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978-0-521-53520-5 - The Nationalization of Politics: The Formation of National Electorates and Party Systems in Western Europe

Daniele Caramani

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Introduction

HOMOGENEITY AND DIVERSITY IN EUROPE

The nationalization of politics is a major long-term political phenomenon over almost two centuries. Nationalization processes represent a broad historical evolution toward the formation of national electorates and party systems, party organizations and campaigns, as well as issues and party programs. Through nationalization processes, the highly localized and territorialized politics that characterized the early phases of electoral competition in the nineteenth century is replaced by national electoral alignments and oppositions. Peripheral and regional specificities disappear, and sectional cleavages progressively transform into nationwide functional alignments. Through the development of central party organizations, local candidates are absorbed into nationwide structures and ideologies. Programs and policies become national in scope and cancel out – or at least reduce – the scope of local problems, with the most relevant issues being transferred from the local to the national level. These processes of political integration translate in the *territorial homogenization of electoral behavior*, both electoral participation and the support for the main party families.

Nationalization processes therefore represent a crucial step in the *structuring of party politics*. The nineteenth century witnessed the most striking changes in political life with the transition from absolutist to parliamentary regimes and with the progressive entry of the masses on the political stage through the extension of voting rights. Parliaments, that in many cases had not been convened since the end of the Middle Ages, were reintroduced (Bendix 1961; Hintze 1970). Although in some cases they were still based on estate or curial representation, in all countries these bodies soon transformed into modern parliaments based on general representation. Yet, in spite of the general democratization of West European political systems, national electoral alignments and party organizations did not appear

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suddenly in the aftermath of democratic reforms. The systems that developed in the nineteenth century long remained unstructured and highly territorialized and, in the absence of national party organizations and nationwide oppositions, politics remained dominated by local issues and candidates, which prolonged the control by elites of the past on political life.

This means that the formation of national electorates and party systems is not only a crucial aspect of the construction of national political spaces and of the structuring of party systems, but also of the development of a *political democratic citizenship*. The nationalization of electoral alignments and political parties has meant the transition from a fragmented and clientelistic type of politics dominated by local political personalities to *national representation*. National party organizations structured along nationwide cleavages replaced an atomized type of political representation. Candidates in the various constituencies became increasingly “party candidates” who no longer merely represented local interests but instead nationwide functional interests and values, giving the masses the possibility to influence directly national decision-making processes (Rokkan 1970a: 227–34).

In spite of its central position within West European electoral developments, the territorial dimension of the construction of national political spaces in Europe has received little attention. The necessary comparable electoral data disaggregated at the constituency level for several countries might have been one of the causes for this neglect. The analysis of the territorial dimension of elections in Europe requires cross-country electoral results by parties for single constituencies. Furthermore – as will become clear in the course of the analysis – such data are needed from the early stages of electoral development after the major transitions toward representative parliamentary systems in the nineteenth century. The formation of national parties and party systems must be analyzed from the beginning of competitive elections, that is, during the phases of formation of party alternatives and cleavage constellations.

The great variety of party systems and electoral formulas in Europe has also helped to discourage systematic and comprehensive macroanalyses of the territorial dimension of voting patterns in a cross-country perspective.¹ Not only do formulas vary a great deal between countries, but over time too

¹ The last major attempts to analyze territorial politics in Europe are represented in particular by two books by Stein Rokkan and Derek Urwin, *The Politics of Territorial Identity* (1982) and *Economy, Territory, Identity* (1983). *Center–Periphery Structures in Europe* by Rokkan et al. (1987) – addressed more specifically to students in the form of a handbook – is a text of the same period of work.

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electoral systems have undergone major changes with the almost general transition from majoritarian to proportional representation (PR) formulas around World War I. In particular, the difference in the size and number of territorial units between formulas creates several difficulties for the analysis of longitudinal data. Furthermore, whereas single-member plurality systems magnify the geographical dimension of voting patterns and allow the analysis to focus on voting patterns at very localized levels (this has been possible notably in North America and the United Kingdom), PR electoral systems have been predominant in continental Europe since World War I.

Lacking empirical foundations, the macrophenomenon of a progressive national integration of electorates and party systems in Europe has been taken for granted. The thesis of the nationalization of politics – both in the explicit and more implicit formulations – seemed not to need to rely upon empirical evidence and has never been submitted to a thorough work of empirical verification. As J. Agnew notes, the “[a]cceptance of the nationalization thesis is based largely upon intellectual foundations *independent* of empirical demonstration” (1988: 301). Apart from country-specific case studies whose conclusions can rarely be raised to the level of analytical generalization, broad encompassing comparative work has often remained at the level of mere theoretical typologies. Empirical investigations have mostly focused on single countries or have been limited to short time periods. Only one major research is comparative but limited to the 1945–75 period (Rose and Urwin 1975). In most other cases, studies in this area have taken the form of case studies of single countries with a myopic focus on recent periods, not directly comparable, and therefore not leading to an overall picture of Europe. In opposition to these many short-term and case-oriented analyses, this book adopts a broader perspective presenting a general and concise picture of the *political-territorial structures in Europe over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, allowing to highlight the effects of key evolutionary steps – state formation, democratization, industrialization – on the territorial structures of the vote.

Long-term comparative electoral analysis has so far focused almost exclusively on the “functional dimension” of the political space – mainly the left–right dimension.² Both theories of state formation and nation-building, and the hegemony in political thought of the class cleavage and left–right

² These works deal with the well-known “freezing hypothesis” formulated by Lipset and Rokkan in 1967. On the one hand, electoral change has been associated with the aggregate changing distribution of electoral support among political parties representing the organizational expression of social groups. This interpretation has given rise to measures

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alignments, have turned the attention of political studies away from the spatial-territorial dimension. Much of the literature has considered the progressive formation of national electorates and party systems in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to be closely associated with processes of political modernization as well as with more general socio-economic processes of modernization of Western societies. Work on political development has emphasized the integration of peripheral cultural identities and economic areas within broader national contexts.³ As noted by Derek Urwin, because of both fashion trends and the supremacy of the socio-economic dimension, “[t]raditionally, political science has displayed little sympathy for groups that were thought to have lost in the historical game” (Urwin 1983: 222).⁴

This work is therefore also an attempt to “bring territory back in” and to reintroduce the basic spatial concepts devised by the pioneers of electoral analysis. Studies like those of M. Hansen (*Norsk Folkepsikologi* of 1898) and A. Siegfried (*Tableau Politique de la France de l’Ouest* of 1913) belong to the “golden age” of an electoral geographical tradition that had not yet been challenged by other techniques of social inquiry (in particular surveys and individual data). The analysis carried out in this book is broken down at the level of single constituencies: European territories are much too diverse and their variety much too large to limit our data to the level of nation-states. All political cleavages and social divisions – cultural and center–periphery, as well as the left–right dimension – are analyzed as they are configured on the territorial space. The territorial structures of electoral behavior in

of stability/instability based on aggregated data (Rose and Urwin 1970; Pedersen 1983; Bartolini and Mair 1990). On the other hand, change meant the weakening of the individual relation between voters and parties. Research attempted to establish the extent to which the same social groups continued to support parties and the extent to which the social base of partisan support – independently from their size – had undergone a change. This has been carried out mainly through survey techniques and has led to indices of class voting (see, e.g., Franklin et al. 1992). The theoretical debate on cleavages too has largely neglected the territorial dimension (Rae and Taylor 1970; Zuckerman 1975).

³ For an analysis of demographic integration in Western Europe, see Watkins (1991). Following the sociological tradition from Marx to Durkheim and Parsons, who described the transition from traditional (primordial) communities to modern societies, modernization breaks down territory, ethnicity, and religiosity as central elements of the political process. For a representative sample of work on political integration, see Almond and Coleman (1960), Almond and Powell (1966), Apter (1965), Black (1967), Deutsch (1953), and Kautsky (1972). Against the mainstream “integrationist literature” of the 1960s, see Connor (1967). For a further critique see Connor (1972), and for a recent discussion see Fox (1997).

⁴ “A territorial approach to politics . . . seemed to disappear from the academic lexicon after 1945” (Rokkan and Urwin 1983: 1).

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Europe reflect multiple cultural, political, and socioeconomic factors. They have created over centuries complex territorial assessments and overlapping sedimentations, and historical conflicts have projected their lines of division on European territories, creating an intricate web of sociopolitical cleavages. Territories – so to speak – contain the “fossils,” the crystallized memory of European conflicts.

Results presented in this work attest to a general process of national political integration, that is, an evolution toward the *nationalization or homogenization* of politics. The transformation of territorial structures of electoral behavior in most European countries is characterized by the progressive reduction of territorial diversity in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This has led to the increasing integration of peripheral electorates into national political life and the transformation of local electorates and segmented party systems into national electoral constellations. Albeit to different degrees, nationwide functional alignments progressively replaced territorial cleavages in all countries.

This process of nationalization of electorates and party systems has to a large extent been the result of the *hegemony of the left–right cleavage* over ethnolinguistic, religious, center–periphery, and urban–rural cleavages – that is, the main preindustrial cleavages. Industrialization and the simultaneous extension of voting rights in the second half of the nineteenth century have imposed the supremacy of the class dimension in West European party systems.⁵ The regionally disaggregated approach of this book shows in the first place that the left–right cleavage is a source of territorial homogeneity *within* European nations. Furthermore, the European-wide comparison supports the view that this cleavage is at the same time a source of similarity *between* countries. Not only is the territorial distribution of the left–right dimension the most uniform – compared to cultural and center–periphery dimensions – but this is the case in most European countries. The long-term historical perspective since the mid-nineteenth century indicates that the electoral support for the parties of the left–right cleavage spread and homogenized rapidly after the Industrial Revolution and remained stable with the “freezing” of party systems in the 1920s.

However, the perspective of this work is not only that the increasingly homogeneous territorial distributions of party support reflect the general integration of societies or that parties merely adapt to changing social structures that eroded territorial oppositions. This book tries to demonstrate

⁵ For the historical and comparative analysis of the left–right cleavage see Bartolini (2000b).

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that national electoral behavior and party systems are also the result of parties' *competitive strategies* aimed at expanding through territory in search of electoral support. This work thus tries to combine a "bottom-up" sociological perspective with a "top down" actor-centered approach.⁶ Evidence shows that the erosion of territorial cleavages is not deterministically a consequence of the general integration of societies, but also the product of the action of parties and of their inherently competitive strategies. Parties increasingly tend to challenge other parties in their former strongholds and to spread through constituencies that were hitherto in adversaries' hands. At the territorial level – as later at the ideological level – they tend to cover as much "space" as possible.

These processes will be analyzed in relation to the main historical institutional changes – the extension of franchise and the introduction of PR. However, this perspective, more centered on the behavior of agents, suggests that the competitive mechanisms working in the functional-ideological dimension (described and analyzed since the time of Downs 1957) worked at an earlier stage of electoral development in the territorial dimension independently of the main institutional changes. Evidence presented here indicates that competition in the territorial space preceded competition in the functional-ideological space, especially during phases of restricted electorates. Parties were "catchall parties" before turning into "catchall parties."⁷ Beside macroprocesses of political and socio-economic integration, therefore, competitive factors contribute to generate nationalized party systems in which the most important parties are present in the entire national territory.

Yet, in spite of this general process, regional diversity and territorial cleavages in Europe have not disappeared. To different degrees, territorial politics survives in a number of countries. This book wishes to contribute to research on political cleavages by including in the analysis the sources of *diversity*, *variation*, and *discontinuity* among European party systems. Besides factors of homogeneity and similarity, a number of cultural cleavages have maintained their strength in European party systems in spite of the general process toward the homogenization of electoral behavior. To give a

⁶ For such a "top-down" perspective, see Lipset and Rokkan (1967a: 50) and Sartori (1968: 22).

⁷ As a matter of fact, models in which competition takes place in the "ideological space" were inspired by work on spatial competition carried out by economists (Hottelling 1929; Smithies 1941). These models are therefore ideological analogies. For the concept of "catchall party" see Kirchheimer (1966).

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complete picture of the European cleavage constellation, this work therefore opposes two sets of cleavages:

- *homogenizing* socioeconomic cleavages at the origin of *countries' similarities*: left–right cleavage and nationwide oppositions in regard to secularization and democratization (between liberals and conservatives in particular);
- preindustrial, mainly cultural, cleavages at the origin of the *fragmentation* of European territories and *country differences*: religious, ethnolinguistic, and urban–rural cleavages, as well as peripheral oppositions to national administrative centralization and cultural standardization.

These cleavages are analyzed through the *comparison of the different party families*: those of the first phases of state formation and parliamentary life (conservatives and liberals), those of the industrial age (socialists, agrarians, and later communists), and those that, more than others, account for territorial diversity and cross-country variations: religious parties (Catholics, Protestants, interconfessional people's parties) and ethnolinguistic or regionalist parties stemming from peripheral resistance to national integration.

Whereas, on the one hand, macro-sociopolitical processes led to an increasing integration of political life on a national scale, on the other hand the diversity of patterns of state formation and nation-building, the imperfect correspondence between state and ethnocultural borders, differences in center–periphery relations, and religious fragmentation account for the persistence of a marked territorial fragmentation of the vote and, consequently, for country differences. By including other cleavages besides the left–right one, this book examines the extent to which territorial diversity has survived in spite of the homogenizing forces leading to increasingly nationalized electorates and party systems in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The combined analysis of all cleavages shows that processes of state formation and nation-building, industrialization, and urbanization were unable to compress fully territorial diversity. In particular, the book aims to estimate the weight of *cultural factors* – religious and ethnolinguistic cleavages – on regional diversity in Europe today.

The persistence of diversity in European territories implies that processes of nationalization were strongly at work but not inevitable. Because of the survival of territorial politics in a number of cases, it is legitimate to question whether processes of nationalization of electorates and party systems can actually be reduced to a unidirectional and deterministic

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view. In other words, it is legitimate to ask whether macroprocesses of modernization of Western societies necessarily imply a process of nationalization of politics. Patterns toward more integrated national electorates and party systems varied to a large extent among countries according to their religious and ethnic structures, trajectories of state formation and nation-building, timing of democratization, and formation of stable party alignments. An analysis of European nationalization processes can therefore not avoid being a comparative analysis.

Recent events of regionalization and reterritorialization of politics within European nations have drawn the attention of scholars back to the spatial dimension of political conflicts and have led them to question the unidirectionality of nationalization processes (Keating 1988). On the one hand, transformations at the ideological level – with the decline of the left–right ideological hegemony after 1989 – liberated room in several political systems for feelings of ethnic and territorial identity. On the other hand, the process of European integration and of supranational construction of a European political system led to a significant loss in the normative role of nation-states. These transformations have encouraged several authors to predict the “end” of the traditional nation-state and the birth of a European regionalized and decentralized institutional framework (Harvie 1994). These developments are associated with the idea of a “crisis” of unitarian, centralized, and homogeneous political systems. The breakup of several East European countries, as well as the devolutionary tendencies in many West European ones, seem to attest to the advance of a postnational phase. A transformation toward regionalization can therefore not be excluded a priori at the present time, and the territoriality of political phenomena remains an important dimension of analysis.

To give a complete picture of this macrophenomenon, the analysis presented in this book encompasses more than 150 years of electoral history in 17 West European countries, providing dynamic longitudinal analyses of so far unexplored disaggregated data. Within the broad field of works on nationalization processes, this work focuses on the more specific electoral aspects – *electorates and party systems*. Electoral data represent a helpful tool for the empirical analysis of diverse and complex territorial configurations. The use of such data for the investigation of the complexity of European territories allows in the first place for a systematic analysis. The measurement of nationalization processes through electoral data constitutes a thread to follow in the complex labyrinth of cleavage lines, dimensions of conflict, and territorial divisions. First, this indicator is able to “boil down” the extreme

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diversity of territorial configurations in Europe. Second, it allows for the cross-country comparison and, above all, allows us to go back in history through a numerical and standard measure. Third, electoral behavior is a major indicator of mass political attitudes. Electoral alignments reflect socioeconomic and cultural divisions, and political cleavages translate into party organizations. This indicator will not, of course, tell the entire story, but it constitutes a “skeleton” allowing for the reconstruction of the history of European territorial structures.

Electorates and party systems are analyzed through *electoral participation* and *electoral support for political parties*. Regional variations of turnout and party strength in national general elections measure distinct aspects of the nationalization of politics. The former indicates the persistence of peripheral regions in terms of socioeconomic development: economic structure (the persistence of traditional society), literacy, and forms of political culture (local clientelism). The latter is an indicator of the strength of the territoriality of political cleavages: socioeconomic (wage earners/employers-owners, rural/urban), cultural (ethnic, linguistic, religious), and center-periphery.

The disaggregated election results collected for *EWE-1815* (Caramani 2000) provide the empirical basis of a series of systematic comparative analyses. The description and explanation of the three following variations constitute the basic structure of the empirical investigation:

- The analysis of the *general trend* through time of the territorial structures of voting behavior in Europe (turnout and party support).
- The *cross-country comparison* of the territorial structures of voting behavior (and their temporal evolution).
- The comparison of the territorial structures of support between *cleavages and party families* (and their temporal evolution).

The West European countries included in this research are those of Table I.1.⁸ Central and East European countries have been excluded given the problematic access to sources and the diverse political experience of these countries since 1945. This leaves the analysis with a homogeneous “universe” of 17 West European countries (Rokkan 1970a: 110). For these countries, national general legislative elections to the lower houses are considered. No by-elections or elections to upper houses or regional

⁸ Several countries have been excluded because of their small territorial size. Luxembourg is the main one for which data are available in *EWE-1815*.

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Table I.1. *Countries, Periods Covered, and Number of Parties and Elections*

Country	Period Covered	Number of Elections (Turnout Cases)	Number of Parties (Election Averages)	Number of Party Cases
Austria	1919–95	21	4.0	84
Belgium	1847–1995	32	6.6	211
Denmark	1849–1998	65	5.1	330
Finland	1907–95	32	6.7	213
France	1910–97	17	9.0	132
Germany	1871–1998	36	8.4	297
Greece	1926–96	21	5.9	123
Iceland	1874–1995	42	3.5	150
Ireland	1922–97	26	5.2	133
Italy	1861–1996	33	6.5	213
Netherlands	1888–1998	30	7.5	226
Norway	1882–1997	33	5.2	156
Portugal	1975–95	9	4.5	41
Spain	1977–96	7	12.3	86
Sweden	1866–1998	44	5.2	157
Switzerland	1848–1995	45	7.3	329
United Kingdom	1832–1997	42	5.6	162
TOTAL	1832–1998	535	6.1	3,043

Notes: The analysis considers all parties that received at least 5 percent of the vote within at least one constituency. Other parties, dispersed and unknown votes, and independent candidates are not included. The overall number of cases consists of all parties at each election for every country. Ireland 1832–1918 (the last all-Ireland election) and Northern Ireland 1922–97 included under the United Kingdom.

parliaments are included. The periods of time covered for each country are also presented in Table I.1. Periods of time end with the most recent elections published by 1999. The number of constituencies – in some cases even more disaggregated units such as the provinces in Italy – varies from a minimum of 8 in Iceland (1959–95) to a maximum of 641 in Britain (1997).⁹

Differences in the number of elections between countries are determined by historical factors (state formation, democratization, and structuring of party systems), as well as by the availability of data – depending on the “archivistic revolution” states carried out in recording information during

⁹ Only metropolitan territories are included (namely, for France, the Netherlands, and Portugal), and overseas possessions have always been excluded. The detail on the levels of aggregation is given in Chapter 2 and Appendix 2.