminster) were appointed to assist the MPs in their parliamentary work. The MPs organised themselves into a 'shadow cabinet' mirroring the different policy responsibilities of government departments, with each MP being allocated four or five policy portfolios. In terms of the relationship with other bodies within the party, PC's newly elected MPs prepared regular reports on their activities for the party's Executive Committee, National Council and Annual Conference. Moreover, a Liaison Committee was established which envisaged weekly meetings between the MPs, the party's Chairman and General Secretary. However, the logistical difficulty of arranging such meetings soon saw the committee being abandoned in favour of daily informal discussions about tactics and policy between PC's elected representatives and senior party officers. Ensuring the continued involvement of the party on the ground, however, proved to be more problematic; renewed dissatisfaction with the distance between party members and their representatives led to a motion being passed at the party's Annual Conference in 1975, ordering the parliamentary party to toe the party line in the House of Commons or face the prospect of disciplinary action (although what exactly this action might be was left undefined).[13] Despite these initial tensions, however, this organisational model remained in place until 1999 as a way of structuring the activities of PC's representatives, and their links with the party organisation as a whole.

As noted above, in 1999 PC passed the threshold of representation at two new territorial levels: the supranational level (within the European Parliament) and the regional level (within the National Assembly). However, the different pressures for organisational change created by these two developments is striking, and again suggest the differing priorities assigned by autonomist parties like PC to different territorial arenas within a multi-

---

[12]   *Annual Reports 1970-75*, Plaid Cymru Archive, G74.
[13]   *Daily Mail*, 'Plaid order MPs to toe the party line', 7 January 1975, no page number.

nap new academic press

level political system. On the one hand, organisational change in response to the election of two PC MEPs was both minimal and informal. Apart from the appointment of a small administrative staff in Brussels to support the work of MEPs, no other formal organisational change took place; policy-development functions and vertical-co-ordination structures were either already established or proceeded on an ad-hoc basis (Elias 2006: 99). On the other hand, passing the threshold of representation at the regional level led to the most far-reaching organisational change ever undertaken by PC. The party appointed a large number of new staff dedicated to office administration, policy research and public communications. PC's presence within the NAW also brought a major grant from the United Kingdom's Electoral Commission, allowing the party to set up a new policy unit in 2001. Gaining representation within the NAW, therefore, led not only to an increase of financial and human resources, but also added considerably to the complexity of organisational processes and intra-party relationships within PC. The differing pressure for, and nature of, organisational adaptation did not derive solely from an imbalance of numbers, that is, 2 MEPs against 17 AMs. Rather, it reflected the different opportunity structures available to PC at different territorial levels; whilst PC would never be in power in Westminster or in Europe, it was a major player within the NAW, and the latter arena provided the best opportunity for achieving the party's policy goals. Thus, whilst representation at the state level was crucial in order to push the agenda for territorial re-organisation of the UK, and representation at the European level was symbolically important for PC, it was the regional level that remained the 'core level' for the party, as suggested above.

However, as a result of the redistribution of PC's financial, human and organisational resources as a direct result of gaining representation within the NAW, tensions emerged once again between the different 'faces' of the party. Even more so than when PC crossed the threshold of representation at the state-wide level, gaining representation within the NAW created a new locus of power within the party, which in turn translated into greater distance between different groups of actors within the party. Firstly, the party group within the NAW became increasingly independent from the party membership. In particular, the employment of full-time policy staff by PC's Assembly Group since 1999 saw the initiative for formulating and putting forward motions for discussion at party conferences shift away from local branches to this new group of unelected party functionaries. Pressure from the grassroots to re-equilibrate the power balance within the party led to the passing of a motion at PC's Annual Conference in 2003 of 'one member – one vote' in future conferences; this would replace the long-standing practice of reserving voting rights in conferences for representatives of local branches alone.

nap new academic press

Secondly, tensions also emerged between different manifestations of the 'party in public office', namely PC's representatives at different territorial levels. With discussions about policy and strategy entirely focused in and around the NAW, party representatives in Westminster and Strasbourg became increasingly concerned about their exclusion from debates about the party's direction and purpose. The problem of co-ordinating party activity across different levels of political representation constitutes a challenge that is especially acute for political parties committed to competing in a multi-level political system.

In contrast to the organisational change executed as a direct result of achieving representation within the NAW, the acquisition of 'relevance' within this arena did not exert a comparable pressure for organisational adaptation. Becoming a party of government, however, saw an increase in the number of staff employed by the party, not least to support the party's new responsibilities. These included secretarial staff as well as three special advisors to direct policy-making. Perhaps the clearest organisational consequences of crossing the threshold of government, however, have been the periodic clashes between the party in office and the party more generally. These have been a response to the difficult policy choices that PC has had to make in government, and which have not always been popular with party members. For example, PC ministers' decision to support the introduction of tuition fees for Welsh students in higher education went against the party's manifesto commitment, and sparked a "civil war" within the party.[14] As noted below, other policy decisions provoked equally deep disillusionment with the party's performance in government. PC members thus experienced for themselves the difficult choices that accompany government office.

12.4. Changes in party goals and PC's policy impact

As PC crossed different thresholds at different territorial levels, the party's prioritisation of goals changed. For the first 40 years of the party's life, its main concern was to get enough votes to secure representation at the state-wide level. This would provide a platform for articulating the party's territorial project: 'dominion status' for Wales within the British Commonwealth was the ambition during the 1930s, whilst by the 1950s this had evolved into a demand for autonomy within a Britannic confederation (Wyn Jones 2007). From the initial declaration of the party's commitment to electoral competition in the mid 1920s, until the election of the party's first MP in 1966, all attempts to reorganise the party internally and modify

---

[14]   *Western Mail*, "Crisis talks loom for the One Wales coalition", 8 November 2008.

Table 12.5. *Pressure for organisational change upon crossing thresholds*

Threshold	Regional level	State level	European level
V	**Medium** - Increase in support staff to support government activity - Tensions between party in government and party on the ground		
IV-B			
IV-A			
III	**Strong** - Significant increase in number of staff employed - Substantial increase in number and variety of tasks performed - Clear shift of power away from party on the ground, to the party in public office within NAW	**Medium** - Secretarial support for parliamentary work - Informal vertical co-operation between different levels	**Medium** - Secretarial support in Brussels - Informal vertical co-operation between different levels
II		**Medium** - Changes in party financing and fundraising	
I	**Medium** - New policy-formulation bodies created - New campaign strategy and techniques	**Medium** - Reorganisation of party organisation at different hierarchical levels - Improved policy-making structures - Modification of electoral campaigning and fundraising strategies	

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

nap new academic press

its political message were driven by this vote-seeking goal. Repeated failures to meet electoral expectations, however, led to recurring internal tensions within PC over both the validity of its electoral strategy, and the efficacy with which it sought to achieve its electoral goals. As noted above, these tensions were particularly acute during the mid-1950s and early 1960s (Butt Philip 1975: 85). Indeed, such was the dissatisfaction with PC's lack of policy impact by the mid-1960s, that one individual even speculated at the time about 'the extreme unlikelihood of the party being able to carry on at present' (Evans 2005: 253).

The surge in support for PC in the 1966 by-election bought a temporary reprieve from the party's internal infighting; moreover, with a representative in the House of Commons, PC's goal became that of influencing governmental policies towards Wales. Evans's strategy was one of 'guerrilla warfare', which meant bombarding the government with hundreds of questions regarding the state of Welsh politics, society and the economy (Evans 2005: 289). As suggested above, however, the success of this strategy was limited; PC's role in pushing the issue of devolution onto the agenda of the UK government by the end of the 1960s was minimal. This contributed to the party's loss of its parliamentary seat in the 1970 general election, and prompted renewed intra-party factionalism over party strategy and direction.

With the re-election of PC MPs to the House of Commons in 1974, the priority again became influencing policy at the state-level. In order to do so, the party's representatives took part in the twice-weekly Prime Minister's Question Time, replied to Ministerial Statements and participated in debates in the House of Commons, as well as sitting on the Welsh Affairs Committee.[15] Pursuing this policy-seeking goal, however, would once again generate conflict with the party in central office and the party membership, not least over the strategies pursued by PC's parliamentary group in order to achieve policy influence, as noted above. This tension came to the fore a year later over the issue of devolution for Scotland and Wales. When the first proposals for devolution were published in 1975, PC opted to fully support the government's plans despite the fact that they fell far short of the kind of self-government PC had been demanding hitherto. This contrasted with outright opposition on the part of the SNP and, paradoxically, a significant number of Labour MPs to their own government's proposals. Within PC, a growing disillusionment with the way that the party's MPs were seen to be cavorting shamelessly with the government, prompted the party's Chief Executive to publish a press release warning his own MPs that the party was 'not for sale' (Evans 2005: 394). Ultimately, the attempts by PC MPs to exchange support for the Labour government's

---

[15]   Dafydd Ellis Thomas, *Parliamentary Report 1975*, Plaid Cymru Archive, G206.

nap new academic press

devolution proposals for concessions on issues such as compensation for unemployed Welsh miners and talks on the establishment of a Welsh broadcasting service, were politically and electorally disastrous. PC went into the devolution referendum campaign a deeply divided party, but emerged in even greater disarray, not least because the devolution proposals were rejected by an overwhelming 79.74% of the Welsh electorate, on a turnout of 58.8%.[16] The party's disastrous performance in the general election a few months later "seemed to mark the end of a distinct chapter in Welsh political history, with nationalism in full retreat" (Morgan 1998: 407). In contrast, the landslide win of Thatcher's Conservative Party sounded the death knell to any hope that PC had of keeping the devolution issue on the British political agenda for years to come.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, PC's primary goal remained that of increasing its share of the vote across Wales, in both general and European elections. The party's gradual rebranding of itself as a moderate and progressive left-wing party committed to a regional Europe (Lynch 1995; Wyn Jones 1996; Elias 2008: 56-59) contributed to an improving electoral record on the state-wide level, as can be seen from table 12.2. This vote-seeking goal was complimented by the pursuit of policy influence on Welsh issues within the House of Commons. Again, however, and as suggested above, the degree to which the electoral growth of Welsh nationalism translated into policy impact on the key issue of territorial reorganisation was limited. The failure of PC's steady electoral ascendance to threaten the Labour Party's political hegemony within Wales meant that PC was denied the influence of the SNP in Scotland in driving the Labour Party to embrace devolution for the UK (Mitchell 1998).

The party's goals were also largely frustrated at the supranational level. Even though PC's better-than-average results in European elections provided an important platform for the party's political message, it would take until 1999 for the party to be able to complement the vote-seeking goal with that of policy influence on the supranational level. Upon entering the European Parliament, PC joined the European Free Alliance (EFA) group and undertook a range of activities in pursuit of greater rights for Europe's historic nations and regions (Elias 2006: 105). However, the impact of this activism has been limited due to the small size of the EFA group in relation to the European Parliament as a whole, the heterogeneous nature of political interests within this institution, and the reassertion of state interests in the direction of the European integration process in recent years.

---

[16] The Wales Act 1978 contained a specific requirement that if devolution proposals were approved by a Yes vote in favour of devolution, the support of more than 40% of the eligible electorate in Wales was required for the proposals to be implemented. Measured against this criterion, only 11.8% of the eligible Welsh electorate voted in favour of devolution.

With devolution to Wales becoming a reality in 1999, PC's priority in the first election to the NAW was to secure as large a share of the vote as possible. The party's spectacular performance in these elections, and its resultant status as the main party of opposition within the NAW, meant that for the first time in its history, PC could not only hope to have a significant impact on policy-making within this new institution, but could realistically aspire to being a party of government. With these two goals in mind, PC's strategy during the first year of the NAW was to support the minority Labour government in order to create a stable political context within which to pursue consensus-style policy-making,[17] whilst investing significant time and resources in developing a comprehensive policy agenda (both within the party itself and within the Assembly's subject committees) in order to portray itself as a credible governing alternative.

However, these policy-seeking and office-seeking ambitions were frustrated and the party failed to live up to the high expectations that accompanied its electoral breakthrough in 1999. PC's limited ability to influence policy-making can be attributed to two major developments within the NAW during the first term. Firstly, the decision by the minority Labour Government to enter into a 'partnership' coalition with the Liberal Democrats in October 2000 cancelled out any blackmail potential PC had hoped to employ to exchange legislative support for the government for policy concessions. Secondly, even though the NAW had been designed in such a way as to promote the development of cross-party consensus politics,[18] the institution's first term saw the emergence of a clear separation of powers between the Assembly Government and the Assembly as a legislative body (Osmond 2003), with a Westminster-style confrontational politics between government and opposition. This development was accompanied by a deliberate refusal by the governing Labour Party to make any policy concessions to Welsh nationalism, an attitude reminiscent of the anti-nationalist attitudes of the Labour Party at the state level over 30 years previously. As a result, PC's influence on Welsh policy may even have declined from what it was before devolution.

Once again, PC's failure to make a discernible impact on policy-making – this time within the NAW – led to the re-emergence of tensions within the

---

[17]   This strategic choice on PC's part also reflected the specific political conditions in which the NAW had come into existence. The narrow margin by which the referendum on devolution in 1997 was won – just 6,721 votes separated the 'yes' and 'no' camps – revealed the lack of public support for this new institution. If the NAW was to acquire legitimacy, making sure it worked was imperative, hence the need to provide political stability within this institution.

[18]   More specifically, the NAW was designed as a 'corporate body' with no formal distinction between executive and legislative functions; rather, the government of the Assembly and the Assembly as a whole would work together to carry out both executive and legislative functions. See Osmond and Jones (2003) for a more detailed account.

nap new academic press

party. Firstly, dissatisfaction was articulated over PC's policy priorities post-1999. Specifically, PC was accused of sacrificing core party values in the pursuit of broader electoral appeal. The party's perceived failure to address traditional nationalist issues such as the protection of the Welsh language, culture and the regeneration of rural Welsh communities led some members to participate in the formation of *Cymuned* in 2001*,* a pressure group to campaign on the issues of the housing crisis in rural Wales and the social and cultural implications of rising migration into Welsh-speaking areas. Another faction, known as the *Triban Coch*, also became more vocal within the party and called for a stronger emphasis on socialist values.

Secondly, dissent emerged over PC's strategy within the NAW. The failure of the party's initial conciliatory strategy to produce any immediate policy benefits prompted a debate about the most appropriate role for the party to assume within this institution. Opposition to the idea of working within the Assembly's structures to secure a solid policy and political grounding for future government came from the increasingly influential left wing of the party, which advocated a more confrontational and oppositional strategy which would expose the weaknesses of both the governing executive and the devolution structures more generally.

These internal divisions, combined with the low media profile of PC's new leader since 2000, Ieuan Wyn Jones, contributed to the party's disappointing performance in the second round of elections to the NAW in 2003 (Wyn Jones and Scully 2004). The Labour Party's attainment of a governing majority within the NAW in the same election also ruled out any possibility of coalition government, thus putting paid to PC's office-seeking ambitions. PC's poor electoral performance plunged the party into a new period of internal strife over leadership, strategy and policy that persisted for most of the Assembly's second term. Internal divisions on the regional level also had negative knock-on effects for the party's electoral performance at other levels of representation, with the party's share of the vote declining in both the European election (2004) and state-wide election (2005). One of the most important consequences of these divisions was the effort to clarify the party's long-term constitutional ambitions. The goal of "full national status for Wales in Europe" had been adopted by the party during the 1980s, when developments in European integration seemed to presage a new supranational framework for resolving the territorial demands of autonomist actors (Elias 2006; 2008). However, PC had been attacked by its rivals for the ambiguity of this goal, and accused of diverting attention away from its true independentist aspirations. In the aftermath of the 2003 electoral disaster, the goal of "independence in Europe" was adopted as a clearer expression of the party's long-term project for Wales. This was an effort to settle the constitutional question, so that the

party could focus instead on the more immediate priority of building the Welsh nation through influencing policy-making within the NAW.

By the third set of Assembly elections in May 2007, some key lessons had been learned, and the party managed to recuperate some of the electoral losses of four years previously (Scully and Elias 2007; see also table 12.4). With the Labour Party failing to secure a governing majority, the opportunity was created for PC to cross the threshold of government at the regional level. The party was given the responsibility for the following portfolios: Rural Affairs, Culture and Heritage, and Economic Development. Most importantly, the *One Wales* coalition agreement between the two parties contained commitments to key PC policies, such as the holding of a referendum on enhanced powers for the NAW, the development of a new strategy for Welsh-medium higher education, and new legislation to strengthen the Welsh language.

Being a party of government posed new challenges for PC. Difficult choices had to be made about the allocation of resources once in office, which meant reneging on some important manifesto promises. For example, in February 2008, the then Minister for Culture and Heritage, Rhodri Glyn Thomas, announced that considerably less funding would be available for the launch of a Welsh-medium daily newspaper than had been previously promised. This prompted anger amongst party members who saw this as a major blow to efforts to promote the use of the Welsh language, and led to accusations that PC in government had turned its back on the party's core values. Similar criticisms were heard when PC was forced to compromise on a manifesto commitment not to raise tuition fees for students in higher education in Wales (see above). Both these decisions reflected the constraints of being in coalition government, although it was still interpreted as a betrayal by the party on the ground.

At the same time, however, the party has made important policy gains whilst in government. Thus in March 2011, a referendum was held on further legislative powers for Wales, a key demand made by PC as part of its coalition agreement. The Yes vote gave the NAW primary legislative powers in devolved areas of decision making. In this respect, the party's policy influence has been substantial, not least compared to difficulties in the past to deliver on this core territorial goal (see above). The party has also been successful in other respects, with the creation of a Federal College in Wales (as a framework for advancing Welsh-medium higher education) and new legislation on the Welsh language (with official status granted to the Welsh language in Wales, based on an amendment submitted by a PC AM). This certainly does not reflect the full extent of PC's policy influence within regional government; however, these policies are central to the nationalist project pursued by PC and falling short on their delivery would be particularly difficult for the party's core support base to accept.

nap new academic press

PC's period in regional government has thus been a mixed experience, with unpopular decisions as well as major policy advances. The big electoral test for this record in office will be in May 2011, at the next regional elections. As noted in the Introduction to this volume, being in government is highly risky for any political party, especially when this role is undertaken for the first time. PC's performance in elections at other territorial levels since 2007, however, suggests that voters have not sought to punish the party at any opportunity. In the 2009 European election, the party's vote-share increased slightly to 18.5% (from 17.4% in 2004; see table 12.3); in the 2010 general election, there was a slight decline (from 12.3 in 2005 to 11.3%) although the party retained its three MPs. It thus remains to be seen how voters in Wales evaluate PC's period in regional government, and the programmatic, strategic and organisational consequences of this result for the party.

12.5. Conclusion

In over eighty years of existence, PC has evolved from being a protest group in defence of the Welsh language to a party of regional government in Wales. As this chapter has demonstrated, however, this transformation has been far from uniform. While PC passed the threshold of declaration very soon after the party's establishment, it would take several decades to pass the thresholds of authorisation and representation. Moreover, it is only very late in life that the party has succeeded in passing the thresholds of relevance and governance. This skewed lifespan is the product of several factors that have interacted in different ways, at different times, and at different territorial levels, to shape the evolution of PC as a political party. Thus, for example, the external systemic and political context within which PC has been active has had far-reaching implications for the party's ability to progress to different stages of party development; moreover, different patterns of voter behaviour, as well as PC's organisational and programmatic profile, have also boosted or hampered the party's ambitions at different points in time. Balancing these different opportunities and constraints has been further complicated by the realities of multi-level politics, which requires a political party to compete in several political arenas across different territorial levels at the same time.

At the same time, this case study provides interesting insights into the ways in which parties change as a result of crossing different thresholds. Firstly, evidence is provided of the different pressures for organisational change exerted by different thresholds. In its early years, passing the thresholds of declaration and representation drove the largest degree of organisational change within PC. However, securing representation at both the state and regional levels also disrupted the balance of power between

nap new academic press

different 'faces' of the party organisation, with the party in public office becoming more dominant at the expense of the grassroots membership. It is noteworthy that in both instances, crossing the threshold of representation was proceeded by steps to improve internal party democracy, as PC sought to balance the demands of representation with maintaining party unity. That such a tension did not emerge as a result of crossing the threshold of representation at the supranational level is attributable to a second trend that is evident in this case study, namely the different pressure for organisational adaptation exerted by different territorial levels. For PC, gaining representation at the state, supranational and then regional level translated into very different pressures for organisational adaptation, depending on the perceived political importance of that level for achieving the core nation-building aims of the party. The contrast between organisational adaptation as a result of gaining representation within the European Parliament and the NAW, is striking in this respect.

Thirdly, this case study demonstrates the impact of crossing thresholds on changing party goals. The priority for PC for much of its lifetime was vote-maximisation, as a prerequisite to influencing policy and (at least at the regional level) entering government. After securing political representation, however, the party's attempts to influence policy-making at different territorial levels have been repeatedly frustrated, with the effect of aggravating internal party dissent over policy priorities and strategy. Most recently, such tensions arose from PC's lack of policy impact within the NAW. The party's entry into coalition government in July 2007 pushed these concerns aside temporarily, with hopes being high for PC to exercise hitherto unprecedented influence over policy-making in Wales. However, the party's experience during its first term of office has been mixed; unpopular policy compromises have been accompanied by more significant policy successes, not least a referendum on enhanced legislative powers for the NAW. It remains to be seen, however, how members and supporters will evaluate the party's office incumbency. In this respect, the results of the May 2011 Assembly elections will determine the next phase in the lifespan of PC.

References

Butt Philip, Alan (1975) *The Welsh Question: Nationalism in Welsh Politics 1945–1970*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
Davies, D. Hywel (1983) *The Welsh Nationalist Party 1925–1945: A Call to Nationhood*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

nap new academic press

Elias, Anwen (2006) *Europeanising the Nation: Minority Nationalist Party Responses to European Integration in Wales, Corsica and Galicia*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Florence: European University Institute.

Elias, Anwen (2008) *Minority Nationalist Parties and European Integration. A Comparative Study*. London: Routledge.

Elias, Anwen (2011) 'Pleidiau Cenedlaetholgar Lleiafrifol ac ymaddasu i ddatganoli: Astudiaethgymharol o Blaid Cymru a'r Bloque Nacionalista Galego', *Gwerddon*, 7. Available at: http://www.gwerddon.org

Evans, Rhys (2005) *RhagPob Brad*. Talybont: Y Lolfa.

Geekie, Jack and Roger Levy (1989) 'Devolution and the Tartanisation of the Labour Party', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 42, 399–41.

Katz, Richard and Peter Mair (1995) 'Changing Models of Party Organisation and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party', *Party Politics*, 1: 1, 5–27.

Lynch, Peter (1995) 'From Red to Green: The Political Strategy of Plaid Cymru in the 1980s and 1990s', *Journal of Federal and Regional Studies*, 5: 2, 197–210.

Melding, David (2003) *New Dawn or Sunset Boulevard – What Role for the Welsh Conservative Party?* Speech to the Institute of Welsh Politics, University of Aberystwyth, 27 October.

Mitchell, James (1998) 'The Evolution of Devolution: Labour's Home Rule Strategy in Opposition', *Government and Opposition*, 33: 4, 479–496.

Morgan, Kenneth (1998) *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880–1980*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Osmond, John (2000) 'Devolution in Transition', *Monitoring the National Assembly*, February to May 2000. Cardiff: Institute of Welsh Affairs. Available at: http://www.iwa.org.uk/publications/publications_monitoring.htm.

Osmond, John (2003) 'From Corporate Body to Virtual Parliament: The Metamorphosis of the National Assembly for Wales', in: Robert Hazell (ed.), *The State of the Nations 2003: The Third Year of Devolution in the United Kingdom*. London: Imprint Academic Press, pp. 13–48.

Osmond, John and Barry J. Jones (2003) *Birth of Welsh Democracy: The First Term of the National Assembly for Wales*. Cardiff: Institute of Welsh Affairs.

Scully, Roger and Anwen Elias (2007) 'The 2007 Welsh Assembly Election', *Regional and Federal Studies*, 18: 1, 103–109.

Thrasher, Michael and Colin Rallings (2007) *British Electoral Facts 1832–2006*. Ashgate: Aldershot.

Wigley, Dafydd (1992) *O Ddifri*. Caernarfon: Gwasg Gwynedd.

Wigley, Dafydd (1993) *Dal Ati*. Caernarfon: Gwasg Gwynedd.

Wyn Jones, Richard (1996) 'O 'sosialaeth gymunedol' i quango Wales: Ymdaith ddeallusol hynod Dafydd Elis Thomas', *Tu Chwith*, Haf 1996: 46–58.

Wyn Jones, Richard (1999) 'Saunders Lewis a'r blaid genedlaethol', *Cof Cenedl,* XIV, 163–192.

Wyn Jones, Richard (2007) *Rhoi Cymru'n Gyntaf: Syniadaeth Plaid Cymru*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Wyn Jones, Richard and Dafydd Trystan (2000) 'A "Quiet Earthquake": The First National Elections to the National Assembly for Wales'. *CREST Working Paper*, no. 85.

Wyn Jones, Richard and Roger Scully (2004) 'Minor Tremor but Several Casualties: The 2003 Welsh Election', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 14, 191–207.

nap new academic press

Jo Buelens

The Vlaams Belang

13.1. Introduction

The Vlaams Belang (VBel), and its predecessor the Vlaams Blok (VB), originally emerged out of opposition among some Flemish nationalists to the pragmatism of the Volksunie (VU) on the issue of the territorial organisation of political authority in Belgium. The VB in its earliest incarnation thus espoused an uncompromising position on Flemish independence as its *raison d'être.* By the 1990s, however, the VB had supplemented its territorial demands with rhetoric typical of the radical right, characterised by opposition to immigration and Islamophobia. It was this, rather than the party's nationalist positions, that provided the basis for rapid and substantial electoral growth, making the VB a highly relevant actor in Flemish and Belgian politics. Contrary to other case studies included in this volume, however, electoral success has not translated into office success; the refusal of other political forces to cooperate with the VB has excluded the party from power. The party's policy impact thus relates to its blackmail potential, with its strategy of protest from the opposition having indelibly shaped the coalition behaviour of its partisan rivals. The threat of illegalisation in 2004 that prompted the VB to change its name to the VBel did not undermine the party's relevance within the political system.

More recently, however, the party's successful pursuit of vote-maximisation and policy influence has come to an end. Electoral decline since 2007 has posed new questions about the VBel's political strategy, programme and leadership. Increased competition on its autonomist flank, as well as a questioning of the value of the party's status of permanent opposition, suggest that the VBel faces new dilemmas about its political *raison d'être*. This chapter aims to examine the developments that have led the VBel to this point, in order to better understand what the future may hold for a party that has always been highly adept at straddling the boundary between autonomist and radical right party.

13.2. The lifespan of the Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang

The lifespan of the VB is summarised in table 13.1. The party's predecessors, the Vlaamse Volkspartij (VVP) and the Vlaams Nationaal Verbond (VNP), were created with the aim of contesting elections, and the VB passed the thresholds of authorisation and representation in rapid succession. After a

nap new academic press

decade of slow electoral growth, from the late 1980s onwards the party's rapid electoral expansion gave it substantial political relevance within Flemish and Belgian politics. However, the party's own strategic preferences and the refusal of other political parties to consider the VB as a potential partner in coalition government, has seen the party unable to pass the final threshold of government at any territorial level. The VB has thus not completed the sequence of lifespan thresholds identified in the Introduction to this volume.

Table. 13.1.*The lifespan of Vlaams Blok (1978–2004) and the Vlaams Belang (2004–present)*

a) Regional level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1995–2010				X		

b) State level

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1977	X					
1978			X			
1989–2010				X		

c) European level

	I	II	III
1979		X	
1989–2009			X

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

13.2.1. The thresholds of declaration and authorisation

The VB was created in 1978, as the result of a merger between two smaller Flemish nationalist parties, the VVP and VNP. These two parties in turn had split from the Flemish autonomist party, the Volksunie (VU). After a period of electoral gains, the VU had engaged in coalition negotiations with other state-wide parties with a view to entering federal government (see De Winter, this volume). However, dissatisfaction with the compromises made by the VU whilst in office – particularly in negotiations over the federal structure of Belgium – led several of its more hard-line members to abandon the party and create a rival autonomist organisation. However, there was no agreement on

the kind of political party that should be formed, or what electoral strategy should be pursued; the only point of agreement was that the VU's attitude towards Francophone demands during the process of government-formation had been far too weak. This led to the creation of two distinct parties: whilst the VVP (led by Lode Claes) presented itself as a moderate Flemish nationalist party aiming to do a better job than the VU, the VNP (led by Karel Dillen) adopted a more radical nationalist discourse and oppositional strategy.

The federal government within which the VU participated did not last long; linguistic divisions between the coalition partners prompted the government's collapse and new general elections were held in December 1978. The VVP and VNP thus had very little time to develop and consolidate their party organisations and electoral machinery before having to contest their first election. Although there is no deposit to be paid for participating in elections in Belgium, a minimal level of financial resources is still necessary to run an election campaign, and both the VVP and VNP faced difficulties in this respect. Pragmatic considerations thus led both parties to join forces under the name of the VB to contest the general election. The VB succeeded in collecting the small number of signatures necessary to be authorised for electoral participation, and the new party presented electoral lists for the Senate and House of Representatives in every Flemish province.[1] The VB can be conceptualised as a "purifier" party (Lucardie 2000), since it offered a nationalist programme that shunned the pragmatism (and, consequently, ideological dilution) supported by the VU.

13.2.2. The threshold of representation

The VB crossed the threshold of representation in the 1978 general election, the first time the party had competed in any electoral contest (see table 13.1). It secured 2.8% of the vote and 1 House of Representatives seat in the constituency of Antwerp, where the VB's candidate was the party's leader, Karel Dillen (see table 13.2). There were several reasons for this success. Firstly, the particular nature of the electoral system in Antwerp (where less than 3% of votes was needed to gain representation) made it easier for the party to pass the threshold of representation.[2] Secondly, the

---

[1] In Belgium, elections for the House of Representatives and the Senate are always held on the same day. The Senate has a fixed number of Flemish and Francophone representatives. Flemish candidates present themselves in Flanders and the bilingual region of Brussels; Francophone candidates do the same in Wallonia and Brussels. For the House of Representatives, constituencies follow provincial boundaries. They are all unilingual. The only exception is the region around Brussels (a part of the old province of Brabant). In the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency, all parties from both linguistic groups may present candidates.

[2] This was a *de facto* electoral threshold depending on the number of seats to be divided. In Antwerp, this threshold was less than 3%. A formal 5% threshold for federal and regi-

nap new academic press

VB also benefitted from the particular nature of the electorate in this constituency. The Flemish nationalist movement had been associated with Nazi collaboration during the Second World War, and Flemish nationalist activists had faced strong repression in the post-war period. In response, nationalist support networks were developed with the financial backing of some powerful industrialists who had also been condemned for their support for the Nazi regime. These networks were concentrated in the Antwerp region. The VB's political rhetoric appealed to these individuals, whilst the party largely failed to mobilise popular support elsewhere in Flanders.

This initial representation, although limited, was sufficient to provide the VB with just enough financial resources to survive in its earliest years. The party did not contest the 1979 European elections, because of the scarcity of money (a deposit was required to contest the election) and because the supranational level was at the time strategically unimportant for the party. The VB's attention was focused on the state-level, which had to be destroyed as quickly as possible in order for a self-governing Flanders to be created. For the same reasons, the party also considered local elections to be less important.[3] However, the party's electoral growth during the first half of the 1980s was slow. In the 1981 general election, the party's vote-share in Antwerp increased to 4%; this grew to 5.1% in the 1982 local elections (see table 13.2). In the 1985 general election, the party polled 5%, and Karel Dillen remained the party's only representative within the federal institutions. The VB thus remained a party whose support was concentrated in Flanders' main city. In all of these election campaigns, the party's propaganda was focussed on a single issue: securing independence for Flanders. The party's target electorate was clear: voters that were disillusioned with the VU.

The acceleration in the VB's electoral performance began in 1987. The VB won 6% of the vote in Antwerp in that year's general election, and increased its federal representation to 2 seats in the House of Representatives. The major breakthrough, however, came in the 1988 local elections, with the party winning 17.7% of votes and 10 local councillors in Antwerp. The party's electoral rise was confirmed in the 1989 European election. Swyngedouw (2000) argues that key to this new electoral appeal was the increasingly anti-immigration rhetoric adopted by the party in previous years. The VB had been active in organising local protests against the presence of immigrants and the growth of Muslim prayer houses and mosques

---

onal elections was introduced in 2003, although this has not proved a hurdle for the VB. For further details on the Belgian electoral system, see Deschouwer (2009).

[3]   Regional parliaments were only directly elected from 1995 onwards. Prior to this, members of the House of Representatives automatically also became members of the regional parliaments in the regions where they were elected.

nap new academic press

in the most deprived areas of the city. This strategy proved successful and by 1988 the VB was reaching out to more prosperous areas of Antwerp. In 1989 the VB began to use its finances more widely for publishing, training activists and organising conferences and seminars, and by 1991 the party was making electoral breakthroughs outside Antwerp. That year's general election is often referred to as Black Sunday, given that the VB won 12 seats in the House of Representatives and 5 senators. The VB was no longer a local phenomenon, but had become a party of state-wide relevance.

Table 13.2. *Electoral results for the Vlaams Blok (1978–2004) and the Vlaams Belang (2004–2010) (% of vote)[1]*

	Local	Regional	Federal	European
1978			2.3	
1979				1.0
1981			1.8	
1982	0.6			
1984				2.2
1985			2.3	
1987			3.1	
1988	2.5			
1989				6.8
1991			10.4	
1994	6.6			12.6
1995		12.3	13.1	
1999		15.5	15.9	15.1
2000	10.6			
2003			18.8	
2004		24.2		23.2
2006	14.8			
2007			19.0	
2009		15.3		15.9
2010			12.6	

Source: The Belgian Government.

Note:
[1]   The percentage of votes shown for federal and local elections is for the Flemish region, the only one where the VB/VBel contests elections.

Regional and federal elections have always been the most important for the VB, whilst European elections have largely been considered to be second-order in nature. In European elections, like most autonomist parties parti-

nap new academic press

cipating in European elections (De Winter 2000), the VB usually obtained a better result than at the preceding general elections (see above, table 13.2). This tendency is arguably due to the growth in support for the VB support since the 1980s, and thus results at previous elections tend to be automatically worse. However, in comparison with its performance in regional elections, when held simultaneously with the EP elections (in 1999 and 2004), the VB's results were slightly poorer. This is due in part to the fact that the traditional parties tend to present candidates with a high European profile, while the VB's candidates are on the whole less recognisable. When European elections have not coincided with regional and federal elections, they have largely served as a mid-term evaluation of a party's electoral weight. The VB first passed the threshold of representation on this level in 1989, when it elected one Member of the European Parliament (MEP); as noted above, this success followed on from local election successes a year earlier, and confirmed the party's electoral breakthrough. This increased to 2 MEPs between 1994 and 2004, and 3 during the 2004–2009 legislature. In the 2009 European election, the first contested by the VBel, the party lost one of its parliamentary seats; the decline in electoral performance mirrored that in the regional election held in the same year.

13.2.3. The threshold of relevance

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment when the VB acquired blackmail potential in Belgian politics, although it is worth noting that the party's breakthrough in local and European elections – paradoxically the territorial levels of least strategic importance to the party – were defining moments in this respect. The fact that the party's electoral appeal during the 1980s was limited to Antwerp limited the party's political impact, although the size of this Flemish city meant that the VB's rise did not go completely unnoticed by the Belgian political class. The electoral rise of the VU during this decade also suggested that the VB's appeal to regionalist voters was limited; the VB's more radical territorial demands did not appear to resonate with the Flemish electorate. And yet, the VU's decline during the early 1990s was also mirrored by the VB's electoral breakthrough. Although this trend can be explained by the party's programmatic appeal beyond its territorial demands (see below), it is nevertheless arguable that the VB continued to be identified as a nationalist party. The party's independentist demands forced political parties in Flanders and other parts of Belgium to respond. For those politicians who believed in granting greater autonomy to Flanders, there was an incentive to reinforce their message to counter-act the VB's more radical demands. The electoral success of the VB also provoked strong anti-Flemish positions among Francophone political

parties. In this respect, it is arguable that the VB reinforced the territorial cleavage within Belgian politics.

However, the VB's blackmail potential also derived from sources other than its support for Flemish independence. Equally, if not more, important was the party's anti-immigrant and anti-establishment rhetoric (Swynge-douw *et al*. 1993). The former was an issue largely ignored by the traditional parties, whilst they themselves represented the establishment opposed by the VB. In particular for parties of the left, the VB's anti-immigration stance was anathema to the belief that multiculturalism was something to be valued, rather than feared. In response to these new issues raised by the VB, in May 1989 Jos Geysels – party spokesman for the Flemish Green party, pushed for Belgium's 'democratic parties' to sign a pact to exclude the VB from power on all territorial levels. This became known as the *cordon sanitaire*.

Different political parties interpreted the *cordon sanitaire* in different ways. Whilst some on the left refused to talk to VB members or even to shake hands, others went less far and only considered the agreement as the basis for refusing to negotiate with the VB in the process of coalition formation. But to what extent was the *cordon sanitaire* effective? This depends on the goal that this initiative was designed to achieve. If the goal was to exclude the VB from government, then the *cordon sanitaire* was successful, since the VB has never crossed the threshold of government (see below). If, however, the goal was to undermine the VB's further electoral growth, then the initiative has been unsuccessful. In the majority of elections following the *cordon sanitaire*, the VB saw an increase in its electoral support. Not until the 2006 local elections and the 2007 federal election did the party experience a decline in its electoral performance in Antwerp (this was a psychological blow given the party's electoral history, although the party's performance elsewhere in Flanders improved). The party also experienced electoral losses in the 2009 and 2010 elections (see above, table 13.2). Defenders of the *cordon sanitaire* interpret this recent decline as a direct consequence of the party's political exclusion; voters preferred other Flemish nationalist options, such as Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (NV-A, one of the VU's successor parties) and Lijst Dedecker, because they were acceptable to other political parties as possible coalition partners. The VB's lack of coalition potential has thus become an electoral disadvantage for the VB, according to supporters of the *cordon sanitaire* (Cochez 2010).

Unsurprisingly, the VB has always argued against the *cordon sanitaire.* It was decried as undemocratic to exclude all the VB's voters, as if they were second-class citizens. It also went against the principle of freedom of speech; the *cordon sanitaire* was interpreted by the VB as a tool to prevent the party speaking out about problems relating to immigration. The fact that traditional parties systematically refused to engage directly with the

nap new academic press

VB's arguments allowed the party to present itself as the only actor willing to discuss 'real' facts and figures about crime, unemployment and the impact of immigration. The VB also portrayed the traditional parties as fearing the truth about immigration-related issues faced by Flemish citizens. In this respect, the VB was able to present itself as the only truly democratic party.

At the time of writing (2010), the *cordon sanitaire* remains in place. It is evidence of the extent of the VB's blackmail potential within Belgian politics. As the VB's successor party, the VBel, became the largest party in several local councils, it was able to force other parties to build coalitions exclusively designed to exclude the party from office. In other words, the VBel has forced other Flemish parties to adopt closed patterns of party competition (Mair 2002). Demonstrating the VB/VBel's concrete impact on the political programmes of other political parties, however, is much more difficult; it would require demonstrating that positions on immigration would not have changed were it not for the presence of the VB/VBel. In her study on the party politics of immigration policy in Western Europe, Ivarsflaten (2007) did not find a specific VB/VBel influence on Belgian political party positions on immigration. However, it is arguable that as long as traditional political parties perceive the VB to have blackmail potential on this topic, then the former's relevance within the political system will remain high. Apart from the Greens, the fact that traditional parties continue to resist discussing the issue of immigration openly suggests that this remains the case at present.

As noted above, to date the VB has not participated in any governing coalitions at any territorial level (see above, table 13.1). However, is this a result of the *cordon sanitaire* or a decision by the VB to refrain from crossing the threshold of government? Until 1991, the Flemish regional government was formed proportionally, reflecting the strength of different political parties. Given the VB's electoral strength in Flanders from the mid 1980s onwards, these provisions should have led to a VB minister being appointed. However, other political parties chose to maintain the *cordon sanitaire,* and a coalition government was formed that excluded the VB. However, there was also debate within the VB about the party's response were such a ministerial post to be offered. The records of the party council, the second highest tier of decision-making within the party, revealed that there was considerable disagreement on this issue. Some council members favoured government participation as long as the coalition programme contained a significant number of policies from the VB's manifesto. Others, including the party leadership, rejected office incumbency. Thus, whilst some within the VB were keen to acquire coalition potential, others were not.

In 1995, Fillip Dewinter, one of the VB's leaders, argued that breaking the *cordon sanitaire* was necessary if the party was to continue to grow as a political force. A document was prepared that suggested ways in which this could be achieved; if accepted by other political parties, coalitions would be possible. The day following the general and regional elections in that year, the VB issued a press release inviting the Liberals and Catholics to form a coalition with the party in order to remove the Socialists from power. However, this was never achieved. To date, there remains no sign of "bargaining potential" at the level of the party elites (Buelens 1996), whereby elites are willing to negotiate and compromise in order to advance the VB's programme through government office, rather than from the opposition.

At the local level, in contrast, it is arguable that the VB does possess coalition potential. The question of whether or not the *cordon sanitaire* will be maintained by local branches of traditional parties is asked after every round of local elections. Especially in municipalities where immigration and Flemish nationalism are not salient issues, a cross-party coalition including the VB would not be impossible. In 2006, several local party branches requested permission to contest the local elections under a different name, so that they could attract new voters and potentially pass the threshold of government. However, this was rejected by the party's central leadership.

In November 2004, a judicial ruling was passed that some of the VB's auxiliary organisations had breached Belgian anti-racism laws, and were accused of sanctioning discrimination. This prompted the VB to change its name to the VBel; this was done in order to avoid further threats of de-authorisation. It was an opportunity to moderate the party's anti-immigrant discourse, and thus create the conditions for the *cordon sanitaire* to be abandoned. However, no such moderation took place. Dewinter insisted that his party remained committed to the same programme. This suggests that the VB/VBel's lack of coalition potential is as much to do with the party's own strategic preferences, as it is with the attitudes of other political parties towards it.

13.2.4. The threshold of government

Due to its own preferences and the attitudes of other parties in Flanders and Belgium, there is only one possibility for the VB to pass the threshold of governance: it must come into power with an absolute majority. The party was close to achieving such an absolute majority in a communal district of Antwerp in the 2006 local elections; the VBel polled 38% of votes and won 11 out of 23 seats up for grabs. However, as the party's electoral performance in subsequent elections has declined, it is unlikely that the VBel will cross the threshold of government due to its own electoral

strength in the near future. The re-assertion of the party's anti-Muslim position in recent years also makes it unlikely that the party will become a coalition partner as a result of its rivals abandoning the *cordon sanitaire*.

13.3. Changes in party organisation

From the very beginning, the VB possessed a fully developed party organisation, at least on paper. As the party has grown electorally, however, the VB's organisation has demonstrated a remarkable continuity, both with regard to internal structures and party elite; there has only been minimal honing and fine-tuning (Buelens and Deschouwer 2002). The people at the party's helm in 1987 are thus still largely in control, although Karel Dillen has been replaced as the party's President (De Winter *et al.* 2006). In spite of repeated speculation at different points in time, the party has never suffered profound internal divisions until very recently, although all the ingredients for such strife are present (with three party leaders and two very different core businesses). In other words, passing different thresholds has had a minimal impact on the VB's internal organisation (see table 13.3). It is only with the VBel's recent electoral decline that internal conflict has been in evidence.

Most of the VB's founding fathers had been active militants within the VU. Hence, when founding their party, they could fall back on a large reservoir of organisational skills and resources. It thus comes as no surprise that several of the organisational arrangements of the VB are similar to those of the VU. The main decision-making body within the party was the executive committee, chaired by the party's president. Formally, the executive includes approximately 14 people fulfilling different functions (party president and vice-president, the general secretary, the editor of the party's periodical, the treasurer, the head of the research centre, the person in charge of propaganda, the leaders of the parliamentary groups, a representative of the VB's public office holders organisation and of the youth organisation, and so forth). Its members are appointed by the party council, rather than elected by members via the national congress. Moreover, decisions are usually taken by consensus, although where such a consensus is absent, the party's president has the final say (De Winter *et al.* 2006). The executive in turn appoints members of the party council. Apart from the statutory membership of all members of the executive, all senators, representatives and group leaders in the provincial councils, the party council is composed of constituency chairmen upon proposal of the party executive. It has approximately 80 members. Finally, the national congress, in which all members can participate, is no more than a propaganda machine; members cannot influence key decisions relating to leadership, the party's programme or the selection of election candidates. Internal democracy within

the VB has thus been limited from the outset. The party's executive was, and remains, the most important body in the party. For these reasons, a comparative analysis of internal democracy within Flemish parties revealed the VB to be the least democratic of all (Jagers 2002).

In its earliest years, the party evolved very much in the shadow of Karel Dillen, one of the VB's founding fathers and its only federal representative until 1987. He also provided the party's ideological substance, and was effectively a 'mentor' for the new organisation. The admiration which Dillen elicited from party members was reflected in the fact that he was nominated 'party leader for life', and was given a statutory right to choose his own successor. He exercised this right in 1996, when he himself (rather than the party congress or council) nominated Frank Vanhecke as the next party president. This strong leadership was a key factor in facilitating the party's electoral growth from the mid 1980s onwards. Especially as the VB's blackmail potential was increasing throughout the 1990s, strong centralised control over the party's message and strategy was essential.

The growing size of the party in elected office from the late 1980s onwards did not lead to a shift in power relations within the party, with new tensions between the elected party and the party in central office. This was due to the fact that many of the VB's representatives were also senior party members. Growing party relevance, in contrast, brought new organisational problems for the party. For example, its membership did not increase in line with the party's blackmail potential. An internal party document from 1986 notes that "we have 80,000 voters; we don't even want to put on paper the number of members we have among them. This is unacceptable" (Kaderblad 1986).One would expect that passing the threshold of relevance would give the party a boost in members. However, this was not the case; by 2006 the party only had around 25000 members. The VBel's ratio of voters to members is 3.1; for traditional parties in Belgium, the range is between 8 and 10 (Noppe 2007). The VBel's degree of organisation thus remains very low. In response, the party has increasingly focused on developing local and constituency branches; bringing new members into the party is not only a way of consolidating its support base, but also of increasing the financial and human resources available to contest elections.

And yet, in spite of the gradual increase in the numbers of voters, professional personnel and local branches since the 1990s, it is still largely the same key individuals taking decisions at the top of the VB/VBel hierarchy. At the time of writing, half of the executive first took up their positions approximately 12 years ago, and the other half almost 20 years ago. Until 2008, only three members of this body had real power: Filip Dewinter, Gerolf Annemans and Frank Vanhecke. Any individuals who disagreed with the positions of any of these three were ejected from the party. In 2008, the latter was replaced by Bruno Valkeniers as party's new president;

he is perceived as Dewinter's puppet, thus consolidating the latter's grip on the party's leadership. Moreover, the VB's recent electoral losses have not prompted a serious challenge to the extant organisational order. In 2009, for example, the party faced competition from a new populist party, Lijst-Dedecker, and several VBel parliamentary representatives abandoned the party. This prompted some to leave the VBel; personal ambitions were usually the reason for doing so, although the media interpreted these departures as a sign of a possible party split. Voices on the party council have also been heard to criticise the way in which the VB is organised and led. To date, however, there are no signs that the party is considering undertaking leadership change or organisational reform to halt its electoral decline.

Table 13.3. *Pressure for organisational change upon crossing thresholds*

Threshold	Regional and State levels	European level
V		
IV-B		
IV-A	**Medium** - Professionalisation of staff and development of new resources (such as study centres and staff training facilities) - Slow growth in membership	
III	**Strong** - Increase in party in elected office - Local activism increased and electoral campaigning profesionalised - Slow growth in membership	
II		
I	**Medium** - New organisation created based on the VU model	

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

nap new academic press

13.4. Changes in party goals

The VB was created as a more idealistic version of the VU, where the purity of ideology was of greatest importance to the party leadership and their followers. Dillen, as the party's only elected representative until 1987, was the best representation of the party's policy-seeking ambitions. His election had little impact on this core goal; Dillen, and hence the VB, believed that a programme had to be defended even if it only appealed to a limited Flemish electorate. As he himself noted in the party's journal, "we will not change our programme to please some members nor to please a possible new electorate" (De Volder 1984). Dillen considered participation in government to be the VU's greatest mistake; his aim was to convince potential supporters of the inviolability of his party's principles, in contrast to the VU's weakness in the face of Francophone demands for greater rights within the Belgian federation.

During the campaign for the 1988 local elections, however, a newer and younger party elite sang a slightly different tune. Dewinter, for example, argued for the need to develop the party's structures and programme in order to keep growing and win elections. The party thus developed new arguments about the need to protect Flemish society, not just from other linguistic groups in Belgium but also from immigration and selfish politicians. As noted above, these latter themes were much more successful that the territorial issue in mobilising electoral support for the party. They were not acceptable to everybody within the party; several older party members withdrew from the VB in opposition to this rhetorical shift and the new contacts nurtured with radical right parties such as the French *Front National*. However, the majority accepted the argument put forward by the likes of Annemans and Dewinter that being a Flemish nationalist was compatible with opposing immigration. The Flemish nationalist programme was thus diminishing as a feature of the VB's programmatic profile, and replaced by an anti-immigrant and anti-establishment rhetoric. Party leaders successfully combined the pursuit of votes with policy impact (through blackmail potential) for several decades. The only goal that eluded the VB was office incumbency although, as argued above, it was not necessarily the case that this was something that the party desired.

As the party crossed the threshold of relevance from the early 1990s, the party focused on using its electoral position to place its policy demands on the Belgian political agenda. Winning at elections thus became the party's primary goal; this applied at every territorial level. Thus, for example, in 1993 Dewinter was asked why the VB chose to participate in local elections when the party's demands – Flemish independence and a change in migration policy – could only be achieved at the federal level. He replied that the absence of the VB at the local level could risk voters changing their prefe-

rence for good to another political party. The party thus sought to consolidate and expand its electoral position at all territorial levels, as a means of exercising blackmail potential within the Flemish and Belgian political arenas. The party's performance at the 1994 local elections made it conceivable that coalitions involving the VB could be formed. However, the party's leadership made it clear that it was not interested in compromising core principles in order to pass the threshold of government; this refusal to compromise forced other political parties to look elsewhere for coalition partners.

This simultaneous pursuit of votes and policy has only recently been questioned, as a result of the VBel's declining electoral performance. As noted above, in 2007 some of the party's federal representatives left to join the newly formed Lijst Dedecker, a protest party with very populist slogans, a dynamic leader (Jean-Marie Dedecker) and an electorate that overlaps with that of the VBel. The latter lost some of its votes to this new party in the subsequent general election, notably in the symbolically important constituency of Antwerp. Further electoral losses were experienced at the 2009 and 2010 elections (see above, table 13.2). On these occasions, the party also faced competition on the nationalist dimension, with the N-VA taking over as the most voted Flemish nationalist party in Flanders. The VBel's strategy of vote-maximisation for policy gain thus seems to have reached the end of its usefulness, although a replacement strategy has yet to emerge clearly. The experience of new parties in government supports the argument put forward by Dumont and Bäck (2006), that protest parties who are permanently in opposition, who lack policy relevance and as a result, suffer electoral decline, may reconsider their isolationist strategy and consider entering coalition government (usually as a result of leadership change) (Buelens and Hino 2008). The VB thus faces a dilemma, between moderating its ideological positioning as a prerequisite to establishing new cooperation with other potential coalition allies, or retaining its hard-line xenophobic discourse and risk continued policy irrelevance. Another option would be to revert to a more autonomist profile, making Flemish independence the party's core goal. It is as yet unclear how the VBel will react to the new pressures on its electoral strategy.

13.5. Policy impact

As argued throughout this chapter, there have been three key themes in the VB/VBel's political rhetoric over time: the independence of Flanders, opposition to immigration and opposition to the political establishment. The relative importance of these different themes has shifted according to different political circumstances.

With regard to the first of these, it is arguable that the VB's policy impact has been marginal. The VB/VBel certainly cannot be considered the first, or the most successful, nationalist party in Flanders. The VU had already mobilised support for its regionalist agenda during the 1960s and 1970s. The VU was also instrumental in pushing for the federalisation of the Belgian state, and in causing the division of state-wide Belgian parties into separate Flemish and Francophone organisations (see De Winter, this volume). It was not until the 1980s that the VB was able to attract some electoral support away from the VU, and even then, the goal of Flemish independence only resonated with a small sector of the Flemish electorate. Moreover, the VB was not involved in the formal decision to create a federal Belgian state in 1995. Centre-periphery issues remain central within contemporary Belgian politics. However, the VB still does not represent the main voice articulating Flemish nationalist demands in on-going debates about the territorial organisation of political authority. With the demise of the VU, many of its sympathisers joined traditional political parties, and continue to articulate demands for further de-centralisation from within these organisations. The VU's successor parties, especially N-VA, has also emerged as one of the most important players on regional issues. In short, the VB/VBel has been largely unsuccessful in pushing for its territorial goal – the independence of Flanders – to be achieved.

It is much harder to evaluate the impact of the party's anti-immigrant and anti-establishment discourse on Belgian politics. The VB's blackmail potential in both these respects has been discussed above. The party's articulation of this rhetoric undermined the electoral standing of Belgium's traditional parties, especially the Flemish Socialists. These parties' refusal to discuss issues such as immigration is also testimony to the desire not to give visibility to issues raised by the VB. At the local level, the VB/VBel has also been able to force other parties to change their coalition behaviour in order to exclude the party from government. The VB's electoral success at the regional and federal levels has also narrowed the options for coalition formation drastically at times. However, it is more difficult to assess how party policy has been affected more concretely by the VB's presence in Flemish and Belgian politics. Issues relating to immigration and political mistrust are salient in the majority of Western European countries, even where there is not a political party akin to the VB/VBel that explicitly places such concerns on the political agenda. Isolating the specific policy influence of the VB/VBel in this respect remains a challenge for academic inquiry.

13.6. Conclusion

In many respects, the VB/VBel can be considered a highly successful party. From the late 1980s onwards, the party enjoyed increasing electoral support; indeed, until 2007, it had not lost any election (in the sense of seeing its vote-share decline). This translated into substantial political relevance, with the VB/VBel playing the role of protest party in permanent opposition. Free from the constraints of political office, the VB/VBel has used its position very effectively to attack traditional political parties and their inability to deal with issues of key importance to voters, such as the social, political and economic implications of immigration. The VB's political rise also signalled a change in goal pursuit, where the initial ambition of securing independence for Flanders was replaced by xenophobic and Islamophobic rhetoric, which proved more effective in mobilising electoral support. This dual ideological profile differentiates the VB from the majority of other autonomist parties examined in this volume. A highly centralised and disciplined organisation, which has changed very little as the VB's electoral and political status has evolved, contributed to making the party's protest strategy successful.

In terms of success in pushing for territorial reform, however, the VB/VBel's policy impact has been negligible. Whilst this has been an issue of declining salience for the party, other Flemish nationalist parties have come to the fore to defend Flemish cultural and linguistic rights. At the same time, more recently, the continued effectiveness of the VB/VBel's protest strategy has been questioned. The end of the party's trajectory of electoral growth has prompted questions about the party's continued electoral appeal, not least because of its inability to deliver substantive policy change through engagement with other political parties within the institutional arena. In an effort to regain the electoral initiative, the VB/VBel faces several dilemmas: firstly, whether to moderate its radical right discourse in a bid to acquire coalition potential within Flemish and Belgian politics, or maintain its hard-line position at the margins of the political system; secondly, whether or not to re-position itself on the centre-periphery dimension and re-assert its independentist credentials in an effort to attract voters that are still concerned to secure enhanced Flemish self-government.

References

Buelens, Jo (1996) 'To Change or Not to Change', Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Oslo, 29 March – 3 April.

Buelens, Jo and Kris Deschouwer (2002) *De verboden vleespotten. De partijorganisatie van het Vlaams Blok tussen oppositie en machtsdeelname*. Brussel: Vakgroep Politieke Wetenschappen, Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

Buelens, Jo and Airo Hino (2008) 'The Electoral Fate of New Parties in Government', in Kris Deschouwer (ed.), *New Parties in Government. In Power for the First Time*. London: Routledge, pp. 157–174.

Cochez, Tom (2010) *Eigen Belang Eerst. De vuile oorlog binnen het Vlaams Belang*. Leuven: Van Halewijck.

De Winter, Lieven, Marga Gómez-Reino and Jo Buelens (2006) "Vlaams Blok and the Heritage of Extreme-Right Flemish-Nationalism", in: Lieven De Winter, Marga Gómez-Reino and Peter Lynch (eds.), *Autonomist Parties in Europe: Identity Politics and the Revival of the Territorial Cleavage* – Vol. II. Barcelona: ICPS, pp. 47–78.

Deschouwer, Kris (2009) *The Politics of Belgium. Governing a Divided Society*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

De Winter, Lieven (2000) 'Partis ethno-régionalistes et l'intégration européenne dans les élections européennes de 1999', in: Gérard Grunberg, Pascal Perrinnau and Colette Ysmal (eds.), *Le vote des quinze. Les élections européennes du 13 Juin 1999*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, pp. 181–202.

De Volder, Fideel (1984) *Kaderblad Vlaams Blok*, 1–2 (December).

Dumont, Patrick and Hanna Bäck (2006) 'Why So Few and Why So Late? Green Parties and the Question of Govermental Participation', *European Journal Of Political Research* 45, 1: 35–67.

Ivarsflaten, Elisabeth (2007) 'Immigration Politics in Western Europe: Party Politics, Prejudice, and the Anti-Racism Norm', Paper presented at the ECPR General Conference, Pisa, 5–8 September.

Jagers, Jan (2002) 'Eigen democratie eerst! een comparatief onderzoek naar het intern democratisch gehalte van de Vlaamse politieke partijen', *Res Publica* 44, 1: 73–96.

Lucardie, Paul (2000) 'Prophets, Purifiers and Prolocutors. Towards a Theory on the Emergence of New Parties', *Party Politics* 6, 2: 175–185.

Mair, Peter (2002) 'Compairing Party Systems', in: Lawrence LeDuc, Richard Niemi and Pippa Norris (eds.) *Comparing Democracies 2*. London: Sage, pp. 88–107.

Noppe, Jo (2007) 'Morfologie van de Vlaamse Politieke partijen', *Res Publica* 49, 2–3: 479–546.

Swyngedouw, Marc, Jaak Billiet, Ann Carton and Roeland Beerten (eds.) (1993) *Kiezen is verliezen.Onderzoek naar de politieke opvattingen van Vlamingen*. Leuven: Acco.

Swyngedouw, Marc (2000) 'Belgium: Explaining the Relationship Between Vlaams Blok and the City of Antwerp', in: Paul Hainsworth (ed.), *The Politics of the Extreme Right: From the Margins to the Mainstream*. New York: Pinter.

nap new academic press

Christophe Roux

Radical Nationalism in Corsica

14.1. Introduction

Nationalist mobilisation in Corsica represents the most virulent case of centre-periphery contestation in France, a country often held up as the best example of a unitary nation-state in Western Europe. Although Corsican nationalist parties have not emulated the electoral success of some of the other autonomist parties included in this volume, they nevertheless enjoy significantly higher levels of electoral support that autonomist movements in other parts of the French territory (such as Brittany, Alsace, Savoy, Occitania, the French Basque Country and French Catalonia). However, nationalist activity is not limited to the electoral arena; Corsican nationalism is characterised by the use of political violence, with armed groups targeting illegitimate 'foreign' interests on the island (such as businesses or houses) and, less often, symbolic representations of the French state on Corsican soil. Even if politically motivated murders have been rare compared to the Basque Country or Northern Ireland (Crettiez 1999), several dozen deaths have been directly linked to Corsican nationalism since the 1970s. One of the most shocking was the assassination of the regional Prefect Claude Erignac, the highest French civil servant on the island, by a dissident nationalist group in February 1998.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a comprehensive overview of Corsican nationalism, although given the paucity of academic work on this case, the next section outlines the key developments in Corsican nationalist mobilisation. The high fragmentation and instability of the Corsican nationalist movement renders it impossible for this chapter to consider in detail all of the different actors that feature in the island's contemporary nationalist panorama. One option would be to focus on the most important political parties in the moderate nationalist tradition; since the 1960s, moderate nationalist parties have demonstrated relative organisational and strategic continuity. A second option, the one to be pursued here, is to examine the lifespan, organisational and goal development of radical nationalist parties. This is justified for two reasons. Firstly, this volume is interested in examining how autonomist parties evolve from being parties of protest to being parties in power. Radical Corsican nationalism presents a particularly interesting example of how radical movements (with an electoral strategy) behave when confronted with an opening up of new political opportunity structures. The chapter thus analyses the evolution of the dual 'ballots and bullets' strategy employed by radical nati-

nap new academic press

onalists as they have sought to push their territorial agenda within the Corsican and French political arenas. Secondly, within the Corsican nationalist space, mobilisation has tended to be dominated and shaped by radical groups (Briquet 1997a; 2001) due to their electoral growth during the 1980s and, above all, through the use of political violence.

Before proceeding to examine the lifespan of radical Corsican nationalist groups in more detail, however, it is necessary to note that in some respects, the analysis presented in this chapter differs from that in other contributions to this volume. Most importantly, the unit of analysis is not a single enduring political party but a political trend – radical nationalism – which has always had two faces (a violent clandestine group and a political party competing in elections) and which has taken multiple organisational forms (with different political groups competing against each other within the radical nationalist camp). This specificity has implications for the examination of how crossing different thresholds has impacted upon party organisation, goals and policy impact. In particular, it makes applying the framework of analysis outlined in the Introduction difficult in some respects, for example with regard to analysing the organisational impact of threshold-crossing and the policy influence of these actors. These challenges aside, the chapter nevertheless outlines the efforts of radical nationalists to transform themselves from being marginal actors excluded from formal Corsican politics, to being a central force in delivering self-government for the island.

14.2. An overview of Corsican nationalist mobilisation

The contemporary Corsican nationalist movement has its roots in the 1960s. Nationalist mobilisation was a response to state-driven regional economic policies during the decolonisation years in France (Kofman 1982; Loughlin 1987; Briquet 1998; Crettiez 1999; Roux 2005a). These policies were seen by many Corsicans as only benefiting newcomers (mainly former colonists repatriated from Algeria) whilst having harmful effects on Corsicans themselves. Aggravating this sentiment was the island's demographic situation, characterised by increasing emigration of native islanders. These factors contributed to a climate of deep disaffection among some sectors of Corsican society. Nationalist actors interpreted these developments as efforts by the French state to undermine the island's historical and cultural specificity, and conceptualised the centre-periphery relationship as France's colonial dominion of Corsica.

In 1966, the Front Régionaliste Corse (FRC) was formed by student associations originally established in Paris in 1960, but which rapidly developed a left-wing 'regionalist' sensibility. Then, in 1967, Action Régionaliste Corse (ARC) was formed, developing out of earlier efforts to defend Corsican economic interests. The group demanded limited administrative and economic autonomy for the island. These two organisations – the left-wing

FRC and the more right-wing ARC – represented the two manifestations of early moderate Corsican nationalism. By the early 1970s both had adopted more autonomist rhetoric, a theme that would continue to characterise the moderate nationalist tradition in subsequent decades.

During the 1970s, however, the nationalist movement also underwent radicalisation. More hard-line members of ARC organised as clandestine groups, such as the Fronte Paesanu Corsu di Liberazione (FPCL) in 1973 and Ghjustizia Paolina in 1974. These later merged to form the Front de Libération Nationale de la Corse (FLNC) in 1976. These first radical movements used systematic clandestine violence targeted at material symbols of external political and economic domination in Corsica. After several failed attempts, the FLNC succeeded in establishing a legal political organisation in 1980, named Cunsulta di i Cumitati Naziunalisti (CCN).

Since then, there has been a clear distinction between moderate and radical nationalist traditions in Corsica, with the difference between them being their attitude towards the use of political violence (condemned by the former, supported by the latter). Within each tradition, however, the nationalist phenomenon has evolved in different ways. Moderate nationalism during the 1980s and 1990s displayed relative stability, and was represented by Unione di u Populu Corsu (UPC). The party became the Partitu di a Nazione Corsa (PNC) in 2002. Other moderate parties, including A Chjama Naziunale (ACN) and Inseme per a Corsica (IPC) were also established in subsequent years. These three parties – PNC, ACN and IPC – formed a very successful electoral coalition, Femu a Corsica, to contest the 2010 regional election.

The evolution of radical nationalists was considerably more complex; the movement has been plagued by deep factionalism and instability. For example, during the 1980s, the FLNC's political front, CCN, was replaced first by the Movimentu Corsu per l'Autodeterminazione (MCA) in 1983, and then by a CuncoltaNaziunalista (aCN) in 1987. Further divisions were experienced from 1989 onwards. One-time leader of the FLNC, Pierre Poggioli, resigned from aCN to form his own party, Accolta Naziunale Corsa (ANC) with its own armed branch *Resistenza*. The FLNC split at the end of 1990 to create the FLNC 'Canal Habituel' with its new public front, Mouvement Pour l'Autodetermination (MPA), and the FLNC 'Canal Historique'. The latter's political front, aCN, changed its name to Cuncolta Indipendenza (CI) in 1998, and then to Independenza upon its merger with other smaller radical groups (such as Corsica Viva(CV)) in 2001. Independenza would also later merge with Corsica Nazione (CN) (to form Independenza-Corsica Nazione (ICN)); CN was originally an electoral alliance formed between moderate and radical nationalists[1] ahead of the 1992 regional election, from which the former withdrew due to the refusal to condemn the use of political violence.

---

[1]   It also included other smaller parties such as the ecological group I Verdi Corsi (IVC).

ICN has close links to the renamed clandestine group FLNC-Union des Combattants. ICN, along with other smaller radical parties, formed the electoral alliance Corsica Libera to contest the 2010 regional election. Together, they constitute the main voice of radical nationalism in contemporary Corsican politics. However, some smaller clandestine groups without public representation (such as the FLNC du 22 Octobre and the FLNC 1976) continue to challenge the legitimacy of the radical nationalists' electoral strategy.

14.3. The lifespan of radical Corsican nationalist parties

14.3.1. The threshold of declaration

For many political parties, the threshold of declaration may be one of the least interesting in a party's lifespan; the vast majority of parties are created with the intention of competing in elections, and thus the threshold is passed by default. However, the threshold of declaration assumes greater significance in cases where, as in Corsica, violence is a feature of a party's political project. Thus, whilst most autonomist parties are well integrated into democratic politics and 'play the electoral game' (Roux 2003), electoral politics is not the only strategy that these actors can pursue.

Radical Corsican nationalism emerged at a time when moderate nationalist parties did not participate in electoral contests. The latter's efforts to present candidates in general and by-elections in selected constituencies in the late 1960s and early 1970s had not yielded substantial electoral returns (between 2.5% and 3.2% of the vote). Withdrawal from electoral competition was a response to the perceived difficulties associated with such contests. Thus, for example, elections were considered fraudulent because of the strength of clientelistic ties and the widespread use of electoral fraud (Briquet 1997b; 2003; Pellegrinetti and Rovere 2004).[2] Criticism of the workings of democratic representation (and particularly the political hegemony of the clans) in Corsica has always been a key nationalist theme. In response to the difficulties of securing political representation, moderate nationalist groups radicalised their political rhetoric, for example by conceptualising Corsica as a nation instead of simply a region.

Radical nationalists also responded to the closure of the Corsican political system by changing their political rhetoric. The FLNC was established as a party with radical ideological values on both the centre-periphery and left-right dimensions (Elias 2008: 116). The party promoted a revolutionary

---

[2]   Clientelism is a key feature of Corsican politics. The island is dominated by a limited number of so-called ‚clans', defined as "political groups that are controlled...by important regional notables, linked to local elected politicians and voter networks (often kinship networks) by clientelistic exchange and interpersonal solidarity" (Briquet 2003: 495).

struggle against French colonialism, and aimed to create a new society along socialist lines. However, in the late 1970s, the language of independence and socialism was abandoned in favour of a demand for Corsican self-determination and much vaguer ideological principles (Roux 2005a). As several key actors later testified, leftist separatism did not reflect the dominant trend within Corsican nationalism. Not only was Maoism far from being universally accepted in an ideologically diverse movement where extreme-right ideas were also articulated, but there was also scepticism about the need for genuine independence. This move was also designed to avoid a loss of support among the Corsican electorate. Opinion polls regularly showed that less than 10% of those questioned supported 'independence' as a constitutional goal, whilst the majority of the population also did not approve of radical violence. At the same time, excessive moderation risked alienating radical nationalism's core support base and creating new internal divisions. For this reason, the new goal of 'self-determination' was ambiguous enough to allow more hard-line supporters to interpret it as meaning independence.

Radical nationalism's strategic change was given expression in the FLNC's White Book, published in 1981. As suggested above, socialism was no longer referred to and 'self-determination' was substituted for 'independence'. In order to secure this goal, it was argued that Corsican nationalism needed to establish itself in all areas of political, economic, cultural and social life. Three dimensions were identified to the Lutte de Libération Nationale pursued by the FLNC: an 'armed struggle' undertaken by the latter; an 'institutional struggle' based on electoral participation; and a 'mass struggle' whereby radical nationalism would penetrate society through trade-unionism (the Sindicatu di i Travagliadori Corsi was created in 1984) and cultural and economic associations. Hence, rather than advocate a violent rupture from France, the FLNC aimed to make Corsican nationalism a dominant social and political force. Political violence was thus conceived as radical nationalism's tool for imposing itself on the social and political scene, forcing other non-nationalist actors to respond to its territorial demands. Electoral participation was one element of the nationalist struggle, although an awareness of the limited opportunities for democratic representation (based on the experience of the 1960s and 1970s) meant violence continued to be a key tactic for placing pressure on the central state to acknowledge nationalist demands (Crettiez 1999).

Until the late 1970s, apart from municipal elections, the only possibilities for putting the FLNC's 'institutional struggle' into practice were to compete in legislative (general) or cantonal elections; these elected representatives to the French Parliament and the *Départements* (the administrative tier below the state until the introduction of a regional tier in the 1980s) respectively. New opportunities for institutional representation were created by the introduction of European elections in 1979 and elections to a newly established regional tier of government in 1982. These electoral arenas are summarised in table 14.1.

Table 14.1. *Territorial levels of political representation in Corsica*

Territorial level	Institution	Potential available seats for political parties	Constituency	Electoral system[1]	Competent authority to change the electoral system
Town (*commune*)	Municipal Councils Mayor	Number of seats proportional to the population of each of the 365 Corsican communes	Commune	PR	French Parliament
Départements	General Councils of *Haute-Corse* and *Corse-du-Sud* (from 1975)	22 (Southern Corsica) 30 (Northern Corsica)	Canton	M	French Parliament
Region	Assembly of Corsica	61 (1982–1991) 51 (1992–)	Corsica as a whole, except in 1986-1987 (departmental constituencies)	PR	French Parliament
State	French National Assembly	4	Legislative constituencies	M	French Parliament
	French Senate	2	*Département*	M (indirect)	French Parliament
European Union	European Parliament	87 (1979–1999) 13 (2004–)	France as a whole 'South-East' constituency: Corsica, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Rhône-Alpes.	PR	French Parliament

Notes:
[1] PR :Proportional representation; M :Majoritarian

Unlike its moderate counterparts, radical nationalism's political front during the early 1980s, CCN, refused to participate in the first regional elections held in 1982. The party decried the new regional institution as being a limited concession aimed at pacifying nationalist actors without providing a real answer to Corsica's problems (such as depopulation, and threats to the insular economy and culture). However, following the

FLNC's change of strategy (see above), CCN's successor, the MCA, presented candidates for the first time in the 1983 municipal elections and the 1984 regional election. Since then, radical nationalists have always contested regional elections. This demonstrated the movement's strategy of controlled radicalism, with electoral participation considered to be a political opportunity that could be used to advance the nationalist cause. The strategy also indicated the movement's gradual institutionalisation.

There were times, however, when radical nationalists decided not to participate in a given election for tactical reasons. Two factors informed such a decision: the electoral system in use and the political context. With regard to the first, different electoral systems present a particular set of constraints and opportunities for political parties. As a relatively small political force, at times divided into several political parties across a small insular territory, two types of election have always been difficult for radical nationalists. Proportional elections using large constituencies that include Corsica alongside other parts of mainland France, as is the case for European elections, are problematic because nationalist candidates must compete in territories in which they are completely unknown. Smaller constituencies are more advantageous for these actors, although elections run under a single-member district majoritarian system, as is the case for legislative and cantonal elections, remain challenging. This is because radical nationalists have seldom received a majority, or even a plurality, of votes in any one district; it is thus difficult to obtain representation. For this reason, no radical (or moderate) Corsican nationalists have ever been elected to the French National Assembly, or to one of the island's two General Councils until 2008 (when one nationalist candidate – Paul-Joseph Caitucoli – was elected in Southern Corsica[3]). Regional elections thus constitute the best chance for radical nationalists to cross the threshold of representation, since Corsica itself is the constituency and the electoral law employed is proportional. The second factor determining radical nationalist electoral participation is political context. When their electoral prospects have not been good, and in order to avoid poor scores that would suggest their weakness as a political force, radical nationalists have refrained from competing in elections. The costs and benefits of electoral participation are thus evaluated ahead of each election.

Let us consider legislative elections. For reasons linked to the political context at the time (the desire of the Socialist majority to assist the Greens

---

[3] However, he does not belong to a specific political party. He obtained 45.3% of the vote in the second round (his opponents obtained 31.5% and 23.2% respectively). Caitucoli insisted, however, that the significance of his election should not be overestimated given that his campaign was based around themes such as the defense of rural interests and the influence of his family in the constituency (interview on Radio Alta Frequenza, 26 March 2008).

and facilitate the growth of the Front National at the expense of the Republican right), a proportional system was used in the 1986 French legislative election for the first time (and the last to date) under the Fifth Republic. Radical nationalists took part in this election, building a coalition with moderate nationalists. But their participation has been far from systematic; in some years they presented candidates (1986 and 1988), in some they did not participate at all (as in 1997) and in others they did not present candidates but supported moderate nationalists (as in 2007).

As far as European elections are concerned, prior to 2003 radical nationalist groups did not invest directly in this arena as it was almost impossible to secure a representative in a constituency formed by the entire French territory (within which Corsica represented less than 0.5% of the French population). In 2003, constituencies for European elections were re-organised, with Corsica (280,000 inhabitants) being included in a larger South-East constituency along with Rhône-Alpes and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (approximately 10,780,000 inhabitants). However, this has not made it substantially easier to pass the threshold of representation, hence radical nationalists' continued absence from these contests. Moderate nationalist parties, in contrast, have sought to build alliances with autonomist parties in other parts of France as well as the Green Party. In 1989, the UPC elected Max Simeoni as Corsican nationalism's first and only Member of European Parliament (MEP); a member of the radical nationalist movement was appointed as his parliamentary assistant. This representation was not regained in the 1994 European election.

14.3.2. The threshold of authorisation

Radical nationalist groups have not faced major difficulties in crossing the threshold of authorisation. On the whole, they were able to meet the requirements for contesting elections under French law. To be a candidate, a person need only be of French nationality, a registered voter, and not suffer from any legal exclusion (for 'incapacity' or for having been declared non-eligible by a court of law). A candidate must also write a declaration of candidacy to be sent to the prefecture (the local representation of the central government). Candidates are forbidden from contesting more than one constituency; moreover, they are not required to collect a list of signatures, as is the case for Presidential elections.

However, on occasion different political groups have been banned from electoral competition in France. These have included anti-colonialist, Islamic fundamentalist, extreme-right, extreme-left and autonomist movements. Such a decision is taken by the President of the Republic after consultation with the government and on the basis of conditions defined by legislation passed in 1936 (and modified for the last time in 1992). In its current form,

associations or *de facto* groups can be dissolved if, among other reasons, their actions risk 'harming the integrity of the national territory' or if they prepare or commit 'acts of terrorism.' Advocating separatism and political violence are thus two legal bases on which political groups can be outlawed.

In metropolitan France, ten autonomist groups – located in Brittany, the French Basque Country and Corsica – were banned between 1974 and 1987 (almost 20% of the total number of banned groups).[4] In Corsica, these included two clandestine armed movements (FPCL in 1974, FLNC in 1983), three political parties (ARC in 1975, CCN in 1983 and MPA in 1987) and one association (*A Riscossa* in 1987). These groups were banned after important episodes of violence: ARC was banned after the events of Aleria[5] in 1975, CCN after the assassination of a high-level civil servant by the FLNC in 1983, and the MCA after the assassination of the leader of the anti-nationalist association Corse Française et Républicaine in 1987.

However, being outlawed did not signal the death of these organisations, as they were immediately replaced by new groups with the same political goals, albeit under different names. Thus, for example, CCN was replaced by the MCA in 1983, which was itself replaced by aCN in 1987. Although there was clear continuity between these groups, they were not stopped from electoral participation. Governmental decisions on illegalisation were thus a symbolic act, rather than a move to close electoral participation off to nationalist groups on a permanent basis.

14.3.3. The threshold of representation and beyond

Whilst the French President has been directly elected since 1965, there has never been a Corsican nationalist candidate in these elections.[6] This level of representation is thus not considered further here. Given that radical nationalists have also not secured representation within the French Parliament, at the cantonal level (apart from one representative in 2008 – see above), or within the European Parliament, these are also excluded from the discussion. Although they have been present at the

---

[4] Calculated on the basis of data provided by the French encyclopedia Quid (Frémy and Frémy 2006).

[5] The occupation of a wine cellar in Aleria in August 1975 caused the two first deaths (two policemen shot) in the history of Corsican nationalism. The events not only had an impact on the French public (which became aware of the so-called 'Corsican question' for the first time) but also on the radicalisation of Corsican nationalism. From the end of 1975, the number of nationalist-related bombings increased substantially.

[6] This does not mean that French Presidential elections are of no interest. For example, in 1965 nationalist groups asked Corsican voters not to vote in the election. In 1981, nationalists also encouraged their supporters to vote for the Socialist candidate, François Mitterrand, against the centrist Valéry Giscard d'Estaing.

local level, the most significant representation has been secured at the regional level.

Although the regional electoral system has undergone a number of adjustments over the years, it has always been proportional in nature. It should also be noted that there have been a high number of elections due to several dissolutions of the regional institutions: in 1984 because no political party had a governing majority; in 1986 due to the implementation of new legislation on decentralisation; in 1987 because of the annulment of the 1986 election results in Northern Corsica (due to electoral fraud); and in 1999 because of the annulment of the 1998 election results (for the same reason). The electoral performance of radical nationalist parties is summarised in table 14.2 (from 1982 to 1991) and table 14.3 (from 1993 onwards). A distinction should be made between these two periods because of the transformation of the Corsican Assembly established in 1982 into the Collectivité Territoriale de Corse in 1991 (see below). These reforms gave the region additional autonomy, with representatives being elected in a proportional two-round election (revised in 2009); the latter provision aimed to reinforce the stability of regional institutions without getting rid of smaller movements. Since 2009, only lists obtaining at least 7% of votes cast in the first round, or new lists composed of candidates from lists that obtained at least 5% in the first round, can proceed to the second round of voting.[7]

Table 14.2. *Electoral performance of radical nationalist parties in regional elections, 1982–1987*

Year	Party	%	Seats (out of 61)
1982	-	-	-
1984	MCA	5.22	3
1986	UPC-MCA[2]	8.97	3(+3)
1987[1]	UPC-MCA[2]	8.44	3(+3)

Source: Based on Roux (2005a).

Notes:
[1] By-election in Northern Corsica.
[2] Coalition between moderate and radical nationalists.

---

[7] Furthermore, if one list is able to obtain more than 50% of votes, it receives a majority bonus of 3 seats while the remaining 48 seats are distributed proportionally among all the lists that have polled over 5%. If no list is able to secure an absolute majority – which is usually the case – the second round of voting is only open to lists that won at least 5% of votes. The list that obtains most votes receives the majority bonus (3 seats) and the remaining seats are distributed proportionally.

Table 14.3. *Electoral performance of radical nationalist parties in regional elections, 1992–2010[1]*

Year	Party	% 1st round	% 2nd round	Seats (out of 51)
1992	CN-IVC-ANC-	13.7 %	16.85%	9
	UPC	7.4 %	8.0%	4
	MPA			
1998	CN	5.2 %	9.9%	5
	MPA	3.4 %	-	-
	CV	1.9 %	-	-
1999	CI	10.4 %	16.8%	8
2004	*Indipendenza-PNC-ACN-ANC*	12.1 %	17.3%	8
2010	*Corsica Libera*	9.4%	9.85%	4

Source: Based on Roux (2005a) and updated.

Note:
[1] The table only provides data for the most important radical groups contesting each election. Moderate nationalists are included here only when they participated in electoral coalitions with radical nationalist groups.

The norm in regional elections has been open competition between moderate and radical movements, and even between different radical groups. Only between 1986 and 1987, and in 2004 (under the banner of Unione Naziunale), was a formal union strategy promoted whereby radical and moderate groups formed electoral alliances. In 1992, an electoral alliance was formed between several radical and moderate groups (along with the ecological party IVC), although this proved short-lived (see above). Thus, for over thirty years, radical nationalist groups dominated the parliamentary representation of the nationalist movement. It was only in the 2010 regional election that a moderate alliance – Femu a Corsica – polled substantially more report than its radical counterpart, Corsica Libera (25.9% in the second round of voting, compared to the latter party's 9.85%).

To what extent have radical nationalist groups been able to build on this representation to acquire political relevance in the Corsican political arena? Firstly, it has been extremely difficult for any nationalist actors to be considered as potential coalition partners by traditional political parties. This is because they have been subject to the same strategy as used in Flanders against the Vlaams Blok (VB) and its successors, namely the use of a *cordon sanitaire* (De Winter, Gómez-Reino and Buelens 2006: 49; see also Buelens, this volume). Its basic logic is to isolate any political actors that do not share the fundamental democratic and liberal principles on which

nap new academic press

representative institutions are based. This exclusion can affect extreme-right parties, but it has also affected radical Corsican parties because of their refusal to condemn the use of political violence.

In addition, the first nationalist representatives pursued a 'tribune strategy' (Seiler 1982) rather than fully participating in the institutional arena. For example, a former leader of the MCA during the 1980s, Pierre Poggioli, ordered members of his party not to talk to those from other traditional political parties. It should be recalled that the political context at the time was highly charged, with the number of political-related bombings reaching its highest level in 1984. The traditional political class responded by uniting to refuse to cooperate with nationalist forces.

Over time, however radical nationalist parties adapted to institutional life. As Pierre Poggioli explained in a recent account of the history of the FLNC during the 1980s:

We decided not to accept participation in the Assembly's commissions... For us, getting positions in those commissions and structures would mean having to engage in obscure bargaining with other regional representatives, which meant surrendering our principles...How surprised we were when we were told that we had a right to get a number of commission positions without any bargaining or surrender of principles, but simply because of the application of the proportional rule!...We finally accepted representation on these bodies (Poggioli 2004: 107).

Some attempts were made in the 1990s to go beyond this strong opposition. This was in part due to the fact that Corsican nationalism became a stable feature of regional politics, and these parties were legitimated by their improving electoral scores. Also important was the growing importance of the regional level within the framework of deepening European integration and the rise of multi-level governance. In this context, the territorial cleavage cut across the traditional left-right divide. Some leaders on the left (such as Paul Giaccobbi from the Parti Radical de Gauche, most of the Corsican members of the Parti Socialiste, and the smaller Corse Social-Démocrate (CSD)) as well as on the right (especially José Rossi, former member of the Union pour la Démocratie Française and now of the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire(UMP)) encouraged the development of more accommodationist policies. Firstly, in 1998, the President of the Executive Council, José Rossi, controversially gave the presidency of the Commission for European Affairs to Jean-Guy Talamoni, the spokesman of CN. A second step in the *rapprochement* between radical nationalist and traditional parties took place in 2004 when the former supported the election of Pierre Chaubon (CSD) as the President of the Corsican Assembly, against Camille de Rocca Serra (UMP). Though he was elected, Chaubon

immediately resigned, explaining that he could not accept the nationalists' support. The latter criticised the refusal of this '*politique de la main tendue*' (olive branch politics). Rocca Serra was finally elected, profiting from deep factionalism within the left (Roux 2005b).

It is arguable, however, that the relevance of radical nationalism has been more due to the strategy of violence pursued by these groups, rather than to electoral and political leverage exercised within democratic institutions. Violence has been a significantly more efficient tool than electoral support in the struggle against the French state. To paraphrase Newman (1994), bullets have been more efficient that ballots. If Corsica is an issue for French governments, this is not so much because of the existence of a strong elected nationalist presence in the region, but because of the violence supported by these actors. The state responded to this mobilisation with three waves of territorial reform. The *Statut Particulier* passed in 1982 under François Mitterand's Presidency established a directly elected Corsican Assembly, with responsibilities for administering the social, cultural and economic affairs of the island (Loughlin 1985). Then, in 1991, the *Statut Joxe* created the *Collectivité Territoriale de Corse*, with additional administrative responsibilities in the areas of education, audio-visual and cultural policy, as well as the environment. Finally, the so-called Matignon Process initiated in 1999 and led by the French Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, envisaged a further increase in insular autonomy. Whilst the proposals did not fully satisfy radical nationalist demands, they were considered to be a preliminary step towards the island's 'emancipation', culminating in Corsica's eventual independence from France. However, many of these provisions were declared unconstitutional by the French Constitutional Court, and abandoned by President Jacques Chirac in 2002. In a 2003 referendum, Corsican voters also rejected proposals to create a single political and administrative body for the island, with formal but limited legislative powers in areas such as the economy, the environment and transport.

In summary, therefore, it is arguable that as a result of securing political representation, radical nationalist groups have wielded blackmail potential at the regional level, although not coalition potential. However, this blackmail capacity has always been held in check, at least formally, by other parties. Nevertheless, radical nationalist representatives have not been completely isolated at the regional level. The fact that they have maintained a continuous presence in this area since the 1980s has enabled them to participate in the process of policy-making. They have also undergone an important learning process that has seen them adapt to the realities of institutional politics. Thus, day-to-day informal contacts with politicians of all colours, as well as agreements on less politicised issues, has contributed to a process of progressive and mutual adjustment. It is difficult, however, to be more specific with regard to the relevance of radical

nationalist actors for two reasons: firstly, the lack of scholarly analysis of policy processes in Corsica; secondly, the lack of visibility and transparency of the regional institutions themselves. It should also be recalled that these actors' use of political violence has arguably been just as effective a strategy for guaranteeing political relevance as electoral and political participation.

Table 14.4. *The lifespan of Corsican radical nationalist parties (1983-onwards)*

a) *State level*

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1986		MCA				

b) *Regional level*

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1984				MCA		

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

14.4. Party organisation, party goals and policy impact

14.4.1. Problems in studying the organisation of radical Corsican nationalism

Examining the impact of crossing thresholds on party organisation is very difficult in the case of radical Corsican nationalism, not least due to the complex nature of this movement. The relationship between clandestine groups and public fronts is ambiguous; moreover, several movements compete to represent this political tradition. Thus, even if public parties have an official party organisation, these are constantly changing and do not constitute a strong constraint on political actors who believe that direct action is the most effective way to achieving political goals.

Firstly, radical Corsican nationalism is characterised by a very high degree of factionalism. Indeed, factionalism is a defining feature of the Corsican nationalist panorama (Vallée 1997; Olivesi 1998). There is no clear dominance of one group over the others; whilst some are more important than others, they also interact with and impact upon each other. Moreover, party names can refer to movements, parties, political groups or clubs, rallies of parties, electoral coalitions or clandestine violent groups. There are thus no well-established and coherent autonomist parties, such as exist in other territorial peripheries in Western Europe.

This complexity is one of the reasons for the lack of scholarly study of the Corsican nationalist phenomenon. As a consequence, it is not possible to analyse the organisational features of radical Corsican nationalism by focusing on one or two parties, as is the case with other autonomist parties included in this volume.

The basis for this factionalism is both ideological and personal. Ideological factionalism is structured along three main cleavages, which can be represented as a continuum along which various groups have located themselves at different periods of time: autonomy vs. independence, public vs. clandestine violent action, left vs. right. Personal factionalism is fuelled not only by a lack of party discipline, but also by the partial inter-penetration of organised crime and radical clandestine nationalism. For obvious reasons, it is difficult to assess the nature of these links between crime and politics, although the first judicial enquiries undertaken in the early 1980s concluded that nationalism could be a useful 'screen' for illegal activities (mainly racketeering).

Secondly, there is no clear distinction between parties and movements in Corsican nationalism. Political groups representing this tradition are active in several different arenas, and electoral politics is not always the most relevant one. This is true especially for radical nationalism; whilst the organisation that participates in elections is the most visible one, the key actor has always been the FLNC (and its clandestine rivals).

As a consequence, studying Corsican politics only through its public political parties would be misleading. For the same reason, analytical approaches commonly used in the comparative study of political parties, including that outlined in the Introduction to this volume, are difficult to apply to the Corsican case. Given that electoral politics is subordinated to political violence, a strictly 'legal' analysis provides at best a partial understanding of the situation. Within the radical Corsican nationalist movement, leadership is exerted by clandestine movements and violence is the key consideration when deciding what demands should be articulated in order to resolve the Corsican problem. In the words of Poggioli (2004: 112-113), "it is from the clandestine organisation, and on the basis of its directives, that the Corsican movement for national liberation, in all its components, was created." Political action in other arenas, including the electoral one, are thus dependent on directives from the clandestine sphere. In other words, the 'mass struggle' and the 'institutional struggle' are at the service of the armed struggle. One could also add that self-limited violence is a useful instrument for a movement that is not electorally dominant in the Corsican arena. Political violence is thus a strategy that places Corsican nationalist demands centre stage. In this sense, the use of political violence is rational: it promotes actors that would otherwise be marginal, and is a

nap new academic press

way of placing pressure on central authorities to respond to these actors' territorial demands.

14.4.2. Party goals

Prior to the early 1980s, the difficulties of accessing state and European level institutional arenas (for reasons outlined above) and the absence of a regional level of representation meant that the primary goal of radical nationalist groups was to give visibility to the 'Corsican problem' (in its social, economic and political manifestations). The FLNC's pursuit of the Lutte de Libération Nationale, inspired by anti-colonial struggles in the Third World, aimed to secure Corsican independence from the French state; as noted above, political violence was the strategy employed to achieve this policy goal. It is in this latter respect that radical nationalists diverged clearly from their moderate counterparts. Strategic differences aside, however, these actors shared a common conceptualisation of the Corsican problem. This encompassed issues of economic under-development, immigration, cultural standardisation and environmental exploitation by non-insular actors. Both radical and moderate groups also concurred in placing the blame for these problems on the French authorities and decades of political neglect of the island's needs.

From 1983 onwards, however, radical nationalists also pursued the goal of vote-maximisation. This was in part a response to the new political opportunity structure opened up by the creation of new regional institutions, which presented a new arena within which to articulate nationalist demands. Radical nationalists thus sought to attract electoral support as a prerequisite for securing a voice within the Corsican Assembly. As noted above, regional representation was first achieved in 1984. However, passing this threshold did not have a major impact on the party's policy ambitions. The crucial change in rhetoric – marked by the moderation and increasing ambivalence of the movement's ultimate territorial goal – had already taken place some years previously in response to internal reflections on ensuring the resonance of the radical nationalist message with the Corsican population.

Up until very recently, radical nationalists were successful in increasing their electoral presence at the regional level, and establishing themselves as key actors within Corsican politics. This was achieved in spite of periods of deep internal divisions within the movement itself, and competition from smaller radical and moderate nationalist groups. On the basis of this electoral growth throughout the 1980s and 1990s, radical nationalists also became the preferred interlocutors between the insular political class and the French authorities, and were able to push for a range of policy concessions. In this respect, radical nationalists were also able to meet some of

nap new academic press

their policy goals, in the ways that are outlined in more detail below. During the 1990s, CN (as the main party representing the radical tradition) also sought to build on its electoral consolidation by presenting itself as a possible party of regional government. To this end, the party undertook to further moderate its image, with the emphasis placed on the party's credibility and seriousness as a political actor. This also entailed adapting the party's territorial demands. A long tradition of anti-Europeanism was replaced by a new commitment to demanding 'independence in Europe' (Elias 2008: 128-132). This was an effort to acknowledge, on the one hand, the realities of European integration as a framework that could facilitate self-government for the island; on the other, the retention of the rhetoric of independence sought to reassure CN's more radical support base that core principles had not been abandoned wholesale. The party's office-seeking ambitions were never realised, due both to the governing majorities usually secured by the traditional parties and the refusal of the latter to consider cooperating with political actors that refused to condemn the use of political violence. Nevertheless, radical nationalists were successful in pushing for further territorial reform, which eventually came in the form of the Matignon Process at the end of the 1990s (although, as noted above, these were eventually not implemented because of judicial and popular opposition).

For over two decades, therefore, it is arguable that radical nationalists successfully pursued the two goals of vote and policy simultaneously. However, the result of the 2010 regional election saw the radical nationalist alliance Corsica Libera eclipsed by the spectacular electoral breakthrough of a new moderate nationalist alliance, Femu a Corsica. Radical nationalists thus face a new stage in their lifespan where their electoral and political salience has been compromised, and where new strategies are required in the pursuit of policy goals.

14.4.3. Policy impact

The policy impact of radical Corsican nationalism has been significant. Compared to other French regions where autonomist parties have mobilised, radical nationalism has been successful in obtaining policy concessions in a range of areas. This is particularly striking given that traditional Corsican parties have not made similar autonomy demands. Policy success has taken three forms.

Firstly, radical Corsican nationalists have been successful in pushing for greater autonomy for the island. Whilst moderate nationalists only obtained limited reforms in the 1970s, their radical counterparts have arguably been instrumental in forcing central authorities to respond to nationalist mobilisation. The two statutes of 1982 and 1991, along with the

nap new academic press

2002 reforms, had no equivalent on mainland France. French governments always justified institutional reform on the basis that Corsica was an island. However, it is difficult to deny that the presence of nationalist mobilisation (and specifically the threat of political violence) contributed to these developments (see above). This was particularly true of the earlier reforms, when the traditional political parties resolutely opposed nationalist demands. The political influence of radical nationalism has become more difficult to assess in recent years as the centre-periphery cleavage has cut across the traditional left-right cleavage. Nevertheless, even the 2002 reforms – although not eventually implemented due to their popular rejection – have been analysed by many as a concession made by central government to nationalists. Radical nationalist actors, such as Jean-Guy Talamoni and Paul Quastana, participated in the negotiations leading up to these proposals alongside regional councillors of other political persuasions. Radical nationalist representatives were thus considered to be key interlocutors in the process of territorial reform. This formal involvement built on a much longer period of informal contacts between clandestine activists and the French authorities, using freemasonry networks as a channel of negotiation. However, the secret nature of these interactions makes assessing the precise policy impact of radical nationalist groups extremely difficult.

Secondly, radical Corsican nationalists have influenced decision-making in relation to economic policy. Corsica is a poor region that receives substantial financial support from the French state. This assistance consists of a series of specific provisions among which the most important is the Plan of Exceptional Investment with a value of approximately €2 billion. The fact that such resources have been so forthcoming reflects, in part, the way in which the Corsican problem is understood by the French authorities, that is, as being rooted in difficult material conditions. The size of these financial transfers also provoked some jealousy in other regions; one argument frequently heard in the mainland French media in favour of Corsican independence is that the island is too expensive and should be gotten rid of. However, it has also been demonstrated – notably through journalistic investigations and parliamentary reports – that particularistic financial advantages have been offered to nationalists actors or economic sectors where nationalism has some influence (such as agriculture) by the French state.

Thirdly, there has been an influence in the area of cultural and linguistic policy. Paradoxically, in Corsica cultural associations have played a marginal role in promoting the protection and promotion of insular culture and the Corsican language, as has been the case in Brittany, Catalonia or Occitania. Rather, these claims have been made predominantly by nationalist representatives, and radical actors in particular (given their dominant

representation within the Corsican Parliament). This has led to a considerable investment of public money in these areas. There have also been ambitious attempts to give formal recognition to the existence of the Corsican nation. For example, on the initiative of radical nationalist representatives, the Corsican Assembly passed a motion recognising the existence of a 'Corsican people' on 13 October 1988. This was approved by the French Parliament in 1991, although it was declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Council later that year.

All these manifestations of policy impact do not mean that radical Corsican nationalists have achieved their political programme; on the contrary, these policy concessions are considered to be far from satisfactory. These actors continue to criticise the inadequacy of the responses of Corsican and French authorities, claiming that Corsican identity and socio-economic development remain fundamentally under threat. However, with the recent triumph of moderate nationalist groups in the 2010 regional election, it remains to be seen to what extent radical nationalists will retain their policy relevance within the Corsican political arena. With their institutional representation reduced, and with the initiative having passed to their more moderate counterparts, radical nationalists are faced with new questions about how to make their voices heard within Corsican politics.

14.5. Conclusion

Radical Corsican nationalism offers an interesting example of the different kinds of repertoires available to autonomist actors in their pursuit of self-government. Faced in the 1970s with a closed political system in Corsica, political violence was adopted as the best strategy for forcing the issue of Corsican self-government onto the political agenda of the traditional Corsican parties and the French authorities. In time, however, clandestine political violence was complimented by electoral and social activism, as part of a global strategy for securing Corsican independence. The former has always been dominant however, and has dictated the behaviour of different radical political fronts within the Corsican institutional arena. An electoral strategy has thus been grafted onto a project that espouses violence as its primary means of drawing political attention to Corsica's problems.

The opaque relationship between the clandestine and the electoral manifestations of nationalist mobilisation has contributed to the failed institutionalisation of radical Corsican nationalism. At different times, the movement has been deeply divided over questions of the appropriateness of political violence as a strategy, and the relationship between the movement's clandestine and public political actions. Such divisions have created a highly fragmented and unstable nationalist panorama that has undermined the development of organisationally autonomous and coherent

political parties. This organisational weakness, as well as difficulties in securing representation at other territorial levels, has also meant that radical nationalists have never pursued the kind of multi-level electoral strategy favoured by other autonomist parties examined in this volume. And yet, this chapter has argued that radical Corsican nationalists have still managed to exert an important influence within Corsican politics. Political violence has played no small part in securing the movement's relevance; however, different political fronts also dominated nationalist representation within the Corsican regional institutions since the 1980s (at least until 2010). The movement's transition from 'protest to power' has been incomplete, since radical nationalists have yet to enter regional government. Nevertheless, successive waves of territorial reform – unmatched elsewhere within the French state – has enhanced Corsican political autonomy in important ways. A further impact has been on the attitudes of Corsica's traditional parties; these have become increasingly sensitive to the need for island-specific answers to deep-rooted economic, social and cultural problems.

The movement's recent loss of dominance within the nationalist panorama raises important questions about the future strategy for radical Corsican groups. With the apparent demise of its electoral strategy, there is the prospect of a return to political violence as the key mechanism for pushing the movement's territorial project. A growth in clandestine activity, however, may also trigger further internal instability, as different actors disagree on the best way of regaining influence within the Corsican political arena. The future of the 'ballots and bullets' approach may thus be highly contested, as radical Corsican nationalists once again face difficult choices about how to achieve an independent Corsica.

References

Briquet, Jean-Louis (1997a) 'Les fondements d'une "utopie". La contestation nationalitaire en Corse', in: Christian Bidégary (ed.), *Europe occidentale: le mirage separatist*. Paris: Economica, pp. 139–152.

Briquet, Jean-Louis (1997b) *La tradition en mouvement. Clientélisme et politique en Corse*. Paris: Belin.

Briquet, Jean-Louis (1998) 'Le problème corse', *Regards sur l'Actualité*, 240, April, 25–40.

Briquet, Jean-Louis (2001), 'Les vrais enjeux de la question corse', *Mouvements*, 13, 104–108.

Briquet, Jean-Louis (2003), 'La politique au village. Vote et mobilisation électorale dans la Corse rurale', in: Jacques Lagroye (ed.), *La politisation*. Paris: Belin, pp. 31–45.

Crettiez, Xavier (1999), *La question corse*. Brussels: Complexe.

De Winter, Lieven, Marga Gomez-Reino and Jo Bulens (2006) 'The Vlaams Blok and the Heritage of Extreme-Right Flemish Nationalism', in: Lieven De Winter, Marga Gómez-

nap new academic press

Reino and Peter Lynch (eds.), *Autonomist Parties in Europe: Identity Politics and the Revival of the Territorial Cleavage – Vol. II*. Barcelona: ICPS, pp. 47–78.

Elias, Anwen (2008) *Minority Nationalist Parties and European Integration. A Comparative Study.* London: Routledge.

Frémy, Dominique and Michèle Frémy (eds.) (2006) *Quid 2006*. Paris: Robert Laffont.

Kofman, Eleonore (1982) 'Differential Modernisation, Social Conflict and Ethno-Regionalism in Corsica', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 5: 3, 300–312.

Loughlin, John (1985) 'The Elections to the Corsican Regional Assembly, August 1984', *Government and Opposition*, 20: 2, 240–250.

Loughlin, John (1987) *Ethnic Nationalism and Regionalism in France: A Case Study of Corsica*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Florence: European University Institute.

Newman, Saul (1994) *Ethnonationalist Movements in Western Europe. Mostly Ballots, Rarely Bullets.* Westwood: Greenwood Press.

Olivesi, Claude (1998) 'The Failure of Regionalist Party Formation in Corsica', in: Lieven De Winter and Huri Türsan (eds.), *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe*. London: Routledge, pp. 174–189.

Pellegrinetti, Jean-Paul and Ange Rovere (2004) *La Corse et la République. La vie politique de la fin du Second Empire à aujourd'hui*. Paris: Seuil.

Poggioli, Pierre (2004) *Derrière les cagoules. Le FLNC des années 80*. Ajaccio: DCL.

Roux, Christophe (2003) 'Regionalist Parties' Non-Violent Political Action', Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Edinburgh 28 March – 2 April.

Roux, Christophe (2005a) *Les 'Iles Sœurs'. Une sociologie historique comparée de la contestation nationalitaire en Corse et en Sardaigne*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Lille/Siena: University of Lille/Siena.

Roux, Christophe (2005b) 'Corse: vote à gauche, île de droite', in: Bernard Dolez, Annie Laurent, and Claude Patriat (eds.), *Le vote rebelle. Les élections régionales de mars 2004*. Dijon: Editions Universitaires de Dijon.

Seiler, Daniel-Louis (1982) *Les partis autonomistes*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Vallée, Jean-Charles (1997) 'Division chez les nationalistes: le cas de la Corse', in: Christian Bidégary (ed.), *Europe occidentale: le mirage separatist*. Paris: Economica, pp. 153–185.

nap new academic press

Jean-Marie Izquierdo

The Abertzale **Left in the Basque Country**

15.1. INTRODUCTION

Since the mid 1970s, political actors referred to as the '*abertzale* left' have mobilised within the Basque Country. These groups combine a strong left-wing ideology with a demand for independence for the Basque Country. Historically, the *abertzale* left have maintained close links with the clandestine paramilitary group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA); the terrorist group was established in 1959 and has pursued a strategy of political violence in pursuit of the same goals ever since.

This chapter maps out the lifespan of the *abertzale* left in the Basque Country, both within Spain (the autonomous communities of the Basque Country and Navarra) and France (the provinces of Lapurdi, Xiberoa and Behe-Nafarroa). In Spain, Herri Batasuna (HB) was created in 1978 as the main mouthpiece of the *abertzale* left tradition. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the party enjoyed growing electoral successes, although the decision in its earliest years to refrain from taking up parliamentary representation, as well as the attitude of other political parties, translated into limited political influence. Since the late 1990s, however, the *abertzale* left has struggled to overcome legal barriers blocking its participation in electoral competition at all territorial levels. This prompted several efforts at organisational renewal, which included the coordination of activities and political programmes across the Spanish and French Basque territories. This ultimately failed, however, due to different attitudes within the *abertzale* movement to ETA's continued strategy of violence. As a result, since the 2000s the *abertzale* left in different parts of the Basque territory has fragmented, and has pursued different goals with different degrees of success. Whilst these actors in the autonomous community of the Basque Country still struggle to gain authorisation to enter the electoral arena, their counterparts in Navarra and (to a lesser extent) the French Basque Country have been able to establish themselves as stable and increasingly relevant actors in their respective territorial arenas. The chapter thus examines the differential institutionalisation of the *abertzale* left across the Basque Country, and the different implications for the policy impact of these actors.

15.2. THE LIFESPAN OF THE ABERTZALE LEFT

In the Spanish Basque Country, HB was established in April 1978, as a coalition of leftist nationalist political groups with close links to the terrorist

group ETA.[1] In the previous year, these different actors had taken part in the illegal initiative Koordinadora Abertzale Sozialista, which sought to coordinate the actions of *abertzale* left parties and organisations in the defence of the national and social emancipation of the Basque Country; the movement was known as the Movimiento Vasco de Liberación Nacional. Once HB had been established, the party immediately crossed the thresholds of declaration and authorisation by declaring its intention to contest the 1979 general election in the autonomous communities of the Basque Country and Navarra.[2] The party polled 15% of the vote in the Basque Country and 8.9% in Navarra (see table 15.1). Although the party's vote-share in the former translated into 3 seats in the Spanish Congress of Deputies, it did not take up this representation; this anti-system strategy allowed HB to proclaim the illegitimacy of the newly created institutions. A similar stance was taken in the first elections to the Navarran parliament in 1979, and the Basque parliament in 1980 (where the party polled 11.1% and 16.5% respectively). This 'empty chair' strategy was not uncontroversial; two smaller groups left the party in the early 1980s in opposition to this approach.[3]

---

[1]   These groups included Acción Nacionalista Vasca (ANV), Euskal Sozialista Biltzarrea (ESB), Langile Abertzale Iraultzaile en Alderdia (LAIA) and Herri Alder di Sozialista Iraultzailea.

[2]   The division of the historical Basque Country in this way was criticised by the abertzale left, and was one of the reasons for the perceived illegitimacy of the new Spanish institutions created in the post-Franco period.

[3]   These were ANV and LAIA.

Table 15.1. *HB results in local, regional and general elections, 1978–1996 (% of vote)* [1]

	Local		Regional		State	
	Basque Country	Navarra	Basque Country	Navarra	Basque Country	Navarra
1979	10.6	15.3		11.1	15.0	8.9
1980			16.5			
1982		12.4			14.8	11.7
1983	13.2			10.6		
1984			14.7			
1986		15.0	17.4	13.7	17.8	14.0
1987	21.2					
1989		11.9			16.8	12.0
1990			18.3	11.2		
1991	21.9					
1993					14.6	10.5
1994			16.0			
1995	19.5	8.5		9.2		
1996					12.6	8.3

Sources: Gobierno Vasco (www.euskadi.net); Gobierno de Navarra (www.navarra.es).
Note:
    Results are provided up until the arrest of the HB executive in 1997. The electoral perfor-
    mance of subsequent *abertzale* left organisations are presented later in the chapter.

However, this strategy was not pursued at the local and European levels. Representation within local and municipal councils was acceptable since these institutions were not a creation of Spain's 1978 Constitution, but rather constituted the continuation of 'original' Basque institutions. At the European level, representation within the European Parliament was pursued as it was an international body; it also provided HB with a platform for articulating its political project to an international audience. According to Koldo Gorostiaga, an *abertzale* left MEP between 1999 and 2004, the movement's aim was to secure Euskal Herria's (the Basque Country) position as a legal actor directly within the European Union. Upon the introduction of European elections in Spain in 1987, HB's charismatic Txema Montero was elected as part of a joint list of left and independentist groups from Catalonia and Galicia; he was re-elected when HB stood alone in the 1989 election. This seat was lost in 1994, although regained in 2004 by Euskal Herritarrok (EH, HB's successor party, see below). Although a new *abertzale* left list – Herritarren Zerrenda (HZ) – was formed to contest the 2004 European election, it was banned by the Spanish Supreme Court for its links to the illegalised Batasuna (an *abertzale* left party created in 2001).

In the 2009 European election, the list Iniciativa Internacionalista – Solidaridad entre los Pueblos (IIS) was also investigated for its possible links to Batasuna, although it was eventually allowed to compete;[4] however, with only 1.1% of the Spanish vote, the party failed to elect an MEP to the European Parliament.

HB's anti-system strategy at the state and regional levels did not, however, mean that the party lacked relevance in these institutional arenas (see table 15.2). Other autonomist and state-wide parties were forced to respond to HB's role as ETA's political voice. In 1988, for example, political parties in the Basque Country signed the *Pacto de Ajuria Enea*,[5] which committed the signatories to protect democratic principles and to cooperate in the fight against terrorism. The pact had the effect of officially rejecting the political project espoused by HB – and by extension ETA – and any institutional cooperation with the former. As a result, HB was effectively excluded from the political arena in the Basque Country (although not in Navarra), and was unable to cross the threshold of government at the regional level.

Table 15.2. *The* abertzale *left's lifespan in the Basque autonomous community*

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1980				HB		
1984				HB		
1986				HB		
1990				HB		
1994				HB		
1998					HB (99)	
2001			EH			
2005	AG		EHAK			
2009	EHAK					

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

---

4   Nevertheless, Arnaldo Otegi, Batasuna spokesperson and an ex-member of ETA, invited abertzaleleftvoters to support IIS in the 2009 European election.
5   These parties included Alianza Popular (AP), Centro Democrático y Social (CDS), Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV), Euskadiko Ezkerra (EE), the Basque branch of the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) and Eusko Alkartasuna (EA).

After a period of ten years and a decline in its electoral fortunes (see table 15.1), HB moderated its strategy somewhat. In 1997, for example, the party decided to cooperate with organisations such as the Commission for Human Rights established by the Basque parliament, which defended the rights of Basque nationalist prisoners. However, ETA's kidnapping and assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco, a member of the state-wide Partido Popular (PP), in July 1997 led to a wave of opposition against both ETA and HB.[6] A few months later, HB's executive board was arrested on charges of cooperating with armed groups, for having shown a video produced by ETA in an internal meeting.

This event required the *abertzale* left to look for other ways of securing its presence within Basque and Navarran regional arenas. In 1998, EH was quickly established as the successor to HB. The party was composed of members of HB as well as two other organisations opposed to terrorist violence, namely *Zutik* (in the Basque Country) and *Batzarre* (in Navarra).[7] EH immediately declared its intention to participate in forthcoming local, regional and European elections and faced no problems in being authorised to do so. The elections would take place in the context of a new peace process launched by the signing of the *Pacto de Lizarra Garazi* on 12 September 1998,[8] followed by ETA's announcement of a ceasefire a few days later. EH also sought to adapt its programme to take into account the strong popular opposition to ETA's violence; the party thus focused more on territorial claims than on revolutionary/violent methods for achieving the goal of a socialist self-governing Basque country (although the party refused to formally denounce ETA).

EH had a series of electoral success in the 1998 and 1999 regional, local and European elections (see table 15.3). This was in large part a consequence of expectations raised by the aforementioned peace process; hopes

---

[6]   ETA threatened to assassinate Blanco unless the Spanish Government started to transfer all ETA prisoners to prisons in the Basque Country within 48 hours. Hours before the ultimatum expired, demonstrations demanding his liberation took place all over Spain and in the French Basque Country. The event led to the creation of the antiterrorist group Foro de Ermua (Ermua being Blanco home town), to promote the "Ermua spirit". The event also marked the beginning of a series of popular protests that came to constitue a symbolic arena of contestation between those who denounced ETA's strategy of political violence (PP, PSOE, and the Basque autonomist parties PNV, EA and Ezker Batua) and those who did not (HB).

[7]   *Batzarre* was established as a list of candidates for the Navarrese foral election in 1987, and was officially constituted as a political party in 1991. Zutik was its counterpart in the Basque Country.

[8]   The pact was signed by the Basque Country's nationalist political parties (including EH, PNV, EA and AB), together with some trade unions and social movements; it adopted a methodology to solve the Basque conflict similar to that used in the Irish peace process (Majuelo 2000; Bustillo 2007).

that the Basque conflict could be resolved contributed translated into support for EH. In the Basque parliament, the party voted in favour of the investiture of the PNV's Juan José Ibarretxe as leader of the Basque government (known as the *Lehendakari*) in January 1999; in March of that year, a governing agreement was reached whereby EH would provide legislative support for a PNV-EA coalition government. For the first time, therefore, a representative of the *abertzale* left crossed the threshold of relevance. It should be noted, however, that EH's influence was limited to blackmail potential; this was due to the fact that the governing agreement explicitly stated that participation in government would require EH to formally condemn the use of political violence.

Table 15.3. *Electoral results of the abertzale left in the Basque Autonomous Community, 1998–2009 (% of vote)*

	Electoral level	EH/ Batasuna	AuB	HZ/IIS	AG	EHAK	Aralar
1998	R	17.7					
1999	E	12.6					
1999	L	26.8					
2000	G						
2001	R	10.0					
2003	L	*	*				1.2
2004	G						3.1
2004	E			*			1.3
2005	R				*	12.5	2.3
2007	L						0.6
2008	G					*	2.6
2009	E			1.1[1]			1.3[2]
2009	R					*	6.1

Key: E: European election; G: General election; R: regional election; L: Local election.
* indicates illegalisation of the party

Notes:
[1] % of vote within the Spanish constituency
[2] As part of the alliance *Europe de los Pueblos-Verdes*.

ETA's breaking of the ceasefire in November 1999, and EH's refusal to reject the group's resumption of hostilities, brought an end to the period of co-operation with the PNV and EA. After further terrorist attacks in Janu-

ary and February 2000, the *Lehendakari* definitively rejected the possibility of cooperating with the *abertzale* left in coalition government. This prompted EH to withdraw its 14 representatives from the Basque parliament, leaving the PNV-EA in minority government. The stalemate that ensued forced early elections to be called in May 2001. EH witnessed a dramatic decline in its electoral fortunes, with its share of the vote falling to 10.0% (compared to 17.7% in the previous regional election). The party was thus punished by its supporters for its clandestine partner's resumption of political violence, and deprived of its political relevance within the Basque parliament (see above, table 15.2).

This electoral defeat prompted EH to be refounded as *Batasuna*.[9] Whereas the political activities of HB and EH had been limited to the Spanish Basque Country (encompassing the autonomous communities of the Basque Country and Navarra), Batasuna aspired to unite the *abertzale* left in all of the Basque territories, including those in the French Basque Country (for more on the *abertzale* left in France, see below). Together, these territories were referred to as *Euskal Herria*. The new organisation thus espoused a strategy of territorial expansion. The electoral and political impact of this new group, however, was severely curtailed by the Spanish Congress's approval of the so-called *Ley de Partidos* on 12 April 2002. The law foresaw the illegalisation of any party which employed xenophobic or racist discourse, or which supported political violence or the activities of terrorist groups. Batasuna was banned by the Spanish Supreme Court in 2003 because of its explicit support for ETA (Izquierdo 2003). This forced the *abertzale* left in the Spanish Basque Country to cross back over the threshold of authorisation.

Over the next few years, re-naming efforts in an attempt to continue competing in elections at different territorial levels were continually thwarted by illegalisation. In the 2003 local elections, for example, the *abertzale* left presented itself as Autodeterminaziorako Bilgunea (AuB), but 229 out of the party's 249 candidates were disqualified from taking part in the contests just a few days before they were to take place.[10] HZ was disqualified ahead of the 2004 European election, as was Aukera Guztiak (AG) ahead of the 2005 regional elections in the Basque Country. It should be noted, however, that in the latter election the list presented by Euskal Herrialdeetako Alderdi Komunista (EHAK) did obtain repre-

---

[9]   Not all members of EH participated in the new organisation. For example, ANV, which had participated in HB since its creation in 1978, decided not to form part of *Batasuna*, preferring to contest future elections on its own. EHAK was created as a separate group in 2002, although it undertook minimal political activity until 2005. Its programme espoused Marxist-Leninist and independentist positions.

[10] AB candidatures in 20 municipal council elections succeeded because local courts had insufficient time to examine all the files.

sentation in the Basque Parliament (12.5% of votes and 9 seats in the Basque parliament) (see above,table 15.2).This was achieved by announcing, only a few weeks before the election, that the party defended the same political values as those of the outlawed *abertzale* left groups; moreover, the party only began campaigning officially a week before the election, in illusive terms that "the militancy clearly understood" (Iriondo and Sola 2006). However, the party did not succeed in crossing any subsequent thresholds, and it was suspended for 3 years ahead of the 2008 general elections for its links to ETA.

Faced with these difficulties in securing authorisation to participate in elections within Spain, the *abertzale* left sought refuge in the French Basque Country. For example, EH's MEP between 1999 and 2004, Koldo Gorostiaga, crossed the border and set up his office in Bayonne with his parliamentarian assistant, Egoitz Urrutikoetxea.

The re-foundation and subsequent illegalisation of the *abertzale* left from 2001 onwards had different implications in Navarra. Aralar had been created in 2000 as a critical current within EH, opposed to ETA's political strategy. In 2001 the party decided to go-it-alone, leading to an important re-positioning of *abertzale* leftpolitical forces in Navarra.[11] In the 2003 regional election in Navarra, for example, the party won 8.02% of the vote (4 seats) (see table 15.4). Ahead of the 2004 general election, the party co-operated with other Basque nationalists in Navarra (Batzarre, EA and the PNV; the only group excluded was Batasuna) and several independent candidates to present a single electoral platform, Nafarroa Bai (NaBai). NaBai defended three main goals: the peaceful resolution of the Basque conflict and opposition to ETA's violence; self-determination and the reform of Navarra's territorial status (with links to the Basque autonomous community as well as the French Basque Country); and the defence of Navarran interests within the Spanish parliament in relation to social, economic, education and culture policies. The alliance proved to be highly successful; it polled the best result for Basque nationalism in the region since the 1986 general election (18% of votes and one representative).

This success was repeated in subsequent local and regional elections. For example, in the 2007 local elections the party was the most voted political party, and crossed the threshold of government in several municipalities. In the 2007 election to the Navarran parliament, the party emerged as the second largest political force behind the Unión del Pueblo Navarro (UPN); its 23.7% of the vote gave the party 12 parliamentary seats out of 50. The party proposed forming a tripartite coalition with the

---

[11]   Although the party also contested elections in the Basque Country, its electoral presence has always been considerably weaker than in Navarra.

Navarran branches of the state-wide PSOE and Izquierda Unida (IU). In the event, the coalition was not finalised due to the PSOE's central party organisation prohibiting such a deal. Nevertheless, the discussions showed that NaBai had acquired clear coalition potential within the Navarran parliament.

Table 15.4. *Electoral results of the abertzale left in the Autonomous Community of Navarra, 1999–2009 (% of vote)*

	Electoral level	EH/*Batasuna*	HZ/IIS	Aralar
1999	R	15.6		
1999	E	15.1		
1999	L	14.9		
2000	G	*		
2003	R			8.0
2003	L	*		4.8
2004	G			17.8[2]
2004	E		*	4.4
2007	L			15.8[2]
2007	R			23.6[2]
2008	G			18.5[2]
2009	E		1.1[1]	4.4[3]

Key: E: European election; G: General election; R: regional election; L: Local election.
* indicates illegalisation of the party
Notes:
[1]   % of vote within the Spanish constituency
[2]   As part of the coalition NaBai.
[3]   As part of the alliance *Europe de los Pueblos-Verdes*.

Abertzale left forces emerged in the French Basque Country during the 1970s and 1980s.[12] They pursued an anti-system strategy similar to that espoused by their counterparts in the Spanish Basque Country, and defen-

---

[12]   These included Enbata (1963-1974) and Euskal Herriko Alderdi Socialista (1975-1981). The latter was the first party to present itself on both sides of the French/Spanish border and had close links with HB. Later groups included Euskal Batasuna (EB) created in 1986, and Ezkerreko Mugimendu Abertzalea (EMA).

ded socialism and independence for the Basque Country. During the 1980s, the groups were also seduced by the strategy of political violence pursued by ETA. By the 1990s, however, this option was abandoned in favour of a more pragmatic approach of trying to secure representation within institutional arenas (especially at the local level) and participating in French government-funded projects.[13] In 1995, Abertzaleen Batasuna (AB) was established as a coalition bringing together smaller *abertzale left* parties; it became the main mouthpiece of this movement in the French Basque Country.

Until the 1990s, the French *abertzale* focused on competing in local elections, as this offered the best opportunity for securing representation; the movement was also financially and organisationally weak, and thus had limited resources to extend its electoral strategy. With the creation of AB, the *aberzale* also began to compete at other territorial levels, presenting candidates in cantonal, regional, general and European elections. This was deemed to be a necessary step to affirm AB's institutionalisation as a political party. On most occasions, AB ran with other autonomist parties, including the Parti Nationaliste Basque (PNB) and Eusko Alkartasuna-Iparralde (EA-I); both these parties were linked to sister organisations in the Spanish Basque Country (PNV, EA). For the 2007 general election, a new alliance was formed, Euskal Herria Bai (EH Bai), which brought together AB, EA-I and Batasuna.[14] However, there was limited success in passing the threshold of representation in any election above the local level. A major obstacle has always been the delineation of the constituencies within which the French *aberzale* competes. The French Basque Country is contained within the larger Atlantic Pyrenees *département* (used in cantonal and general elections) and the region of Aquitaine (for regional elections). It has thus proved difficult to mobilise sufficient support beyond these groups' core electorate to elect representatives. In the 2007 general election, for example, EH Bai failed to reach the 12.5% threshold for passing to the second round of voting in any of the constituencies in which it was present. In the 2010 regional election, the coalition fared even worse, polling only 0.02% of votes in the first round of elections in Aquitaine. In European elections, the French Basque Country is contained within the much larger South-West constituency, where it faces the same difficulties. For this reason, the French *aberzale* has not passed the threshold of authorisation in cantonal (until 2001), regional, general and European elections.

---

[13] For example, the project Pays Basque 2010 which sought to promote local governance in the French Basque Country. See Ahedo (2003).

[14] Although the PNB had originally been part of talks to join this coalition, the ETA attack on Barajas airport in Madrid on 30 December 2006 led the party to decide that it could not participate in the same electoral forum as Batasuna.

There has been more success on the local level, where the thresholds of representation and relevance have been crossed, often through cooperation with state-wide parties (see table 15.5). For example, in the 1988 local elections, Jakes Abeberry, the charismatic leader of French *abertzale* left, got 13.5% of votes and was elected as a local councillor. In 1991, the party co-operated with the Union pour la Démocratie Française's (UDF) Didier Borotra to win control of the city of Biarritz, which they did. In this specific context, the *abertzale* left possessed coalition potential in the eyes of its state-wide rival. In the 1995 local elections, Abeberry (by then leader of AB) and the *Biarritz Autrement* list ran again with the UDF and his seat was retained. In the 2001 local and departmental elections, AB confirmed its progression at the local level by securing *abertzale* left representation for the first time on the General Council of the Atlantic Pyrenees (for the municipality of Saint-Étienne de Baïgorry), and in other towns where the *abertzale* left had not previously been represented. However, EH Bai failed to retain this council seat in the 2008 cantonal elections.

Table 15.5. *The* abertzale *left's lifespan in the French Basque Country (cantonal and local levels)*

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1989		EB				
1995					AB	
2001					AB	
2008					EHBai	

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

At the local level, therefore, the French *aberzale* gained credibility in the eyes of a conservative and centre-right electorate (Izquierdo 2001). This enabled these actors to build coalitions in order to pass the thresholds of representation and relevance. They were particularly important in contributing to the development of cultural and linguistic policies in the local institutions (such as Biarritz) where they were represented. This lifespan trajectory is particularly striking given that, during the 2000s, the *abertzale* left across the border in Spain was also facing major obstacles to electoral authorisation. AB's eventual withdrawal from the Batasuna process (see below) enabled it, and the French *aberzale*, to follow a different path of institutional representation and influence (albeit limited to the local level). Although there was renewed cooperation with Batasuna in the French Bas-

que Country as part of the EH Bai coalition, the illegalisation of the party's Spanish counterpart had little effect on the electoral and political progress of the *abertzale* left in France.

15.3. ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS

In *abertzale* left ideology, the primary level of decision-making has always been that closest to the members. For parties belonging to this tradition, therefore, the most important level is the local one. This also reflects the movement's territorial prioritisation, with local government being considered the only legitimate institutional tier. Focusing electoral activity at this level was also, in the movement's earliest years, a symbolic rejection of regional and state levels of political representation.

Since Spain's transition to democracy, therefore, the *abertzale* left emerged primarily at the local level. Numerous small political groups appeared to promote a socialist and independentist Basque political project, and mostly supported ETA's strategy of violence. As noted above, in 1978 these parties came together to form the coalition HB, with the support of ETA. Groups that disagreed with the use of political violence formed a competitor party, EE. By the spring of 1978, HB and EE were the two main parties representing the *abertzale* left tradition mostly in the Basque Country but also in Navarra.

At the local level, HB's organisation was structured through local assemblies; above this was the provincial level, with the national (Basque) tier above this constituting the party's main decision-making body. Decisions about party ideology and strategy were taken by a national executive composed of approximately thirty representatives; the majority of these represented local assemblies whilst other delegates represented different political groups within HB.

During the 1980s and 1990s, HB's organisational model did not undergo any significant changes. Even the arrest of the party's executive board in 1997 did not lead to substantial organisational reform; a new executive was immediately appointed and EH assumed HB's organisational structures upon its creation in 1998. The new party sought to enlarge its organisational scope by incorporating new groups such as Batzarre and Zutik (see above). However, this did not alter EH's internal structures, which remained based on those established by its predecessor, HB.

From the late 1990s onwards, in contrast, the *abertzale* left underwent far-reaching organisational change. This was prompted by ETA's decision to break its ceasefire in 1999. One consequence was that EH was forced to withdraw its support for the PNV-EA government within the Basque parliament; in subsequent regional elections, the party saw the number of its representatives fall from 11 to 7. The decline of the party in elected office

however, was not directly a cause of internal change. More important was the party's position *vis-à-vis* ETA's strategy of political violence. EH's refusal to criticise this resumption of terrorist activities led to the withdrawal of Batzarre and Zutik; as noted above, Aralar was also created as a critical current within EH to oppose the politics of violence. Moreover, the threat of illegalisation in the Basque Country and Navarra forced the *abertzale* left to seek alternative ways of maintaining a political presence in these political arenas.

This lead to the so-called *Batasuna process*, which saw the creation of a new organisation – Batasuna – and an expansion of the *abertzale* left's territorial strategy to the whole of Euskal Herria (spaning the Spanish and French Basque Countries). Batasuna thus sought to coordinate the political projects of HB and the weaker AB in the French Basque Country. This organisational response was a direct consequence of the threat to the *abertzale* left's electoral authorisation in the Spanish Basque Country.

First efforts at coordinating trans-border *abertzale* activities took place in the 1990s, in the context of the new peace process launched by the *Pacto de Lizarra Garazi* (see above). In 1999, *abertzale* left groups formed *Udalbiltza*, a forum for bringing together the movement's elected local representatives from across the Basque territory. In May 2000, Arnaldo Otegi, EH's spokesman and an ex-member of ETA, called for a new organisational structure to defend a 'socialist Euskal Herria'. The first goal was to coordinate and consolidate the different *abertzale* forces present during the Lizarra Garazi process; these included HB, AB, Zutik, Batzarre and other independents. They focused on developing an organisational presence for a new 'national' *abertzale* left party. Five political groups participated in the foundation of Batasuna.[15]

It was originally intended that the Batasuna process should be concluded by June 2001. However, the different electoral calendar of the French Basque Country prolonged this process; AB was involved in campaigns for the March 2001 local elections, and thus requested that the constitutive process be delayed until October 2001. AB thus participated in the latter stages of debate, between April and October 2001.[16] AB eventually signed up to the Batasuna process, with three *abertzale* left tendencies participating.[17] Once completed, Batasuna was able to cross the threshold of decla-

---

[15]   The abertzale left movement was represented by different ideological tendancies: Piztu Euskal Herria, defending independence and socialism for the Basque Country within a democratic framework; Igitaia eta Mailua, espousing a Marxist and independentist discourse; Aralar (see above); Bateginez, a group promoting the abandonment of political violence; and Arragoa, a party critical of ETA but which withdrew from the Batasuna process before its conclusion.

[16]   By the time of AB's participation in the Batasuna process, the initial sessions defining the new organisation's political project had been completed.

[17]   These factions within AB were Bateginez, Matalaz and Burujabe.

ration by holding meetings to discuss its participation in forthcoming municipal and foral elections in 2003 in Spain. Batasuna established its headquarters in Bayonne (the French Basque Country).

However, this attempt at organisational and strategic co-ordination faced numerous challenges. Firstly, the groups that formed part of Batasuna did not all support the use of violence as a means of securing self-determination for Euskal Herria. Aralar withdrew from Batasuna in 2001 for this reason, and established itself as an independent political party. AB was also divided in its support for this strategy; whilst the party eventually withdrew from the coalition, a small number of supporters of ETA's strategy chose to remain within Batasuna. This point of disagreement continues to divide the *abertzale* left movement. Secondly, the organisational project represented by Batasuna sought to coordinate activities across very different kinds of territorial and cultural entities. Thus, on the Spanish side, Batasuna sought to represent groups present in the autonomous communities of the Basque Country and Navarra, whilst on the French side, the historic Basque provinces did not have their own institutions, but spanned smaller local administrations and fell within and across larger regional units. This meant that the *abertzale* left movement in different parts of the territory had different strategic priorities that were not easy to align within a single organisational framework. Thirdly, although the Batasuna process sought to define a new ideology for the party, representatives from the French Basque country had not actively participated in these debates; there was concern that their Spanish Basque counterparts were attempting to graft their ideas onto a very different French context. This led AB to denounce Batasuna as 'foreign interference' in the affairs of the French Basque Country.

Finally, political developments in the Spanish context – and the growing threat of illegalisation – further aggravated the *abertzale* left's efforts at organisational coordination and consolidation. As noted above, this threat became a reality in 2003. The loss of electoral authorisation ushered in a period of organisational instability for the *abertzale* left in Spain, as successive groups were formed in an attempt to continue to articulate the movement's political project within the Basque and Navarran political arenas. Whilst many of these successor groups struggled to pass the threshold of authorisation, others were more successful. This was due to their explicit rejection of ETA's political violence. Thus, for example, Aralar has developed into a stable political organisation, with a three-tier organisational structure similar to that adopted by HB upon its creation (with local, provincial and 'national' levels of organisation). The party's organisational strength (and hence most intense electoral activity) is in Navarra, where it forms part of the successful alliance NaBai. Much of the latter's success, however, is also

due to the presence within the alliance of two larger parties with a longer and more stable organisational structure, namely the PNV and EA. The organisational resources bought by these actors have been crucial in facilitating NaBai's electoral and political consolidation in Navarra. The organisational evolution of the *abertzale* left is summarised in table 15.6.

Table 15.6. *Pressures for organisational change: the* abertzale *left in Spain*

Threshold	Local level	Regional level	State level	European level
V				
IV-B				
IV-A				
III		**Medium** (1980s & 1990s) - Growth of party in elected office **Strong** (post 2001) - Investment in the French Basque Country		
II		**Strong** (2000 onwards) - Threat of illegalisation led to organisational expansion in the French Basque country and the *Batasuna* process	**Strong** (2003) - Legislation banning the *abertzale* left; passing back over threshold prompts movement re-organisation	
I	**Medium** (1978) - Creation of local assemblies to structure electoral campaigns			

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

15.4. Changes in party goals

The *abertzale* left has always been characterised by a strong commitment to securing policy goals that have been largely consistent over time. The ideological project defended by these actors has been characterised as follows. Firstly, defence of the Basque language, Euskara, is central. For example, for Igitaia eta Mailua, an internal tendency within Batasuna, Euskara is defined as an instrument of resistance against globalisation. The language is thus what defines the Basque Country; its mythical origins distinguish Basque culture from more recent French and Spanish cultures. According to Bateginez, another tendency within Batasuna, speaking the Basque language is what defines an individual's Basque identity. Secondly, of equal importance is the defence of the Basque territory, or Euskal Herria. This is defined as the area where Euskara is spoken, and has historically corresponded with seven provinces. In Spain, these are Biscay, Gipuzkoa, Araba (which together constitute the autonomous community of the Basque Country) and Navarra; and in France, Lapurdi, Behe-Nafarroa and Xiberoa (these do not correspond to present day institutional entities). The *abertzale* left political project, in particular as conceived by Batasuna, is thus aimed at representing this entire territory regardless of the administrative status of different parts of this territory.

These core ideological values did not alter as a result of passing or stepping back over different thresholds. Thus, for example, the Batasuna process did not alter the *abertzale* left's main political purpose, namely to push for a socialist and independent Basque Country. However, at different points in time, the *abertzale* left has pursued its policy goal alongside other goals. Thus HB also sought to maximise its electoral standing from the outset, as a means of forcing its policy demands onto the Basque political agenda. However, it is worth recalling that, in its earliest years, the party refused to take up any parliamentary seats won in elections; influencing policy-making via institutional representation was shunned in favour of forcing other political actors to respond to its demands from outside the institutional arena. This anti-system strategy was abandoned by the 1990s when HB began to participate in the Basque parliament.

By the late 1990s, and after a period of electoral decline, HB pursued yet another strategy in order to gain policy influence within the Basque parliament. As noted above, the party strove to cooperate with parliamentary initiatives and other Basque political actors in order to advance its territorial project. HB's successor, EH, even courted government office, as demonstrated by its support for a PNV-EA government within the Basque parliament in 1999. However, the *abertzale* left's success in meeting its goals has always been made difficult by the actions of ETA, not least the latter's persistent use of political violence in spite of several ceasefire declarations. The group's

resumption of terrorist attacks in November 1999, for example, undermined EH's policy-seeking and office-seeking ambitions. The governing agreement with the PNV and EA was terminated, and the party lost credibility as a reliable political partner in the eyes of other autonomist actors. The party also suffered dramatic electoral losses in the subsequent regional election. In this respect, it is arguable that EH encountered the danger associated with failing to meet party goals (in this case, a definitive end to ETA's political violence and a peaceful solution to the Basque conflict).

Abertzale left attitudes towards the issue of political violence has also been the source of goal discordance within the movement. This became particularly evident during the Batasuna process. Divergent opinions over ETA's strategy led to the division of the *abertzale* movement across the Basque Country, with different groups opting to pursue different goals in their respective territorial arenas. In Navarra, Aralar and later NaBai, represented a tendency that clearly rejected the use of political violence, and preferred to pursue peaceful democratic avenues for pushing for Basque independence. As noted above, vote-maximisation and, more recently, office incumbency have been pursued to this end. This strategy has enabled NaBai to establish itself as a highly relevant political force in Navarra, a third way between the right-wing UPN and the left-wing PSOE.

In the French Basque Country, a similar disagreement over party goals was evident. AB, as the main representative of the French *abertzale* left, initially participated in the Batasuna process, although it later withdrew. During this period, AB discussed what strategy to adopt in pursuit of its policy goal. The choice was between reinforcing its strength as a local political party able to work in coalition with French state-wide parties, or signing up to Batasuna's project and thus accepting the use of political violence as a legitimate strategy. Following long and difficult internal debates, AB opted for the former; the priority was to retain relevance at the local level as a means of securing policy influence over key issues such as the Basque language and identity. As noted above, this strategy has been relatively successful in enabling the *abertzale* left in the French Basque Country to win local-level representation.

In contrast, in the autonomous community of the Basque Country, the *abertzale* left has struggled to meet a very different goal, namely gaining access to the political arena. As note above, successive attempts at renaming and covert political campaigning has thus far only had limited success in enabling these parties to pass the threshold of authorisation. This is a necessary step before these actors can begin to think about courting electoral support, as the basis for exerting policy influence within Basque politics.

15.5. The policy impact of the *abertzale* left

During the 1980s and most of the 1990s, the policy impact of the *abertzale* left, represented by HB, is hard to evaluate. This is not least due to the party's close links to ETA, and the impact of the latter's political violence on Basque and Spanish politics. During this period, it is arguably the latter, rather than the actions of the *abertzale* left, that shaped the responses of other Basque and Spanish political parties to the Basque conflict. For example, the *Pacto de Ajuria Enea* signed by Spanish state-wide parties and other Basque autonomist parties was a direct response to ETA's terrorist attacks, even though it also had the effect of excluding HB from political cooperation due to the links between the two movements. It should also be recalled that, during the 1980s, HB's choice to be absent from parliamentary arenas also limited the party's ability to shape decision-making in relation to its key territorial goal.

The different strategy adopted by EH from 1998 onwards sought to increase the *abertzale* left's direct policy influence. The party was a key instigator of the *rapprochement* between Basque nationalist parties with a view to mapping out a peaceful solution to the Basque conflict. In this spirit, the *Pacto de Lizarra Garazi* was signed, and EH provided support for the PNV-EA government in the Basque parliament. This represented the first real cooperation between nationalist forces of different ideological persuasions in the Basque Country. EH was also at the forefront of the Udalbiltza initiative which, as noted above, brought together elected Basque nationalist representatives in local government across Euskal Herria, to undertake nation-building activities such developing Basque-language media and associations to promote the Basque language and culture. However, ETA's resumption of its terrorist attacks in November 1999 undermined the *abertzale* left's ability to assert leadership in relation to the Basque conflict. The party's refusal to condemn the resumption of violence served to delegitimise it as a political interlocutor in the eyes of the Basque and Spanish political class. The party's subsequent electoral decline also limited the extent to which EH could exercise policy influence within the Basque parliament.

The *abertzale* left*'s* subsequent legal persecution has served to further frustrate efforts at meeting the party's territorial goal. This has not stopped initiatives to try and re-capture a pivotal role in Basque politics. For example, on 14 September 2004 Arnaldo Otegi, Batasuna's spokesperson, presented the *Declaración de Anoeta* to 15,000 *abertzale* left supporters in San Sebastian. He proposed a new peace proposal to end with the Basque conflict, through the organisation of two workshops. Whilst the first, between ETA and the Spanish government, would deal with bringing the former's armed struggle to an end, the second would bring together all political par-

ties in the Basque Country and Navarra to discuss a definitive solution to the territorial status of these Basque territories within Spain. This initiative did not, however, elicit the support of other political actors; in November 2010 Otegi was placed on trial for the crime of glorifying terrorism at this event.

In another respect, however, it is arguable that the *abertzale* left's electoral presence in the Basque Country (at least until the 2000s) was influential in another respect. The electoral space defended by these parties represented 17.7% of the Basque vote in 1998, and around 15% of the vote on average in the Basque Country and Navarra in previous years. This presence has forced other political parties to adopt their political and competitive strategies to the electoral presence of the *abertzale* left. For example, in 2000 the PNV and EA promoted a similar initiative to the Udalbiltza (called the Udalbide*)* in response to EH's initiative. Some years previously, the PNV had also responded to *abertzale* left political demands for Basque independence by radicalising its own territorial project. As noted by Pérez-Nievas (this volume), the so-called *plan Ibarretxe* proposed a third way between independence and limited autonomy, and aimed specifically to attract the support of *abertzale* left voters disillusioned with ETA's political violence. The *abertzale* left has also impacted upon the way other political parties conceptualise the Basque territory. In recent local and regional elections, for example, other Basque nationalist parties, and even the Basque branch of the PSOE, visited the French Basque Country as part of their election campaigns.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the situation of the *abertzale* left in Navarra and the French Basque Country is different to that in the Basque autonomous community. Different electoral strategies and goal preferences have allowed these actors to secure certain relevance within their respective territorial arenas. In particular in Navarra, the growth of Aralar (most recently as part of the coalition NaBai) has carved out a new political space for the *abertzale* left to articulate its political project. Although this formation has yet to enter regional government, it is nevertheless the case that it's electoral and political importance serves as a solid basis from which to influence decision-making within the Navarran parliament.

15.6. Conclusion

The lifespan of the *abertzale* left in the Basque Country cannot be understood without making reference to these actors' relationship with the terrorist group ETA. Established to give political voice to ETA's political project, the *abertzale* left's political influence has also been deeply shaped by the latter's actions. During the 1980s, the continuation of political violence prompted other political actors to exclude HB from the Basque political

arena; later on in the 1990s, ETA's ceasefire provided the context within which EH could exert leadership in the effort to define a peaceful resolution to the Basque conflict. Ultimately, however, EH was unable to impose its will on its clandestine partner, and the resumption of terrorist attacks undermined the party's position as a key interlocutor in the eyes of other Basque nationalist and state-wide actors.

The issue of political violence is also key to understanding the *abertzale* left*'s* evolution during the 2000s, not only the efforts to re-group and re-organise following Batasuna's illegalisation in 2003, but also the increasing fragmentation of the *abertzale* left movement across Euskal Herria. Support or opposition to ETA's strategy undermined efforts at forging a unified Basque movement. The challenges of trying to coordinate party activity across diverse territories, where different groups were faced with different institutional opportunity structures, also proved too great. This has led to a *abertzale* left movement that varies in its institutionalisation and relevance across the Basque territory. None of these groups have been able to bring about their ultimate policy goal, namely the independence of the Basque Country. In more limited ways, however, *abertzale* left parties that rejected ETA's political violence have been able to create stable political organisations with a consolidated electoral support base, as a platform for exerting policy influence either at the local (in the French Basque Country) or the regional (in Navarra) level.

In its most recent attempt to re-gain access to the democratic arena, on 24 October 2010 Batasuna issued a call to ETA to abandon its political violence once and for all (Aizpeolea 2010). Speculation about ETA's survival increased following a succession of arrests of key leaders and members; on 10 January 2011 the group announced a "general and permanent ceasefire". The extent to which this decision was a result of pressure from its political arm is unclear; the move, along with *Batasuna*'s formal renunciation of political violence, potentially creates the conditions propituous for the later's re-authorisation to compete in elections in the Spanish Basque Country. As on previous occasions, however, this will depend on the durability and sincerity of ETA's ceasefire. Whilst *Batasuna* is keen to stress that it has broken all links with the terrorist groups, the party's political future depends on convincing its sceptical political rivals of this definitive break in relations between the two. Failing to do so will consign *Batasuna* to several more years of struggling to pass the threshold of authorisation in Basque and Spanish politics.

References

Ahedo, Igor (2003) *Entre la frustración y la esperanza.* Oñate: IVAP.

Aizpeolea, Luis (2010) 'Batasuna pide a ETA el cese unilateral e incondicional de la violen-cia'*, El Pais* 25 October. Available at: http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/Batasuna/pide/ETA/cese/unilateral/incondicional/violencia/elpepinac/20101025elpepinac_3/Tes

Bustillo, Joxerra (2007) *Historia del sindicato LAB II, Hator gorrira! (2000-2005).* Tafalla: Txalaparta.

Iriondo, Iñaki and Ramon Sola (2006) *Demain Euskal Herria*. Bayonne: Gatuzain.

Izquierdo, Jean-Marie (2003) 'La procédure d'interdiction du parti Batasuna', *Les Cahiers de la Sécurité Intérieure*, 51.

Izquierdo, Jean-Marie (2001) 'Les élections municipales en Pays basque', *Limes*.

Majuelo, Emilio (2000) *Historia del sindicato LAB (1975–2000)*. Tafalla: Txalaparta.

Anwen Elias and Filippo Tronconi[1]

Autonomist Parties from Protest to Power:
A Comparative Overview

In this concluding chapter, we return to the analytical framework outlined in the Introduction to the volume, and provide a comparative overview of autonomist parties as they have moved from protest to power. In so doing, we draw on the extensive empirical data presented in the preceding case studies to identify general trends in the lifespans of autonomist parties, the implications of crossing different thresholds for party organisations and the pursuit of different goals, and the policy impact of autonomist parties (that is, their success in pushing for the territorial re-organisation of political authority). The aim of this analysis is two-fold: to compare cases within the autonomist party family and assess similarities and differences between them, and compare the autonomist party family with other party families in order to assess the particuliarity of the former.

16.1. The lifespans of autonomist parties

One of the key motivations for this study was the observation, outlined in the volume's opening chapter, that contrary to some predictions, autonomist parties have proved to be a stable and enduring feature of the political systems of the majority of West European states. The relevance acquired by many of these actors, and thus the direct challenge they pose to the structuring of political authority, informed our collective interest in mapping the lifespans of these actors, in order to better understand both their internal evolution as well as their impact on the institutions and actors which make up the environments in which autonomist parties operate.

And yet, as the case studies demonstrate clearly, it is impossible to identify a uniform process of autonomist party mobilisation and evolution across Western Europe. Parties' lifespan trajectories display a large amount of variation. Whilst some parties have struggled to cross the thresholds of authorisation (the *Aberzale* left) and representation (radical Corsican nationalists), others passed all thresholds of a party's lifespan very quickly after being established (the Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP)) and even at different territorial levels (the Lega Nord (LN)). Autonomist parties have thus not followed a single direct path from protest to power. In this

---

[1]   This chapter has been jointly authored. The final draft of sections 2 and 4 can be attributed to A. Elias, the final draft of sections 1 and 3 to F. Tronconi. Section 5 has been written jointly.

respect, autonomist parties are no different to other party families, such as the greens, where a uniform lifespan trajectory is also absent (see Rihoux 2006). The internal and external factors shaping a party's lifespan are considered in detail in the following sections.

However, it is nevertheless the case that, in recent decades, autonomist parties have been particularly successful in securing parliamentary representation and political relevance. As is discussed in greater detail below, a growing number of autonomist parties have entered government office (mostly at the regional level), a position that was a privilege of the very few three decades ago. The introduction, or acceleration, of decentralisation in many states has provided a new opportunity structure for autonomist parties; this has been exploited to gain new visibility, bargaining powers, as well as material and symbolic resources in support of these actors' territorial projects. In many cases, autonomist parties have thus been highly successful in pushing for the transfer of policy competences to regional institutions, and have become key actors in nation-building within their respective territories. Such negotiations on the territorial organisation of political authority are also on-going, with autonomist parties involved in complex multi-level negotiations along-side established mainstream parties. Thus whilst there is no evidence of a 'life-cycle' effect in the evolution of autonomist parties, there is more grounds for asserting the existence of a 'generational effect', whereby autonomist parties have been able to profit from (and have advanced) external conditions that have favoured the empowerment of the regional level since the 1970s.

16.1.1. The threshold of declaration

It is widely accepted in the political science literature that political parties are distinguished from other forms of social organisations by their commitment to gain representation in elected bodies (Downs 1957: 25; Epstein 1967: 9; Sartori 1976/2005: 56), and particularly in parliaments. Declaring a desire to participate in elections is thus often synonymous with the birth of a political party. However, if passing the threshold of declaration is a necessary step for a political party, this can be achieved in different ways. Duverger (1954) distinguishes between parties born from below (from civil society) and parties born from above (from a split with another party), arguing that such a distinction has long-standing consequences on the subsequent stages of party development.[2]

---

[2] Eliassen and Svåsand (1975) and Panebianco (1988: 50-53) further elaborate on Duverger's distinction. Here, we only partially follow their framework, as they take for granted that the end-point of party institutionalisation is a state-wide organisation, which clearly is not the case for the parties examined in this book.

This distinction is useful in analysing the autonomist parties studied in this volume, with some having been born from below (that is, from movements or pressure groups active in civil society) whilst others were born from above (from pre-existing political organisations). However, further differentiation within these two categories is possible. With regard to parties born from below, two models can be identified. Firstly, autonomist parties have developed out of cultural associations, where political representation is initially seen as a means of gaining visibility and other resources to support the goal of promoting the cultural and linguistic specificity of the national territory. Thus, for example, the Partido Nacionalista Vasco's (PNV) establishment in 1895 built on the activism of associations that fought for the restoration of the *fueros* in the Basque Country during the 1870s. More recently, the Union Valdôtaine (UV) was born as a transparty, non-ideological association with the aim of influencing the debate over the new autonomous regional institutions of post-fascist Italy, whilst the Società Filologica Veneta was a precursor to the Liga Veneta, a political party that would later merge into the LN. Secondly, autonomist parties have emerged out of military organisations. For example, in the Basque Country, Herri Batasuna (HB) was established in order to enable the paramilitary group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) to negotiate directly with the Spanish state. Similarly, in Corsica radical nationalist parties were created as a political mouthpiece for the clandestine group, the Front de Libération Nationale de la Corse (FLNC). In other cases, the connection between the political and the military branches of the organisation was less straightforward. In South Tyrol, for example, the SVP emerged soon after the end of the Second World War from the experience of the armed struggle against the Nazi regime.

Autonomist parties born from above can also be differentiated in two ways. Firstly, they can be formed as umbrella organisations bringing together pre-existing political organisations and their representatives. This is the case of the Galician Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG), created out of the merger of several smaller autonomist parties that had existed as clandestine organisations during the Franco regime. The LN also brought together several autonomist movements in northern Italy under the leadership of the Lega Lombarda. Convergència i Unió (CiU), as a permanent coalition between Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya (CDC) and Unió Democràtica de Catalunya (UDC), also approximates this type, even though the two original party organisations have remained active. Secondly, autonomist parties have emerged as "purifiers" within an existing party (Lucardie 2000). The best example of this is the Flemish Vlaams Blok (VB), which split from the Volksunie (VU) in protest at the latter's excessive compromises in negotiations on the decentralistion of political authority in Belgium during the late 1970s.

In some cases whether an autonomist party originated from below or from above is a matter of perspective, as it was formed out of the merger of pre-existing party organisations, which in turn were the result of the institutionalisation of social movements or cultural associations. The Scottish National Party (SNP) is a case in point. The party was born in 1934 as a merger of the Scottish Party and the National Party of Scotland; the latter was formed in 1928 by the members of several cultural associations, although it was initially led by Robert Cunninghame-Graham, an MP elected in 1886 as a candidate for the Liberal Party.

The above discussion may give the impression that the path from cultural or paramilitary activity to the political arena is a straightforward one. However, this is not always the case. If all established political parties must pass the threshold of declaration at some point, it is by no means necessary that all political movements aim for political representation. The case of the radical Corsican nationalists, for example, illustrate the internal debates and dilemmas political movements – and particularly movements in which armed groups are a relevant component – often face when the option of participating in electoral competition is considered.[3]

16.1.2. The threshold of authorisation

After a party has 'declared' its commitment to contest elections, political parties must be authorised to compete in elections before they can gain political representation.[4] Actual participation (that is, presence on the ballot sheet) may be conditional on the fulfilment of several legal requirements. For example, a party can be banned from political participation due to its anti-system nature. In our sample of cases, in the Basque Country the political parties close to ETA adopted several reincarnations from 1997 onwards in an attempt to overcome judicial barriers to electoral competition. In a more extreme sense, a number of parties were forced back below the authorisation threshold as a result of democratic breakdown. This occurred in Italy in 1922 and in Spain in 1939. In the first case, the precursor to the SVP – the Deutscher Verband– was banned as part of a process of the forced "Italianisation" of the German-speaking minority in South Tyrol. In the second case, two autonomist parties (UDC, one of the parties

---

[3]   The internal disputes and strategic dilemmas of nationalist movements engaged in armed struggle and democratic political participation are studied in depth by Irvin (1999), with reference to the cases of the Irish Republican Army/Sinn Féin, and ETA/HB.

[4]   Only in one of our cases was this sequence of threshold crossing not followed. In Catalonia, ERC gained representation before being formally authorised to participate in electoral competition. In the first democratic elections following General Franco's death, ERC was initially excluded from the lists admitted to the ballot because of its republican stance. It secured representation by joining a coalition of other leftist organisations, and was legalised only a few weeks after the election.

now constituting the CiU alliance, and Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC)) were well established and represented in elected bodies during the Spanish Second Republic; they were forced into clandestinity during the Franco regime until the restoration of democracy.

A further potential obstacle to crossing the threshold of authorisation is organisational weakness, with political parties unable to collect the required number of signatures or to lodge a deposit, where this is necessary. Due to such difficulties, for example, the SNP was unable to contest all Scottish seats in general elections prior to 1974. Moreover, most of the constituencies contested resulted in substantial costs for the party, as it was unable to reach the minimum electoral threshold for getting its deposit back (12.5% of votes until 1985, 5% afterwards). Such penalties can even endanger the existence of small parties. This example also shows that the threshold of authorisation is not necessarily crossed in one move, but can take a considerable number of years.

16.1.3. The threshold of Representation

Among the autonomist parties included in this volume, all but the radical Corsican nationalists have obtained representation in state parliaments. Moreover, once this threshold was crossed, in only a few cases was representation lost. This was the case for the *Abertzale* left in the Basque Country, which lost its parliamentary seats (at the state and regional levels) as a consequence of being banned (as noted above). The VU also lost its representation at the federal level as a result of its dissolution in 2001, although its successor parties (Spirit and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA)) continue to have seats in the federal parliament. The only party to lose state-level representation as a result of not winning enough electoral support in a general election is the UV; the party failed to retain a presence in the Italian parliament in 1968, re-gained seats in 1976, only to lose them again in 2006 and 2008. In this specific case, the small size of the community being represented only allows the UV to contest one seat (as the Valle d'Aosta region is only entitled to one seat in the Chamber of Deputies); this makes the party particularly vulnerable to a loss of consensus or internal divisions within the autonomist movement.

In the Introduction to the volume, we considered the relevance of electoral systems as a hurdle to crossing the threshold of representation. On the one hand, the evidence gathered from the case studies suggests that a plurality system is not an insurmountable obstacle for autonomist parties, at least in the long run. It is true that in the United Kingdom (UK), the SNP and Plaid Cymru (PC) required much more time to be competitive at the state level than autonomist parties in other countries, and that the run-off system used in French elections poses an obstacle for a weakly organi-

sed autonomist movement such as the Corsican one. On the other hand, after a minimum level of unity and organisation has been reached, SNP and PC never lost their representation in the House of Commons, and their share of seats is not distant from the share of votes they normally reach. On the other hand, in Spain a highly disproportional system has not damaged autonomist parties, in striking contrast to the impact it has had on the electoral fortunes of a medium-sized but territorially dispersed party such as Izquierda Unida. A large district magnitude and the presence of a legal threshold at the state level are much more important factors in hampering the representation of autonomist parties than is the electoral formula *per se*.

Contrary to the vast majority of mainstream parties, state-level elections are often not the most relevant political arena for the members of the autonomist party family. The regional level is instead the core level, although this is not always reflected in the strategic priorities of autonomist parties. Thus, in the UK, the absence of a regional level of government until 1999 meant that autonomist parties could only compete in state-wide elections; Corsican nationalist parties were faced with a similar opportunity structure prior to the creation of a regional tier of government in 1982. In other cases, ideological principles have dictated which territorial level is most important. Thus, for example, the local level has long been of central importance to the *Aberzale* left in the Basque Country, with HB refusing to take up representation at the regional and state levels during its earliest years due to the perceived illegitimacy of these arenas. In Flanders, in contrast, the VB has always focused primarily on the state-level, as this is considered to be the most crucial arena in terms of securing institutional reform.

These observations aside, however, it should also be noted that in general, autonomist parties have been most competitive at the regional level and most of the parties considered in the previous chapters have secured a stable and enduring presence within elected regional institutions. Firstly, this is due to the fact that, *ceteris paribus*, autonomist parties' vote share will be much larger when electoral competition is limited to *their own* region. The same absolute number of votes will be translated into a larger share of votes. Secondly, some of the case studies attribute autonomist party successes at the regional level to the phenomenon of dual or multi-level voting, whereby voters in regional elections favour parties with the strongest regional profile. Such trends are particularly evident in Scotland, Wales and Catalonia and, to a lesser extent, Galicia and the Basque Country (see also Pallarés and Keating 2003; Wyn Jones and Scully 2006). They are, however, absent in cases where regional and state elections usually coincide, such as Flanders. Here, there is little variation in the electoral results of autonomist parties at different territorial levels.

At the European level, all of the autonomist parties included in this volume, with the exception of the radical Corsican nationalists, have enjoyed representation at some point in their lifetime. The number of seats autonomist parties can compete for is usually low, often due to the magnitude of constituencies used in European elections. Constituencies are frequently larger than administrative regions and, in some cases – such as Spain and (up until 2003) France – they coincide with the territory of the state. In such a situation, autonomist parties are often forced to build electoral alliances in order to be competitive; smaller parties within such alliances have very low chances of gaining seats, or must accept a shared seat on a rotation basis, as did the BNG in the 2009 European election. Coordination among autonomist parties within the European Parliament has also often proved difficult. For example, the European Free Alliance has never been able to unite all the regionalist *famille spirituelle* (Lynch 1998).[5] These difficulties notwithstanding, crossing the threshold of representation at the European level can be symbolically important for autonomist parties. The rhetoric of the "Europe of the Regions" has increasingly been used by these parties to justify a viable path towards regional autonomy and even independence from the relative national states (De Winter and Gómez-Reino 2002; Jolly 2007; Elias 2008a; 2008b).

16.1.4. The threshold of relevance

In the Introduction to this volume, we distinguished between two ways in which political parties may achieve the threshold of relevance: by acquiring *coalition* or *blackmail potential* (Sartori 1976/2005: 109). Within the autonomist party family, being relevant means, to begin with, gathering substantial support for the idea that the existing boundaries of the state are illegitimate, and a new independent political entity should be established out of a portion of its territory. This has been referred to as the *stateness problem*: "agreements about stateness [that is, about the right of a government to claim legitimate monopoly of the use of force over state territory] are logically *prior to the creation of* democratic institutions" (Linz and Stepan 1996: 26, emphasis in the original). Such a party is unlikely to be a legitimate governing partner, but its mere presence – provided, again, that it is able to get a significant share of support – will affect the shape of political competition, forcing the other political actors to react to these positions.

Firstly, to the extent that they provoke such considerations, anti-system parties can be said to have blackmail potential within the party system.

---

[5]   In the European Parliament elected in 2009, 9 of the 14 parties covered in this volume are represented. These 19 MEPs are scattered in five parliamentary groups. The biggest delegation is that of the LN, with nine MEPs joining the Eurosceptic group named European Freedom and Democracy.

Two kinds of parties could be classified as anti-system within the autonomist party family: those that advocate independence for their region – and especially those who support (or do not reject) violence to reach this end – and those that hold xenophobic positions. An example of the first kind is HB (and its numerous successor parties), while the VB/Vlaams Belang (VBel) exemplifies the second type.[6] Such parties thus have blackmail potential when they force other parties in the system to respond to the radical issue positions they espouse; their extreme positions enter the political debate and shape it.

Secondly, autonomist parties are relevant if they are able to bring onto the policy agenda issues that would otherwise be excluded. In general terms, a party may bring the issue of the restructuring of the territorial distribution of political authority to the attention of decision makers simply by attracting votes on the basis of this kind of political proposal. Other parties may react to this challenge by incorporating some of these proposals into their own manifestos. In the UK, for example, the Labour Party adopted a commitment to devolution in large part as a response to the electoral successes of the SNP in the 1970s. The same happened in Belgium in the 1960s after the sudden electoral growth of the VU, leading all major political actors to accept the transformation of the state in a federal direction.

Thirdly, autonomist parties have a more direct impact on the policy agenda when they enjoy coalition potential, meaning that they are in a position to extract policy commitments from dominant parties because they hold the balance of power between different possible governing coalitions. The support given by CiU and PNV to minority governments in Spain in 1993 and 1996 is a notable example of this situation. However, reaching this threshold is not necessarily linked to an electoral upturn. The balance of power between major parties is also decisive. Thus in Galicia, the BNG passed from blackmail to coalition potential, and secured access to regional government, after the 2005 elections, in spite of losing both votes (−4.1%) and seats (−4). It should also be noted that a party that has coalition potential will not always chose to cross the threshold of government when given the opportunity to do so; the reasons for not doing so are discussed in detail below.

---

6   The Italian LN can also be classified as a xenophobic party. However, this has not prevented centre-right parties from building electoral and governmental coalitions with the party. The label "anti-system" cannot thus be applied on the basis of objective rules; contingent concerns may lead a party that, in a different context would be considered an unacceptable ally, to be considered a suitable political partner.

16.1.5. The threshold of government

Almost all of the autonomist parties included in this volume have crossed the threshold of government at the regional level. The exceptions are the VB in Flanders, radical Corsican nationalist parties and the Basque *Aberzale* left. Of the remaining eleven cases, only one entered regional government during the inter-war period, namely ERC in 1931. In two more cases (the SVP and UV), government participation was achieved immediately after the Second World War. In the remaining cases, the threshold of regional government was not crossed until the 1980s.[7] Indeed, regional executive bodies were rare in European unitary states before that time, and no strong autonomist parties existed in the federal countries. Italy was the first country to establish regional governments in 1970,[8] while the same happened in Spain after the transition to democracy in the mid 1970s, and later in France, Belgium and finally in the UK (although limited to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). The creation of new regional electoral arenas provided a new opportunity structure for autonomist parties aspiring to be parties of government. Overall, 19 autonomist parties have gained governmental positions in 17 different Western European regions, and in eight cases they have done so as the single party in government or as the main coalition partner (see Elias and Tronconi 2011).

Participation in state-level governments, in contrast, has been much more limited. Among the cases considered here, this has only been achieved by the VU and the LN, and only five parties have done so throughout Europe since 1945.[9] This can be attributed to two factors. First, the electoral appeal of an autonomist party, and the number of seats it can hope for in a state parliament, depends heavily on the demographical size of the region within which it is active. Parties, even dominant parties, based in small regions are rarely determinant for the survival of state-level executives. Parties based in larger regions may have an opportunity to participate in state governments as a minority partner, and this leads to a second consideration. Government participation at the state-level is particularly risky for autonomist parties that claim to represent regional interests and identities, as it can result in negotiations and compromises that are extremely

---

[7] A further exception is the Social Democratic and Labour Party's (SDLP) participation in the short-lived Northern-Irish executive between January and May 1974.

[8] Although five "Special Statute" regions had been established soon after the Second World War in the Alpine regions (Valle d'Aosta, Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia) and on the islands of Sicily and Sardinia.

[9] The other three cases being the Svenska Folkpartiet, representing the Swedish minority in Finland, and two Francophone autonomist parties in Belgium, namely Rassemblement Wallon (RW) and the Front Démocratique des Francophones (FDF). The Svenska-Folkpartiet is also the only case of an autonomist party appointing a Prime Minister, which it did for a few months in 1954.

costly in electoral terms. This is the essence of the vote vs. office dilemma that autonomist parties face when they have the opportunity of joining state-level coalition governments, and is discussed in greater detail below.

16.2. ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

As noted in the Introduction to this volume, different stages in a party's lifespan are usually accompanied by organisational changes, as a party seeks to adapt to new political and/or electoral conditions, or a new institutional operating environment. The organisational implications of crossing different thresholds at different territorial levels are considered in detail below. To begin with, however, we consider the extent to which autonomist parties' transition from protest to power can be associated with a general transformation in these actors' organisations. Given the centrality of Pedersen's 'party lifespan' model to our framework of analysis, it is appropriate to consider whether an equivalent process of organisational transformation can be identified as autonomist parties evolve over time; such a transformation would be characterised by fundamental changes in roles and relationships of various components of party organisation identifiable across all parties (Harmel 2002: 121).

The case studies provide limited evidence of a general trend in organisational adaptation as autonomist parties move from protest to power, such that would enable us to claim the existence of an 'iron law' of organisational evolution (see Michels 1911/1962; Harmel 2002: 121). In part, this is because, as noted above, autonomist parties have achieved different stages of development for a range of reasons; assessing organisational transformation over these parties' lifespan is thus difficult, since each party's development is unique. More importantly, however, autonomist parties display a range of organisational origins that do not allow us to speak easily of the organisational transformation of a single party type. In this respect, the autonomist party family differs from so-called 'new politics parties', which were created with a set of distinctive organisational features (referred to by Rihoux (2006: 71) as the "grassroots democratic model") that were progressively transformed as these actors secured institutional representation and government office (Rihoux 2001). The organisational models initially adopted by autonomist parties relate closely to the conditions in which they were born, as suggested by the distinction between parties 'born from above' and 'born from below' made above. Party ideology also shaped organisational preferences in important, albeit different, ways.

At the same time, however, it is possible to make certain general observations about the organisational evolution of autonomist parties during their lifetimes. In this respect, autonomist parties respond to the same organisational imperatives and systemic pressures as any other party

family. Firstly, the case studies provide evidence of the impact of a party's organisational origins on its subsequent organisational evolution. Panebianco (1988) argues that, due to a tendency towards organisational inertia, the mode of an organisation's construction and development has an enduring impact on the subsequent evolution of political parties, in particular their ability to pass different thresholds and respond to changes in their operating environments. For example, the PNV was formally established as a factional organisation, with a clear division of power between the party in central and public office. This separation of powers proved an enduring feature of the party's organisation, but was both an advantage and a disadvantage at different stages of the party's lifespan. Other autonomist parties were created as highly centralised cadre parties. In many cases this facilitated electoral growth and the passing of successive thresholds; although electoral decline and crossing back over thresholds often prompted demands for internal democratisation, there are no examples of fundamental reforms of this original organisational model. Indeed, in all of the cases considered, original organisational identities and roles have proved enduring across party lifespans, and continue to inform internal party dynamics.

Secondly, many of the case studies demonstrate the broad shift in internal power distribution that often accompanies political parties' transition from protest to power. On the one hand, autonomist parties become more complex organisations as they increase the number of tasks they undertake (representation, government) at different territorial levels. The increasing 'professionalisation' of autonomist parties (see Panebianco 1988) is also striking; experts and technical specialists assume a growing responsibility for decision-making within the party in central office, as a means of passing new thresholds and consolidating political, electoral and office achievements. Two such examples are the SNP and PC. Post-devolution, a substantial increase in representation and government office brought new human and financial resources that led to the organisational transformation of both parties; this has enabled them to establish new structures for formulating policies and fighting elections more efficiently. On the other hand, autonomist parties have experienced shifts in power between different 'faces' of a party's organisation as they have evolved (see Mair 1994). Thus autonomist parties that have succeeded in passing through different lifespan stages to become key political actors, often in government (at the regional and, less frequently, at the state level), have also seen a declining role for the party on the ground, and the increasing importance of the party in central and public office. As the general literature on this manifestation of organisational change would lead us to expect, this shift in power has not been unchallenged. Particularly when autonomist parties fail to meet their electoral, policy or office goals, there have usually been challen-

ges to the authority of the party's dominant coalition (see also below). In some cases, such as that of ERC, party members have been successful in reigning in the latter's autonomy, and re-asserting their authority over key decisions to do with party strategy and policy.[10]

Having identified these general trends in organisational change as autonomist parties attempt to make the shift from protest to power, we now turn to consider in more detail the organisational pressures associated with crossing different thresholds of a party's lifespan. Here too, we see autonomist parties subject to many of the same organisational pressures that come to bear on other political parties. In this respect, there is nothing unique about autonomist parties, although the multi-level political system within which these actors compete – and the varying significance of different territorial levels for these actors – does serve to weaken or strengthen organisational pressures in different ways.

16.2.1. Threshold crossing and pressures for organisational change

As expected, a party's declaration of its intent to compete in elections gives rise to new organisational imperatives, linked to the need to formulate an electoral programme, establish candidate selection procedures, and mount an effective electoral campaign. The pressure for organisational change resulting from crossing this first threshold, therefore, has generally been strong. Only in a few cases has this not been the case, such as when autonomist parties have inherited or copied organisational structures from a previous or already existing organisation (such as the LN, the VB and – during the mid 1970s – the PNV). There is, however, a territorial dimension to such pressures. For example, the introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979 saw autonomist parties on the whole adapt organisational structures already in place rather than created new structures from scratch. This contrasts with the greater pressures for organisational adaptation resulting from the creation of new regional arenas (see the examples of the SNP and PC above). This reflects the different strategic importance that autonomist parties ascribe to different territorial levels. Whilst the European level may be symbolically important for these actors, the opportunities for exercising political authority are much greater at the regional level; the incentive to adapt organisational structures are thus also greater.

In contrast, the case studies show that crossing the threshold of authorisation places less organisational demands on autonomist parties. The same

---

[10] This example also reinforces the point made above about the continued influence of a party's genetic organisational model, as the ERC has always had a strong tradition of grassroots democracy that has endured in spite of leadership efforts to shift power away from the party's membership.

is generally true of the threshold of relevance, although there are exceptions. In the case of the SDLP, for example, the party's prominent role in peace negotiations in Northern Ireland during the 1990s further enhanced the leadership autonomy of John Hume, at the expense of grassroots involvement in intra-party decision-making. The particular Northern Irish context thus contributed to a shift in power relations within the party as a result of the SDLP's political relevance.

The pressures on autonomist parties to adapt their organisations also tend to be strong when passing the thresholds of representation and government, especially for the first time. As posited in the Introduction to this volume, these thresholds see autonomist parties enter new institutional arenas and undertake (sometimes substantial) new responsibilities. At a minimum, autonomist parties have needed to hire new staff to support parliamentary/governing work, establish new mechanisms of coordination between the party in public office and in central office, and often between elected representatives at different territorial levels. For parties like PC, which saw its total number of elected representatives quadrupled after the first elections to the National Assembly for Wales, the need to adapt was particularly urgent; the number of staff employed by the party increased substantially as a result of passing the threshold of representation so emphatically. For autonomist parties in government, there are also opportunities to place party supporters in key positions within the bureaucracy; long-serving governing parties like the Catalan CiU built-up a civil service dominated by its own appointments. Of course, such patronage opportunities are not exclusive to autonomist parties, but are available to any political party in government office.

However, as is well documented in the party politics literature, passing the thresholds of representation and government also often leads to new tensions due to shifts in the internal distribution of power. Particularly evident is the empowerment of the party in public office at the expense of the party in central office and the party membership. In parties like the PNV, the formal incompatibility of central party and elected roles has been a constant source of conflict since the 1980s. It is only in parties where both roles have been occupied by the same personnel – such as the VB and UV, and the SNP post-devolution – that such conflict has been absent. In other autonomist parties, including ERC and PC, party members have criticised the concentration of power in the hands of their elected and, more recently, governing representatives. In both these cases, passing the thresholds of representation and regional government for the first time was followed by internal reforms that reinforced internal democracy as a counter-balance to the empowerment of the party in public office.

Finally, the Introduction to this volume raised the question of what the organisational implications of crossing back over different thresholds might be. The cases studies suggest the following observations. Autonomist parties that cross back over the threshold of authorisation as a result of being illegalised (such as the *Aberzale* left and the radical Corsican nationalists) have had to find new organisational solutions to their exclusion from electoral competition. In contrast, autonomist parties passing back over the thresholds of representation and government faced losing resources and staff that had been gained upon crossing these thresholds in the first place (see above); in this respect, party organisations declined in both complexity and magnitude. However, in most cases, this reverse did not lead to wholesale organisational reform. For example, when the LN first returned to being a party of opposition in 1995, the party withstood internal criticisms of its highly centralised leadership to further strengthen its dominant coalition. Moreover, it is not the case that organisational changes undertaken to facilitate crossing these thresholds in the first place, or initiated to avoid crossing back over thresholds, were undone. The CiU provides a case in point. From the late 1990s, electoral decline and fears that the party would fail to hold on to regional government prompted the party's transformation from a coalition into a federation of parties. These reforms were accelerated, rather than reversed, when the CiU was not returned to government in 2003. In this respect, Panebianco's (1988) argument about party institutionalisation and the conservative nature of organisations is confirmed.

These general observations about the organisational pressures experienced by autonomist parties as a result of crossing thresholds must, however, be qualified in several respects. This is because, in different ways, the case studies demonstrate that the linkage between organisational change and a party's lifespan is more complex than has thus far been suggested. Firstly, some case studies alert us to the danger of conceptualising "crossing a threshold" as a single achievement accompanied by clearly identifiable organisational reforms. For example, the BNG crossed the threshold of representation at the regional level in three distinct senses: by securing institutional representation, by becoming the reference point in Galician nationalism, and by becoming the only autonomist party within the Galician parliament. These three achievements in a period of just over ten years had very different organisational repercussions for the BNG. A similar observation was made with regard to the SNP's crossing of the threshold of authorisation (see above).

Secondly, whilst threshold crossing may create pressures for organisational change, it is not necessarily the case that such change will occur; organisational change is not automatic. Rather, it is the result of a *purposeful decision* by party actors in response to different pressures (whether these be

exogenous or endogenous to the party) (Harmel 2002: 129; Harmel and Janda 1994). For this reason, decision-makers within autonomist parties may choose to respond to organisational pressures in different ways, if at all; these responses will be influenced by factors including ideology, internal pressures, strategy and perceptions of the competitive environment. There is thus scope for considerable variation in the organisational responses of these actors.

Thirdly, conceptualising organisational change exclusively as a *consequence* of crossing different thresholds does not capture the other ways in which organisational change plays a role in shaping a party's lifespan. On the one hand, organisational change can be undertaken to facilitate the passing of different thresholds. Kitschelt (1989: 41), for example, refers to organisational changes oriented towards a "logic of electoral competition", defined as the adjustment of internal organisation, programme and strategy to the conditions of the "political market-place" to maximize electoral support. Many autonomist parties thus undertook organisational change to adapt their internal workings as a prerequisite for passing the threshold of representation. Other autonomist parties, such as the BNG, saw organisational reform as a means of securing political relevance and becoming a party of government. On the other hand, organisational change can try to pre-empt crossing back over a threshold. For parties such as the UV, ERC and PC, electoral decline was the trigger for revising their party statutes.

16.2.2. The territorial dimension of organisational change

Finally, and as mentioned above, there is also a territorial dimension to pressures for organisational change. This is a function of two interrelated factors: the strategic value of contesting elections and securing policy and office influence at different territorial levels, and how autonomist parties perceive institutions at different territorial levels.

Firstly, it is broadly the case that pressures for organisational change have been greatest when autonomist parties have crossed thresholds at the regional and state levels, and least when they have crossed thresholds at other territorial levels. As noted in the volume's introductory chapter, the regional level represents the 'core' level for this party family. One of the priorities for these actors is thus to secure control of power resources within the national territory as a basis for 'building' the nation that they claim to represent. Doing so also provides a platform for autonomist parties to exert pressure on central governments to further decentralise policy competencies to regional institutions. It is for these reasons that the creation of new regional arenas prompted autonomist parties in places like Scotland, Wales and Corsica to re-allocate substantial organi-

sational resources, or create new party organisations. However, given that territorial reform usually requires legislative approval at the state-level, autonomist parties have also usually sought to secure representation at this higher level. For these strategic reasons, the pressures for organisational change have been greatest at these two levels. In contrast, being present at the European level has been symbolically important for many autonomist parties. However, as argued above, the fact that there are limited policy influence and no governing opportunities at this level means that there is less incentive to invest limited organisational resources in supporting party activities.

This general observation must be qualified, however, due to the effect of the second factor noted above, namely the way in which autonomist parties have perceived different institutions at different levels at different points in time. Thus, for example, for ideological reasons, the *Aberzale* left and the BNG initially refused to take up regional or state level representation because of the alleged constitutional illegitimacy of these institutions. Practical factors have also shaped the way in which autonomist parties formulated their electoral and political strategies. For radical Corsican nationalists, the obstacles to securing representation at the state and European levels means that these parties simply do not seek to gain entry to these arenas via electoral competition. In the case of the SDLP, ideological and practical incentives combined to designate the European arena a strategic organisational priority: better-than-average electoral performances at this level, and the absence of a regional governing arena, provided the party with a platform for successfully promoting its ideas about resolving the Northern Irish conflict. Organisational resources are thus targeted at the territorial levels that are ideologically compatible with, and pragmatically conducive to, the autonomist project.

16.3. Goal change

In the Introduction to the volume, we referred to the "hard choices" parties have to make in order to be competitive in different institutional settings (Strøm 1990). In particular, parties often have to choose between a vote-seeking, an office-seeking and a policy-seeking strategy. It is sometimes the case that parties are able to pursue all these goals at the same time, but in other circumstances it may be necessary to trade off between them.

Strøm (1990) refers to three institutional settings – electoral, legislative and governmental – which can be seen to mirror the different thresholds of a party's lifespan identified in the Introduction. Accessing different institutional settings, therefore, leads to different incentives to prioritise one goal or another, as summarised in table 16.1.

Table 16.1. *Thresholds and strategic priorities*

Thresholds (Pedersen 1982)	Institutional settings (Strøm 1990)	Likely strategic priority / dilemma
I. Declaration	Electoral	Vote
II. Authorisation		
III. Representation	Legislative	
IV. Relevance *IVa. Blackmail potential* *IVb. Coalition potential*		Office vs. Policy dilemma Office/Policy vs. Vote dilemma
V. Government	Governmental	

How does goal change come about as a consequence of crossing thresholds and entering new institutional settings? Crossing the first threshold corresponds to a goal change by definition: the organisation declares its will to participate in the electoral process in order to access representative institutions. This means that, from this moment onwards, reaching some level of electoral support is one of the party's goals. At the same time, it is clear that passing this threshold does not guarantee the necessary resources to pursue an office or a policy-seeking strategy. As stated in the Introduction to this volume, vote-maximisation is usually a prerequisite to becoming a relevant actor in terms of office and policy achievements.[11] For this reason, passing the second threshold (authorisation) does not in itself bring about any goal change. It is also arguable that passing the threshold of representation is not sufficient to open up opportunities for pursuing different goals, notwithstanding the fact that achieving one or more seats in regional or state-level parliaments allows participation in a new institutional setting by definition. In order for a party to be able to engage in negotiations over governmental positions or policy preferences, a minimum parliamentary strength is needed; in other words, a party must not only be *present* in the parliamentary arena, but it must also be *relevant*. In our case studies, for example, there are examples of parties having gained access to the state parliament at some point during their lifetime, but without being able to influence decisions about government or policy formation (that is, they lacked coalitional or blackmail potential). Thus alt-

---

[11] A partial exception to this rule is represented by parties that acquire a relevant status thanks to the presence of a military arm, as in the Basque Country and Corsica. In these instances, violence can be seen as a surrogate of electoral success.

hough ERC has been present in the Spanish Congress of Deputies since 1977, only in 2004 did the party cross the threshold of relevance. Similarly, the UV entered the Italian parliament for the first time in 1958, but did not play a decisive role in government formation until 1999. At the regional level, the threshold of relevance has been easier to cross, although even here autonomist parties have faced difficulties in becoming relevant actors. The BNG, for instance, entered the Galician parliament for the first time in 1985, but due to the successive absolute majorities of the state-wide Partido Popular (PP), it is only in the second half of the 1990s that we can consider it as a truly relevant party.

The dilemmas associated with the pursuit of different goals can thus be said to be most evident upon passing the threshold of relevance. At this point, more options become available and strategic games become more complex. A first dilemma is that between office and votes, whereby participation in government can have costly electoral consequences. For example, participation in a regional executive can damage an autonomist party, as it forces it to take a stance on matters that are not directly related to its core policy priorities, or to make costly compromises with coalition partners. This can lead to autonomist parties being punished by their supporters for their governing record; this happened to the SDLP in 2007, to the BNG in 2009 and to ERC in 2010. However, it is arguably at the state-level that this dilemma is most acute. This is so because autonomist parties challenge the legitimacy of the state's authority, and thus participating in government at this level may be considered by supporters to be a fundamental betrayal of core autonomist principles. Compromises with state-wide parties as a result of being in state-level coalitions can thus be particularly difficult to justify, and autonomist parties are particularly at risk of electoral decline, and even organisational splits, as a result of dissatisfaction among supporters. The VB, for example, was created by hard-liners within the VU in 1978 who opposed the latter's coalition compromises on the decentralisation of power in Belgium.

If the risks to an autonomist party of moderating its policy profile in order to become an acceptable coalition partner are clear, maintaining a 'pure' ideological stance can pose its own difficulties. Staying true to core party values and refusing government participation may be popular with a party's grass roots in the short run, and may reap electoral rewards. As the case of the VB in Flanders shows, mainstream competitors that react by establishing a *cordon sanitaire* around an autonomist party will reinforce the distance between government and opposition, and the latter's claim to be the only true defender of territorial interests. However, being a party of permanent opposition (which, in our scheme, equates to possessing blackmail potential) may lead to an inability to exercise policy influence in the long run. This, in turn, may provoke internal tensions and eventual electo-

ral losses. The Flemish VB is currently in such a situation. It remains to be seen whether the external shock provoked by electoral decline will induce the dominant coalition to reconsider its isolationist strategy and to enter coalition government, possibly after a change in party leadership (Dumont and Bäck 2006; Buelens and Hino 2008).

The Italian LN faced a similar dilemma during the 1990s, but responded with a different, more dynamic, strategy. The party briefly participated in the first Berlusconi government in 1994, with electoral success being used as a means of acquiring office and policy benefits. However, this quickly proved to be incompatible with a vote-seeking strategy. Fears of electoral decline led the LN to withdraw from government, and resume its blackmail strategy from the opposition. This proved electorally beneficial in the short term, but renewed electoral decline eventually led the LN to re-negotiate a new coalition agreement with centre-right parties, and re-enter state-level government in 2001. From this moment on, the LN has been able to overcome the office vs. votes trade-off with a successful "opposition within government" strategy (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2005: 956). The risks of weakening its linkages with its core supporters were mitigated with a strong populist style allowing the party to keep a clear distinctive profile within the coalition, especially on the crucial issues of the devolution of powers to the regions and immigration.

A different type of tension emerges when autonomist parties try to go beyond their core business to compete with state-wide parties for the political centre-ground. Most autonomist parties compliment their core centre-periphery values with left-right ideas (Massetti 2009). In our sample of cases, several autonomist parties were faced with the choice of prioritising the centre-periphery or the left-right dimension of political competition. For example, the SNP, PC, and ERC have shifted the focus between their territorial demands and left-wing policy agendas at different points in their history. Emphasising the former is clearly more likely to appeal to the party's core support base, and reinforces the distinctiveness of the autonomist party *vis-à-vis* its state-wide counterparts. However, these three parties also realised that appealing to a broader electorate (with no clear preferences on the centre-periphery dimension) also required going beyond the core business of territorial reform. Thus the SNP and PC sought to assert their left-wing credentials during the 1980s, both in an effort to recuperate electoral status in their respective territories and to provide a clear alternative to the right-wing government in Westminster. In Catalonia, from the late 1990s onwards ERC also tried to carve out a new electoral space for itself by giving new salience to its leftist agenda. This paved the way for a new 'progressive' alliance to be formed with other leftwing forces, as the basis of coalition governments in 2003 and 2006. However, the latter example also highlights the dangers of such a strategy of ideological expansion;

internal criticism of the party's loss of distinctiveness within the coalition, and pre-electoral predictions of substantial electoral losses, led ERC to contest the 2010 autonomous election on a programme which focused first and foremost on its core territorial goal, namely Catalan independence. The fact that the party lost in this election is indicative of the dangers facing autonomist parties as they strive to adapt their programmes to compete more effectively in a multi-dimensional policy space (see also Adams *et al*. 2006).

A further dilemma faced by political parties is between office and policy, whereby political parties have to choose between entering coalition government (as a means of shaping policy-making), or providing external support in exchange for policy concessions. Given the dangers associated with being in government at the state-level (see above), in Spain autonomist parties have repeatedly opted for the latter, with support being given to both left-wing and right-wing governments since the beginning of the 1980s in exchange for substantial policy concessions relating to territorial autonomy. The case of CiU in particular demonstrates the multi-level nature of bargaining over governmental positions and policy concessions. During the 1990s, CiU displayed an extremely flexible coalitional strategy. It supported the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) government in Madrid at the same time as accepting the support of the PP in Catalonia in 1995. A similar multi-level strategy has been pursued by the PNV in the Basque Country. At the regional level, the consolidation of a regional government with increasing powers and resources has led the party to pursue office incumbency; this is justified by the PNV's status as main coalition partner (or a single party in government between 1980-84). At the state level, in contrast, a policy-seeking strategy has been prioritised when state-wide parties have lacked governing majorities within the Congress of Deputies.

It must be noted that such multi-level multi-coalition bargaining is not common outside Spain. Autonomist parties must be relevant actors at both state and regional levels, and possess the necessary ideological flexibility to negotiate with state-wide parties belonging to different ideological traditions. Belgium is another case where such strategies are possible, given the tradition of frequent grand-coalition governments. However, elected regional assemblies have only existed since 1995; by this time the traditional Flemish and Francophone autonomist parties (the VU, the FDF and RW) had already declined or even disappeared, whilst the VB has always been excluded from any coalition negotiations. In principle, the Italian LN could also engage in multilevel negotiations with different state-wide partners. However, a coalition between Bossi's party and left-wing parties has never seriously been an option, and the former has remained loyal to right-wing coalitions since 1999. Occasionally, however, the LN has used its support as a bargaining tool for achieving policy or office concessions. It is not incon-

ceivable that, in a situation of a hung parliament, the LN could support a leftist cabinet at the state-level,[12] if further advances in regional autonomy can be secured as a result.

16.4. The policy impact of autonomist parties

The extent to which autonomist parties are successful in meeting their core policy goal – the territorial reorganisation of political authority – can have major implications for the constitutional integrity of states. The Introduction to the volume posed several questions in order to facilitate the evaluation of the policy impact of autonomist parties in this respect. Here, we draw on the preceding case studies to answer these questions.

Firstly, *how does the policy impact of autonomist parties come about?* The case studies demonstrate that autonomist parties have exerted policy influence in numerous ways: by participating in regional and state governments; by engaging in legislative bargaining; and by influencing the programmes and strategic behaviour of competitor parties. The relative impact of these different mechanisms, however, has varied. Significantly, and contrary to the aspirations of autonomist parties when they join state-level governments, there is little evidence that autonomist parties have been able to directly impact on decisions to undertake, and the implementation of, institutional and constitutional reforms. In Belgium, none of the five major institutional reforms leading to the federalisation of the country (1970, 1980, 1988, 1993 and 2001) were implemented with autonomist parties in government (Van Haute and Pilet 2006: 306). In the United Kingdom, the devolution project failed in 1979 when the SNP and PC provided external support for the Labour government, while it became a reality in 1997 when the two parties did not possess equivalent relevance at the state-level. In Italy, the main step towards federalism was taken with the constitutional reform of 2001, passed by a centre-left coalition with the LN opposing it, while further reform sponsored by the LN was rejected in a referendum five years later (Mazzoleni 2009).

This leads us to argue that autonomist parties are much more effective in forcing state-wide parties to adopt their own agenda of territorial reform, rather than directly contributing to and managing reforms themselves. What matters, in other words, is the electoral threat posed by autonomist parties to mainstream parties, rather than autonomist parties' participation in state government *per se*. Thus, for example, it has been argued

---

[12]   The present electoral system makes it impossible to have a hung parliament at the regional level, where the election of the head of the executive is linked to the creation of an assembly majority. At the state-level, a hung parliament can result from a stalemate in the Senate, while in the Chamber of Deputies the creation of a majority is guaranteed by the mechanism of the majority bonus.

that the Labour Party's embracing of devolution for different regions and nations within the UK can be explained in large part as a response to the growing political salience of the SNP in Scotland from the 1960s onwards. In Spain, the fact that autonomist parties in places like the Basque Country and Catalonia have controlled political institutions at the regional level for most of the democratic period has similarly forced state-wide parties to adopt their own agendas of territorial reform in a bid to compete electorally with their non-state-wide opponents (Roller and Van Houten 2003; Pallarés and Keating 2003).

These observations lead us on to the second question posed in the Introduction, namely *where does the policy impact of autonomist parties emanate from?* As suggested above, multi-level political dynamics have been extremely important in determining the success of autonomist parties in pushing for territorial reform. Whilst decisions on territorial reform are ultimately taken at the state level, they are nevertheless often the result of a complex interaction between state and regional institutions, as well as state-wide and autonomist parties. Recent efforts to reform the autonomy statutes of the Catalan and Basque Autonomous Communities highlight these multi-level institutional and partisan dynamics at work. Thus, in Catalonia, a new Statute of Autonomy was approved by the governing coalition composed of the Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (PSC), Iniciativa per Catalunya-Verds (ICV) and ERC in September 2005, was amended and approved by the Spanish Parliament (albeit with the opposition of ERC) and finally ratified by referendum in June 2006 (Keating and Wilson 2009: 543-545). The simultaneous presence of the socialists as the main governmental actor in Catalonia and Madrid made it easier to build a coalition with Catalan autonomist parties whilst also securing support for the proposals at the state level, thus enhancing the prospects of successful negotiations. In contrast, the absence of such a party-political congruence across the different territorial levels – a PNV-led autonomist coalition at the regional level, and a PSOE government at the state level – contributed to the failure of statute reform. The policy impact of autonomist parties is thus highly dependent on the multi-level political context in which debates about territorial reform take place.

Thirdly*, how much autonomy are these parties able to deliver for their national territories?* Assessing the degree of success of autonomist parties is not an easy task, as regional autonomy is a concept involving many different aspects, and the goals of parties themselves are frequently subject to change. Moreover, territorial goals are frequently (and often deliberately) formulated in ambiguous terms. The "free association" of the Basque Country with the Spanish state, as proposed by the PNV in the so-called *Plan Ibarretxe* (Keating and Bray 2006), or PC's demand for "full national status" for Wales in Europe (Elias 2008a; 2008b), reflect autonomist par-

ties' efforts to find new ways of securing national self-determination alongside existing political structures that established systems of political authority.

At a minimum, we can observe that all the states included in the study have established regional assemblies and governmental bodies, even though in the Italian and French cases this happened independently of pressure from autonomist parties. With regard to the powers exercised by these regional institutions, in all the cases considered there have been significant steps towards a greater decentralisation of authority. In Belgium, after the adoption of a truly federal constitution in the early 1990s, the existence of the state itself is now under threat, and openly questioned by the VB and the N-VA (the main heir to the VU). In Spain, the UK and Italy, regions have considerably expanded their autonomous powers after elected bodies were initially created. Even in France, Corsica enjoys a special status allowing it increased autonomy compared to "ordinary" mainland regions. However, how much of this autonomy can be credited to autonomist parties? This is a complex question, with no easy answers. Nowhere has decentralisation been a one-off decision; rather, it is a process of incremental changes to the existing architecture of power. This involves the building of coalitions sharing, at least in part, the basic goal of expanding the competencies of regional governments, with decisions having to be agreed by a number of partisan and institutional actors located at different territorial levels. In this context, it is extremely difficult to disentangle the role, or the "added value", of autonomist parties. Nevertheless, and as argued above, the case studies provide evidence that autonomist parties have been able to condition parties' and governments' agendas at both the regional and state levels. Whilst there is no direct counterfactual evidence, it seems reasonable to argue that decentralising reforms have been shaped by autonomist parties in important ways, and it is unlikely that these would have taken place in the same way and to the same extent if autonomist parties had not gained a relevant status within their respective regional and state-wide arenas.

Finally*, at what cost is policy impact achieved?* The case studies demonstrate that policy success –that is, achieving territorial goals – is not always a positive thing for autonomist parties. As argued above, a trade-off between policy and votes is sometimes unavoidable. In other words, in order to meet its territorial ambitions, an autonomist party may have to make difficult compromises that may disappoint many of its voters. In the extreme case, an autonomist party can die "by overdose of success" (De Winter 2006). This was the case of the Flemish VU which, after achieving its goal of a powerful Flemish region within a federal Belgian state, lost its *raison d'être* and was dissolved. A similar dilemma has been faced by the SDLP, which has seen many of its proposals for bringing lasting peace to

Northern Ireland implemented; as a consequence, the party has struggled to define a new political purpose for itself while part of its electorate has been lost to the more radical Sinn Féin.

But policy success need not always be bad news for autonomist parties. The case studies also provide examples of parties that, even after seeing many of their proposals adopted, have retained a prominent position in the regional arena. The SVP is a case in point. The party's demands for self-government within Italy had been largely satisfied by the 1990s. Since then, the SVP has turned its attentions to the challenges of governing the regional territory, with a focus on the kind of day-to-day policy issues that are typical of left-right party competition in any other territory. Whilst not having abandoned its rhetoric of defending the interests of South Tyrol, the party has successfully shifted its focus onto the on-going task of building the nation within the achieved parameters of regional self-government. In other places, autonomist parties who have been partly successful in pushing for territorial reform have turned their attention to further enhancing regional autonomy. To different degrees, there continues to be an electoral space for these actors' territorial projects, albeit projects that are continuously re-negotiated to adapt to ever-changing political circumstances.

16.5. Conclusion

In recent years, there has been a renewed scholarly interest in the role of territory as a factor shaping political interactions and the structuring of political systems. This has been prompted by a number of processes that are seen to challenge the established political order, including European integration and the decentralisation of political authority to territorial levels below the state. One manifestation of this emergent research agenda has been a desire on the part of political scientists to take the phenomenon of autonomist party mobilisation seriously. After all, autonomist parties by their very nature challenge the structure of the political system, and their enduring presence within regional and state-wide arenas across Western Europe attests the continuing relevance of the territorial cleavage.

This volume has sought to build on other key comparative works that have shed light on the rise, evolution, political and electoral impact of autonomist parties (De Winter and Türsan 1998; De Winter *et al*. 2006). It has also, however, sought to go beyond this literature to provide new comparative insights into autonomist parties as they have sought to effect the transition from 'protest to power'. In particular, the volume has explicitly drawn on the theoretical and empirical insights of a burgeoning literature on political parties and party systems in order to facilitate a systematic comparative analysis of the ways in which autonomist parties have been impacted by, and have themselves impacted upon, established political

systems and dynamics. On the one hand, our findings suggest that autonomist parties are in many respects conventional political actors, subject to many of the opportunities and challenges faced by any political party that aims to evolve from being a marginal political force to being a key actor within the political system. This is broadly the case, for example, with regard the organisational pressures linked to threshold-crossing faced by autonomist parties, as well as the trade-offs between the pursuit of different political goals. This is an important observation given that much of the extant literature on this party family has stressed the specificity of its members (with respect, for example, to origins and ideology). On the other hand, the case studies point to certain distinctive features of this party family. The multi-level context within which autonomist parties usually operate, as they seek out opportunities to enhance territorial autonomy at different political levels (regional, state and European), is of particular significance. Autonomist party lifespans diverge with respect to their ability to pass thresholds at different territorial levels, whilst thresholds at different territorial levels also present divergent opportunities and challenges for these actors. Moreover, the policy impact of autonomist parties has been argued to be particularly dependant on the broader multi-level context within which demands for self-government are made. The complexity of these dynamics has only partially been captured here. The role of autonomist parties within multi-actor, multi-level political systems requires further investigation in order to arrive at a more complete understanding of these actors' contribution to processes of state transformation.

References

Adams, James, Michael Clark, Lawrence Ezrow and Garrett Glasgow (2006) 'Are Niche Parties Fundamentally Different from Mainstream Parties? The Causes and the Electoral Consequences of Western European Parties' Policy Shifts, 1976–1998', *American Journal of Political Science*, 50: 3, 513–529.

Albertazzi, Daniele and Duncan McDonnell (2005) 'The Lega Nord in the Second Berlusconi Government: In a League of its Own', *West European Politics*, 28: 5, 952–972.

Buelens, Jo and Airo Hino (2008) 'The Electoral Fate of New Parties in Government', in: Kris Deschouwer (ed.), *New Parties in Government. In Power for the First Time*. London: Routledge, pp. 157–174.

De Winter, Lieven (2006) 'In Memoriam: The Volksunie 1954–2001: Death by Overdose of Success', in: Lieven De Winter, Marga Gómez-Reino and Peter Lynch (eds.), *Autonomist Parties in Europe: Identity Politics and the Revival of the Territorial Cleavage – Vol. II*. Barcelona: ICPS, pp. 13–45.

De Winter, Lieven and Huri Türsan (eds.) (1998) *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe*. London: Routledge.

De Winter, Lieven and Marga Gómez-Reino (2002) 'European Integration and Ethnoregionalist Parties', *Party Politics*, 8: 4, 483–503.

De Winter, Lieven, Marga Gómez-Reino and Peter Lynch (eds.) (2006) *Autonomist Parties in Europe: Identity Politics and the Revival of the Territorial Cleavage. Two Volumes.* Barcelona: ICPS.

Downs, Anthony (1957) *An Economic Theory of Democracy.* New York: Harper.

Dumont, Patrick and Hanna Bäck (2006) 'Why So Few, and Why So Late? Green Parties and the Question of Governmental Participation', *European Journal of Political Research*, 45: s1, 35–67.

Duverger, Maurice (1954) *Political Parties: Their Organisation and Activity in the Modern State.* New York: Wiley.

Elias, Anwen (2008a) 'From Euro-Enthusiasm to Euro-Scepticism? A Re-Evaluation of Minority Nationalist Party Attitudes Towards European Integration', *Regional & Federal Studies*, 18: 5, 557–581.

Elias, Anwen (2008b) *Minority Nationalist Parties and European Integration.* London: Routledge.

Elias, Anwen and Filippo Tronconi (2011) 'From Protest to Power: Autonomist Parties in Government', *Party Politics*, forthcoming.

Eliassen, Kjell A. and Lars Svåsand (1975) 'The Formation of Mass Political Organizations: An Analytical Framework', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 10: 10, 95–121.

Epstein, Leon D. (1967) *Political Parties in Western Democracies.* New York: Praeger.

Harmel, Robert (2002) 'Party Organizational Change: Competing Explanations?', in: Kurt R. Luther and Ferdinand Müller-Rommel (eds.), *Political Parties in the New Europe. Political and Analytical Challenges.* Oxford: Oxford Univesity Press, pp. 119–142.

Harmel, Robert and Kenneth Janda (1994) 'An Integrated Theory of Party Goals and Party Change', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 6: 3, 259–287.

Irvin, Cynthia L. (1999) *Militant Nationalism. Between Movement and Party in Ireland and the Basque Country.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Jolly, Seith K. (2007) 'The Europhile Fringe? Regionalist Party Support for European Integration', *European Union Politics*, 8: 1, 109–130.

Keating, Michael and Zoe Bray (2006) 'Renegotiating Sovereignty: Basque Nationalism and the Rise and Fall of the Ibarretxe Plan', *Ethnopolitics*, 5: 4, 347–64.

Keating, Michael and Alex Wilson (2009) 'Renegotiating the State of Autonomies: Statute Reform and Multi-level Politics in Spain', *West European Politics*, 32: 3, 536–558.

Kitschelt, Herbert (1989) *The Logics of Party Formation: Ecological Politics in Belgium and West Germany.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Linz, Juan, and Alfred Stepan (1996) *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lucardie, Paul (2000) 'Prophets, Purifiers and Prolocutors. Towards a Theory on the Emergence of New Parties', *Party Politics*, 6: 2, 175–85.

Lynch, Peter (1998) 'Co-Operation Between Regionalist Parties at the Level of the European Union: The European Free Alliance', in: Lieven De Winter and Huri Türsan (eds.), *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe.* London: Routledge, pp. 190–203.

Mair, Peter (1994) 'Party Organisation: From Civil Society to the State', in: Richard Katz and Peter Mair (eds.), *How Parties Organise.* London: Sage, pp. 1–22.

Massetti, Emanuele (2009) 'Explaining Regionalist Party Positioning in a Multi-Dimensional Ideological Space: A Framework for Analysis', *Regional and Federal Studies*, 19: 4–5, 501–31.

Mazzoleni, Martino (2009) 'The Italian Regionalisation: A Story of Partisan Logics', *Modern Italy*, 14: 2, 135–150.

Michels, Robert (1911/1962) *Political Parties*. New York: Free Press.

Pallarés, Francesc and Michael Keating (2003) 'Multilevel Electoral Competition. Regional Elections and Party Systems in Spain'. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 10: 3, 239–255.

Panebianco, Angelo (1988) *Political Parties: Organization and Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rihoux, Benoit (2001) *Les partis politiques: organisations en changement. Le test des ecologists*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Rihoux, Benoit (2006) 'Governmental Participation and the Organizational Adaptation of Green Parties: On Access, Slack, Overload and Distress', *European Journal of Political Research*, 45: S1, 69–98.

Roller, Elisa and Pieter Van Houten (2003) 'A National Party in a Regional Party System: The PSC-PSOE in Catalonia', *Regional & Federal Studies*, 13: 3, 1–22.

Sartori, Giovanni (1976/2005) *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*. Colchester: ECPR Press.

Strøm, Kaare (1990) 'A Behavioral Theory of Competitive Political Parties', *American Journal of Political Science*, 34: 2, 565–598.

Van Haute, Emile and Jean-Benoit Pilet (2006) 'Regionalist Parties in Belgium (VU, RW, FDF): Victims of Their Own Success?' *Regional & Federal Studies*, 16: 3, 297–313.

Wyn Jones, Richard and Roger Scully (2006) 'Devolution and Electoral Politics in Scotland and Wales', *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 36: 1, 115–134.