

Dispersing Authority or Deepening Divisions? Decentralization and Ethnoregional Party Success

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Political scientists have fiercely debated the impact of decentralization on ethnic conflict; some see it as a panacea, while others contend that it sows the seeds of its own failure by stimulating ethnic divisions via ethnoregional parties. Using multiple methods—historical analysis, quantitative case studies, and multivariate models of the share of votes won by ethnoregional parties in 71 democracies—this article demonstrates that ethnoregional parties derive no benefit from decentralization in nonethnically decentralized countries. Even in ethnically decentralized countries, much ethnoregional party success is explained by the continuation of parties that originally pressed for decentralization. Any impact of decentralization on ethnoregional parties can be minimized through the careful construction of institutions to enhance regional autonomy but not statewide influence. Consequently, institutional designers should retain decentralization as an option when crafting political institutions even in countries with ethnic divisions.

Decentralization has often been proposed as a palliative of ethnic conflict (Bermeo 2002, 99–100; Duchacek 1987; Gurr 2000; Hechter 2000, 146; Lijphart 1996, 260; Manor 1998, 21; McGarry and O’Leary 2009). It offers regions insulation from central government power. Further, it gives regions home to minority ethnicities the opportunity to protect their language and culture and shape regional economic development. Politically, decentralization can empower minority elites—potentially excluded from statewide politics—and give them a stake in the status quo (Horowitz 1991; Kaufmann 1996, 161; Lijphart 1977; Narang 1995). Because decentralization maintains the country’s territorial integrity and forestalls ethnic conflict, the center also benefits. Dominant groups and regions are reluctant to part with territory out of the same emotional attachment that promotes national feeling. Ethnic minority regions may also hold strategic or economic importance for the country. And countries may fear that a claim for independence by one region may set off a chain reaction resulting in state disintegration.

Though many scholars believe that decentralization can lower the temperature of ethnic conflicts, others fear that it may indirectly exacerbate political differences between the center and ethnic minority

regions (Brancati 2009, 193; Brubaker 1996, 30; Bunce 1999a, 39; Kymlicka 1998; Riker 1964; Roeder 2007, 14–15, 69; Snyder 2000, 206). Some theorize that decentralization heightens the political salience of ethnic cleavages but in a nonlinear manner (Lustick, Miodownik, and Eidelson 2004; Miodownik and Cartrite 2010). Ethnoregional parties serve as the “linchpins” of the theorized link between decentralization and ethnic conflict (Brancati 2009, 12).¹ The grant of power to regions may encourage the development of ethnoregional parties that have a stake in heightened ethnic tensions. Rather than placating minority grievances and appeasing their elites, decentralization may fuel more strident action through ethnoregional parties. Instead of being a force that assures state unity, decentralization may cause greater rifts if it provokes minority demands for power sufficient to gut the center, or even independence, that cannot be contained within existing state structures.

Ethnoregional parties form the vital theoretical connection of decentralization to ethnic conflict, so this article assesses the impact of decentralization on their electoral success. If decentralization spurs ethnoregional party growth, it suggests that scholars suspicious of decentralization’s impact on ethnic conflict are on the right track. But the absence of a

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¹Brancati (2009, 84, 112, 142–44) sees decentralization as especially dangerous in countries without a preexisting statewide party.

relationship would be a critical blow to this theory and consonant with Sorens' (2005) finding that decentralization does not promote secessionism. The analysis here takes a multipronged approach: I look first at the historical impact of decentralization on ethnoregional parties, then turn to quantitative case studies of Italy and Spain, and conclude with multivariate models of ethnoregional party success in 71 democracies from 1990 through 2011.

The analysis demonstrates that decentralization does not consistently promote ethnoregional parties. Indeed, it has no systematic impact outside ethnically decentralized countries. Even in these countries, the success of ethnoregional parties may result from other factors as they existed prior to decentralization. Certain types of decentralized institutions are nonetheless more closely associated with greater ethnoregional party success in ethnically decentralized countries. Enhancing the power of regional governments over statewide politics advances ethnoregional parties more than granting power within regions. Practitioners looking to forestall ethnic conflict should not necessarily shy away from decentralization on the grounds that it aids ethnoregional parties, thereby unwittingly advancing ethnic cleavages and conflict. The impact of decentralization is mixed at best and can be mitigated through careful attention to the types of powers granted.

Background and Competing Hypotheses

Before asking why decentralization may or may not aid ethnoregional parties, it is important to define two key terms: decentralization and ethnoregional parties. Countries are defined as *decentralized* if regional governments have constitutionally entrenched independent decision-making authority. This definition parallels similar definitions of decentralized or federal polities (Brancati 2009, 6–7; Elazar 1987, xv). Additionally, countries are categorized as decentralized if they contain regions that score 15.0 or higher on the Regional Authority Index (Hooghe, Marks, and Schakel 2008) as all but one country with constitutionally protected autonomy have regions with scores of 15.0 or higher.²

²The Regional Authority Index measures the power of regions on several dimensions as described below. The United Kingdom and Spain are the only additional countries captured by RAI scores. South Africa is the sole federal country that does not have a region rating 15.0 or above on this index. Rodden (2004) discusses further the use of the terms “federalism” and “decentralization.”

The term *ethnoregional parties*—or ethnic and regional parties—taps into the difficulties in distinguishing clearly between ethnic parties and regional parties. The Bloc Québécois in Canada illustrates this problem, as it is often viewed through alternative ethnic and regional lenses. Though it presents itself as Quebec's regional advocate, its central concern with the status of the French language limits its appeal to speakers of other languages. Yet the Bloc does not seek to represent all francophone Canadians and is not a statewide party. Despite the difficulties in separating ethnic from regional parties, they are later broken into two groups to construct models of factors that promote each type. Parties centered on national or ascriptive characteristics, such as language, religion, or ethnicity, are labeled ethnic with parties having a territorial but not national character classified as regional.

Why Decentralization May Aid Ethnoregional Parties

The argument that decentralization promotes ethnoregional party success is compelling. The prospect of power—and the resources that accompany it—at the regional level may provide a great incentive for ethnoregional party growth. Parties based in a single region or group can only gain power centrally as part of a coalition, but they can aspire to govern at the regional level. Parties can then leverage the fruits of office and heightened prominence to strengthen their position. While the *raison d'être* of ethnoregional parties limits their appeal and can render them unacceptable coalition partners, it allows ethnoregional parties to portray themselves as authentic regional champions.

Critical to the idea that decentralization aids ethnoregional parties is that it cuts the cost of participation in statewide politics, as it already has in place a party apparatus. Participation in these elections provides more opportunities to rally supporters and for elites to gain office. Ethnoregional party competition may push statewide parties to co-opt their agenda and grant new powers to regions. Ethnoregional parties may need to contest statewide elections to retain media and voter attention, particularly if regional elections are held simultaneously.

Even if ethnoregional parties are bit players in statewide politics, they can still be major regional contenders. They have led regional governments in many decentralized polities, including Canada, Germany, India, Iraq, Italy, South Africa, Spain, and the United

Kingdom. Some regions possess party systems distinct from the rest of the country. Scotland and Wales have nationalist parties in addition to the parties active throughout Britain, and Northern Ireland's party system remains essentially separate.³ In Belgium, statewide parties no longer flourish. Separate party systems also exist in Quebec in Canada,⁴ Åland in Finland, and Nevis in St. Kitts and Nevis.

Why Decentralization May Not Help Ethnoregional Parties

Arguments that decentralization promotes ethnoregional parties center on claims that they have limited chances for success at the statewide level. Scholars, however, should hesitate before dismissing the allure of power at the center. The power of regional governments to choose members of the upper house encourages ethnoregional party support in some decentralized countries (Brancati 2008, 2009). The desire to influence statewide politics—perhaps even to promote future decentralization—could provide reason to support ethnoregional parties in the usually more important lower-house elections. If the prospect of power at the regional level encourages ethnoregional parties, then they may face strong incentives to form in centralized countries to press for decentralization.

Ethnoregional parties have participated in central government coalitions in centralized countries like Bulgaria, Finland, Romania, and Slovakia. They may be attractive partners because their focus on ethnoregional issues makes them more flexible on other questions. Ethnoregional parties have also served in government in decentralized countries, so statewide politics may also have its own appeal. Regional parties have joined statewide governments in tandem with statewide partners in Germany and Italy. In India, the negotiation of electoral alliances by the two major statewide parties with ethnoregional parties is critical to the success of each party and alliance. Belgium's constitutional mandate of equal numbers of Dutch and French speaking ministers necessitates the inclusion of parties from both language groups.

³The Ulster Unionist Party and the Social Democratic and Labour Party have had ties to statewide parties, the Conservatives and Labour respectively, but have retained their separate identities and independence.

⁴Though both oppose Quebec separatism, the federal Liberals are center-left, while the Quebec Liberals are center-right. The current Quebec Liberal leader formerly headed the federal Progressive-Conservatives.

Ethnoregional parties can also influence the composition of governments without joining them. In Israel, Arab parties have not been included in government but nonetheless blocked the formation of hawkish governments after the 1992 and 2006 elections. Ethnoregional parties have provided outside support for minority governments in New Zealand and Spain.

Though decentralization offers tangible power to parties able to capture regional governments, it may not prove a boon to ethnoregional parties in statewide elections. After all, voters can cast ballots for different parties, so ethnoregional parties may receive different levels of support. Voters may be more willing to support ethnoregional parties in regional than statewide elections because of greater opportunities for power since they comprise a higher share of voters in the region.

Electoral dynamics may also operate differently in statewide and regional contests because different institutional setups invoke different identities for the voter. Differences that seem highly relevant at one level may seem unimportant at the other. Chandra (2004) and Posner (2004, 2005) have shown that the scope of the political arena can alter the salience of particular ethnic identities. The use of different electoral systems or changes in constituency magnitude can further alter the ability of parties based in different groups to overcome the electoral threshold.

Different cleavages can even produce different party systems at the central and regional level. Several Canadian provinces have party systems that are quite different from federal politics. Alternatively, regional parties can still experience greater success at the regional level even if the party system retains the same basic form. In Spain and the United Kingdom, ethnoregional parties consistently perform more strongly in regional than statewide elections. These differences in support may reflect that regional parties concentrate more on regional contests where they can make a real bid for power and gain control of resources rather than statewide elections where they are secondary players.

Split-level support may also occur because statewide parties do not easily cede political turf to regional challengers. Statewide parties often pair their name with that of the region to give it a local flavor. Socialists in Spain run with the name of the region attached and translated where desirable. Swiss party nomenclature is flexible; parties run under more than one language label—presenting multiple lists in multilingual cantons—with the appropriate regional label often appended. As in Spain and Switzerland, statewide parties can adopt a federal structure with regional sections or branches possessing distinct identities and

a great deal of independence. In short, statewide parties can adopt structures and labels that blur the distinction between statewide and ethnoregional parties and blunt the latter's appeal (Thorlakson 2006, 2009).

Finally, even if ethnoregional parties garner greater support in statewide than regional elections, it does not necessarily indicate that decentralization amps up their support in statewide contests. Voters may be just as willing to cast ballots for ethnoregional parties in statewide as regional elections—a possibility one should not ignore as the historical analysis presented below shows that ethnoregional parties often predate decentralization and their support did not increase in the wake of the creation of decentralized institutions. Ethnoregional cleavages may also be less salient at the regional level because a minority is so dominant in the region as to render the cleavage unimportant.

Rethinking Decentralization's Effect

Much scholarship concentrates on the general impact of decentralization. This article argues for an approach that focuses on the sequencing of decentralization vis-à-vis ethnoregional parties and the type of decentralization in terms of both its territorial organization and the powers granted to regions. First, it is imperative to keep in mind that ethnic parties often play a critical role in the adoption of decentralized institutions. Ethnic parties are more successful in some decentralized polities not because of decentralization but because they already existed and retain their attraction (Bose 2002, 199). Indeed, one would expect that they tend to be stronger in countries that decentralized due to pressure from ethnic parties or conflict—called ethnically decentralized here. It would be odd to claim that countries like Belgium have strong ethnic parties because of decentralization when the party system was completely divided along ethnic lines prior to decentralization and ethnic parties propelled the decentralization process forward. In contrast, regional parties may be more likely to arrive on the political scene after decentralization, perhaps even as a reaction to ethnic party examples.

Second, whether decentralized polities are ethnically decentralized should shape decentralization's impact. In nonethnically decentralized countries, decentralization should not systematically aid either ethnic or regional parties in statewide contests. Regional appeals should gain less traction in countries without ethnic disputes as they lack the power to link party with preexisting

frictions. Though decentralization creates opportunities to run regional governments, regional elites forfeit the chance for greater power at the statewide level if they limit their support to the regional arena. Unlike in countries with strong ethnic differences, such elites should have less fear of potential competitors who organize parties along regional lines, and statewide parties should find it easier to combat them. Decentralization should not consistently reduce the strength of ethnoregional parties in nonethnically decentralized countries if only because they were often weak from the start.

Third, the disjuncture between the expected effects of ethnic versus nonethnic decentralization has further implications for debates regarding the territorial organization of decentralization. Congruent with the expectation that nonethnic decentralization fails to stimulate ethnoregional parties, I do not expect them to experience more success in nonethnoterritorially decentralized countries—that is, decentralized countries in which the dominant nationality forms a majority in all regions—than in centralized countries. In contrast, ethnoterritorially decentralized countries should have more successful ethnoregional parties, if only because ethnically decentralized countries tend to possess much stronger ethnoregional parties that pressed for decentralization. While Hale (2004) sees dividing the dominant nation into several units as having a salutary impact on ethnic conflict, it seems unlikely that this institutional effect demobilizes ethnoregional parties to the extent seen in centralized or nonethnoterritorially decentralized countries.

Fourth, whether autonomy is granted to regions home to the dominant nationality should also matter. Bunce (1999b, 233) contends that nationalism is especially aggravated in ethnoterritorial federations in which the dominant nationality has greater autonomy but is weak at the center. Her conclusions suggest, conversely, that asymmetrically decentralized countries in which governance of the dominant nationality remains centralized should see weaker ethnoregional parties. As the absence of a separate regional government reduces the opportunities for ethnoegional parties and focuses more attention on statewide politics, the results here are expected to confirm this theory.

Finally, the type of powers granted to regions in ethnically decentralized countries should influence decentralization's impact in these countries. Decentralization ranges not just in the level of authority but whether this authority grants the region more power over its own territory or gives the region greater influence at the statewide level (Hooghe, Marks, and Schakel 2008). Greater autonomy should

aid ethnoregional parties at the regional level, but the focus of autonomy on powers within the region ought to diminish the incentive to support them in statewide elections. In contrast, when decentralization grants regions more influence over the central government, there is a greater pull toward statewide politics. Legislative houses selected by regional governments (Brancati 2009, 57) directly involve the region in statewide governance. Required consultation between statewide and regional authorities does the same even more directly. These sorts of powers should shift the focus of ethnoregional parties toward the center and help spur their party success in statewide elections.

Data and Approach

I gathered election results from 1990 through 2011 and information on the political systems of 71 democracies rated as “free” by Freedom House. The breadth of this study allows for greater confidence and generalizability than past studies, all of which are based on fewer countries, often all located in one region. I examine the impact of decentralization on ethnoregional parties with a three-pronged approach. First, I provide a quick overview of the history of decentralization in all 17 decentralized countries included in the multivariate analysis to assess role of ethnoregional tensions and parties in promoting decentralized institutions and their impact in turn on ethnoregional party success after their adoption. Second, I offer a cross-regional analysis of the impact of decentralization within Italy and Spain—two countries that decentralized at different rates across regions. Finally, I turn to multicountry models of the impact of decentralization on the share of votes won by ethnoregional parties to assess whether the primary impact of decentralization stems from the institution or the heightened effect of ethnicity in countries where ethnoregional parties and tensions led to the creation of decentralized institutions. Additionally, the models make it possible to determine the effect of different types and territorial organization of decentralization.

Historical Analysis

Ethnic parties and tensions often, though not always, propelled the creation of decentralized institutions. Regardless, decentralization does not consistently aid ethnoregional parties, as their share of the vote often remains the same or even declines.

Ethnically Decentralized Countries

I define countries in which ethnoregional parties preceded and promoted decentralization, or preexisting ethnic tensions led to decentralization, as ethnically decentralized. Decentralization had an inconsistent impact on the share of the vote won by ethnoregional parties in the eight ethnically decentralized countries. The remainder of this section provides evidence from each of the eight cases to support these conclusions with countries containing regions with separate party systems prior to decentralization discussed first. Other cases follow in a progression from countries where ethnoregional parties lost votes after decentralization through countries where the impact was mixed to countries where ethnoregional parties gained votes.

The Labour Party has long dominated politics in St. Kitts and Nevis but has not won a seat on Nevis since 1952. Indeed, the last victory on Nevis for a party with support on St. Kitts occurred in 1971 (Rogozinski 1999). Labour ceased contesting constituencies on Nevis after 1980, and Nevis has an entirely separate party system. The Constitution, adopted in 1983 over Labour’s objections by a rare non-Labour coalition dependent upon Nevisian support, established asymmetric federalism that guaranteed Nevis, but not St. Kitts, autonomy (Jones-Hendrickson 2003; Premdas 1998).

In Belgium, regional party success pressured politicians within all three major statewide parties to articulate regional grievances, which led to their division along linguistic lines. Joined by the now regional fragments of the formerly statewide parties, regional parties pressed for decentralization. Constitutional amendments in 1970 commenced the decentralization process, but the first election for regional parliaments did not occur until 1995 (Delwit 2003; Leton and Miroir 1999; Swyngedouw 1998).

The federal founding of Canada stemmed from efforts to resolve ethnoregional tensions. In United Canada, Quebec and Ontario had equal legislative representation though British Protestants in Ontario were becoming more numerous than French Catholics in Quebec. Ontarians demanded representation by population, but Quebecers resisted the end to regional parity. Canada resolved this dilemma by grafting American federalism on to British parliamentary institutions. Federalism enabled Quebec to protect its language and religion while allowing for representation by population in the federal legislature (Moore 1997). The immediate impact was to undercut strong regional divisions in the party system. Quebec Bleus and Ontario Conservatives had worked together prior to

Confederation and formed a united legislative group. Even more tellingly, Quebec Rouges and Ontario Reformers, who had not been similarly compatible before the adoption of the federal solution, joined together to form the Liberals (Cornell 1967). Regional parties sprang up at various periods but all either died or became statewide until the success of the Bloc Québécois which won a majority of Quebec's seats in the six federal elections held from 1993 through 2008 but lost all but four in 2011 (Massicotte 2009).

Federalism emerged in South Africa as a result of the transition negotiations to end apartheid. The African National Congress (ANC) favored a unitary state but the National Party—the primary representative of whites and also increasingly perceived as an advocate for Coloured, or mixed-race, South Africans—as well as the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)—a Zulu party—favored decentralization (Griffiths 2005; Kincaid and Tarr 2005). These interests meshed with partisan interests as the ANC was the prohibitive favorite to win the first post-apartheid elections in 1994, but the National Party won the 1994 provincial elections in Western Cape, as did the IFP in KwaZulu-Natal (Rule 2000). Since 1994, the share of the vote won by ethnoregional parties has steadily declined.

The United Kingdom has devolved power asymmetrically to Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Northern Ireland possessed a separate party system centered on the cleavage over its status long before partition. The creation of the Scottish Parliament following a 1979 referendum has not aided the Scottish National Party (SNP) in Westminster contests; the SNP won an average of 19.2% of the Scottish vote in the three parliamentary elections both before and after the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. Support for Plaid Cymru has never equaled that of the SNP, though Plaid's share of the Welsh vote rose after the creation of the Welsh Assembly from an average of 8.7% in the three predevolution elections to 12.7% in the three postdevolution elections.⁵

The 1469 marriage of Ferdinand, heir to the Kingdom of Castille, to Isabella, heiress to the Crown of Aragón, resulted in the foundation of Spain. The country began life as a decentralized polity as the major components of the Crown of Aragón, including the Balearic Islands, Catalonia, and Valencia, retained their own parliaments, as did Galicia and the three

Basque provinces in Castille. Navarre also kept its parliament when it became part of Spain in 1512. Despite fierce resistance, Spain gradually centralized in succeeding centuries, though the Basque provinces and Navarre largely managed to protect their rights (Lecours 2007; Medrano 2005). During the Second Republic, regional parties in Catalonia, the Basque provinces, and Galicia pressed successfully for autonomy, but Franco's victory put an end to decentralization; however, Navarre preserved its rights due to its support for the winning side (Cuadrado 1969; Granja Sainz 1986; Tusell Gómez 1971). Regional parties emerged again in Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia and pushed for decentralization that was ultimately extended to all regions after Spain democratized (Moreno 2001). Spanish decentralization efforts consistently stemmed from demands articulated by ethnoregional parties.

Regional decentralization in Italy has been a gradual and asymmetric process. Shortly after World War II, Italy decentralized to five "special statute" regions. Three—the Aosta Valley, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, and Trentino-Alto Adige—received statutes due to the presence of linguistic minorities while two—Sardinia and Sicily—gained statutes in an effort to release separatist pressures expressed by votes for regional parties in the 1946 elections. Support for these parties declined subsequently, though ethnoregional parties emerged in the other three special statute regions and performed especially well in the Aosta Valley and the South Tyrol province of Trentino-Alto Adige (Wolff 2003, 125). The remaining regions received "ordinary statutes," in 1970, and Italy granted more powers to the regions in 1975, 1990, 1993, 1997, and 2001 (Leonardi, Nanetti, and Putnam 1987). Ethnoregional parties were absent from these regions until the end of the Cold War and the *Tangentopoli* scandals led to the party system's collapse. The Northern League blossomed throughout the North in 1992 after precursor parties emerged in Lombardy, Piedmont, and the Veneto in 1987—roughly two decades after decentralization (Newell 2000). Statistical models shown below confirm the lack of a consistent relationship between decentralization and support for ethnoregional parties in both Spain and Italy.

Despite promises to reorganize India's provinces on a linguistic basis, the Indian National Congress (INC) government held off due to its sensitivity until demands for a Telugu-speaking Andhra state in 1953 forced its hand (Majeed 2003). The 1956 *States Reorganization Act* put into place the current blueprint though India has continued to draw new states,

⁵The SNP has had more striking success at the regional level since the formation of the Scottish Parliament, first winning a minority government in 2007 and then a majority government in 2011, and now promises to hold a referendum on Scottish independence. In Wales, Plaid Cymru joined a Labour-led coalition after the 2007 election but left government after the 2011 election.

primarily but not always on an ethnolinguistic basis (Adenay 2007, 76, 110; Chadda 2010; Ganguly 2007). Ethnoregional parties have become stronger in recent years, though whether their rise can be ascribed to decentralization rather than the INC's decline seems unclear. The INC has been a very heterogeneous coalition, unifying quite different groups across states (Chhibber and Petrocik 2002). Its decline has aided the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—the major pole for the opposition—but this Hindu-oriented party cannot similarly weld such distinct groups together, which has left political space open for ethnoregional parties. The failure of the BJP to unite non-INC forces may further reflect that no other party possesses the aura of the independence movement or the Nehru-Gandhi family (Kumar 2003).

Among the eight ethnically decentralized countries, decentralization had a mixed impact on the fortunes of ethnoregional parties. Two countries—Belgium and St. Kitts and Nevis—had completely regionalized party systems before and after decentralization. In South Africa, ethnoregional parties have declined steadily since its first democratic elections. Decentralization undercut regional divisions in Canada, though the Bloc Québécois performed well in recent decades until the 2011 debacle. In Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom, the impact has been mixed with no change in ethnoregional party success in some regions but higher or lower support in others. Ethnoregional parties have strengthened in India, though whether this growth is due to decentralization or the waning support for the INC remains cloudy. In short, an examination of trends without controlling for other variables does not show that decentralization consistently aids ethnoregional parties.

Nonethnic Decentralization

In contrast to ethnically decentralized countries, decentralization was not propelled by ethnic tensions or ethnoregional parties in nonethnically decentralized countries. These nine countries decentralized for other reasons, such as to unite previously separate territories or to resolve nonethnic disputes. Two-thirds of non-ethnically decentralized countries have no or minor ethnoregional parties in statewide elections. Among the remainder, there is no discernible trend in ethnoregional party support. The rest of this section briefly overviews each case.

Argentina and Brazil created federal structures as a solution to nonethnic tensions between *caudillos* or

oligarchic elites at the center and in the periphery (Gibson and Falletti 2004). Australia, Switzerland, and the United States took federal form to persuade separate territories to coalesce (Griffiths 2005; Kincaid and Tarr 2005). Argentina has many regional parties (Calvo and Escobar 2005; Leiras 2007; Snow and Manzetti 1993), and their vote share has risen in recent years, but ethnoregional parties have limited success at best in Australia, Brazil, Switzerland, and the United States.⁶

Austria opted for federalism after the Austrian-Hungarian Empire's collapse at the end of World War I. Local fascists ended democracy and federalism in 1933 prior to annexation by Nazi Germany in 1938. The Allied victory in 1945 led to restoration of the 1920 federal constitution (Griffiths 2005). No ethnoregional parties have participated in federal elections since 1945.

Welded into a single country by Prussia, Germany had a decentralized, albeit authoritarian, structure since its inception as the states retained much autonomy. The Weimar Republic weakened the states, and federalism died with onset of the Nazi regime in 1933. After defeat in World War II, Germany's new Basic Law established federal structures mandated by the Allies, but also perceived by Germans as protecting liberty and democracy. Communism's collapse led to the incorporation of East Germany in the form of new states (Griffiths 2005; Kincaid and Tarr 2005).

During the Empire, ethnic parties representing minorities in the Empire's periphery accounted on average for three-quarters of ethnoregional party votes with regional parties gaining the rest. Germany's World War I territorial losses removed most ethnic minorities, and thus supporters of ethnic parties, beyond the frontier, so regional parties accounted for most of the ethnoregional party vote during the Weimar Republic. Since the Federal Republic's foundation, Bavarian parties, mainly the Christian Social Union (CSU), have won the lion's share of regional party votes. The Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS)—the East German Communist Party's successor—however, accounted for one-third of the regional party vote during the four elections when it acted as a *de facto* regional party before merging with a breakaway from the Social Democrats to form the Left Party prior to the 2005 elections.

Portugal created the autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira after the overthrow of its authoritarian government in 1974. Autonomy for the two

⁶The Ticino League in Switzerland is the most successful ethnoregional party among these countries. It won an average of 0.8% of the Swiss vote and 16.7% of the Ticino vote in the six elections held from 1991 through 2011.

island groups resulted from nonethnic conflict between the Left and the Right during Portugal's democratic transition (Gallagher 1979). Ethnoregional parties have performed very poorly in Portuguese statewide elections.

Finland granted autonomy to the Swedish-speaking Åland Islands to forestall irredentism and armed conflict with Sweden. But more than 90% of Finland Swedes live on the Finnish mainland, and Finland rejected decentralization as means of addressing linguistic conflict on the mainland in favor of reciprocal protection for language minorities at the municipal level.⁷ The Swedish People's Party (SFP) has consistently won the bulk of the votes cast by Finland Swedes. Åland has its own party system, but its sole MP always has joined the SFP parliamentary faction (McRae 1997).

There is no clear evidence that decentralization consistently aids ethnoregional parties in nonethnically decentralized countries. Ethnoregional parties have experienced minor or no success in Austria, Australia, Brazil, Portugal, Switzerland, and the United States. Support for the Swedish People's Party has slowly eroded along with the number of the Finland Swedes. By contrast, support for ethnoregional parties has grown in Argentina. The CSU has dominated Bavarian politics since World War II, though the party's vote share has declined recently. Total support for ethnoregional parties in Germany rose temporarily when the PDS acted as a regional party before its merger into the Left Party.

Two Cases Studies: Spain and Italy

Spain and Italy present two natural experiments of the impact of decentralization. Both were centralized prior to democratization—after World War II in Italy and Franco's death in Spain—and held statewide elections before decentralization. Further, decentralization did not occur simultaneously in all regions of either country. The Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia held their first regional elections in 1980 or 1981, while the first elections for all other Spanish regions occurred in 1983; Ceuta and Melilla waited until 1995 to receive autonomy. In Italy, the postwar Constituent Assembly gave special statutes of autonomy to five regions, but other regions gained ordinary statutes in 1970.

⁷Despite Åland's autonomous status, Finland is classified as nonethnically decentralized—a choice that makes theoretical sense since the great majority of the ethnic minority party's potential support lives on the centralized mainland, and Finland rejected decentralization as a means to resolve its central ethnic conflict.

In order to test the impact of the introduction of decentralized institutions on ethnoregional party performance in regions of Italy and Spain, I conducted a series of cross-sectional regression analyses that control first just for decentralization and then introduce additional controls for fixed effects and interactions between the fixed effects and decentralization. Tables 1 and 2 present the coefficients and standard errors from three cross-sectional time-series GLS models of the share of the ethnoregional party vote in each region. Model 1 controls just for autonomy; a dummy variable is coded zero before and one after a region gained autonomy. Model 2 also includes controls for fixed effects for each region except Madrid in Spain and Lazio in Italy. Model 3 adds interaction terms between the dummy variable controlling for autonomy and each of the fixed effects but includes only the interaction terms with coefficients somewhat close to achieving conventional levels of statistical significance.

Models of the share of votes won by ethnoregional parties in Spanish elections from 1977 through 2008 and Italian elections from 1946 through 2008 do not reveal that decentralization causes ethnoregional party growth. In all models, the coefficient on the autonomy variable is statistically indistinguishable from zero and thus indicates that decentralization did not result in systematic gains by regional parties. The interaction terms in Models 3 for Italy and Spain indicate that the implementation of decentralized institutions is associated with increased ethnoregional party support in some regions but decreased support in others with no overarching trend.

Multicountry Models of the Impact of Decentralization

Ethnoregional parties and tensions helped propel the birth of decentralized institutions in ethnically decentralized countries; however, decentralization did not result from ethnoregional parties or pressures in nonethnically decentralized countries. If decentralized institutions cause ethnoregional party growth even in countries without preexisting ethnic parties or conflict, then a relationship should exist between their presence and votes for ethnoregional parties in both types of countries. Heightened success by ethnoregional parties in ethnically decentralized countries may merely indicate the continuing strength of ethnoregional parties that preceded decentralization, rather than the impact of decentralized institutions. But one cannot ascribe any added success by ethnoregional

TABLE 1 Cross-Sectional Time-Series-Forced Generalized Least Squares Models of the Share of the Vote Won by Regional Parties in National Elections in Italy, 1946–2008

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Decentralized (1 = Yes)	.04	.23	.21	.26	.11	.14
Abruzzi			.24	1.14	.22	.55
Aosta Valley			43.56	9.08	16.24	17.67
Apulia			.56	1.06	.55	.56
Basilicata			.12	1.13	.12	.52
Calabria			.45	1.12	.41	.59
Campania			.40	1.14	.37	.61
Emilia Romagna			2.27	1.35	.54	1.69
Friuli-Venezia Giulia			6.39*	2.81	2.13	4.12
Liguria			2.93	1.85	2.93	1.80
Lombardy			8.17	5.57	8.22	5.79
Marche			-.04	1.17	-.04	.53
Molise			.70	1.19	.59	.72
Piedmont			5.20	3.06	5.23	3.15
Sardinia			4.54*	1.91	15.56***	3.77
Sicily			1.44	1.23	8.64***	1.27
Trentino-Alto Adige			31.38***	2.51	.44	5.13
Tuscany			-.06	1.17	-.06	.50
Umbria			-.03	1.16	-.03	.55
Veneto			9.80	6.66	9.89	6.94
Aosta Valley x Decentralized					30.42	17.94
Emilia Romagna x Decentralized					2.74	1.98
Friuli-Venezia-Giulia x Decentralized					5.76	4.54
Sardinia x Decentralized					-11.97**	3.86
Sicily x Decentralized					-9.99***	.96
Trentino-Alto Adige x Decentralized					33.15***	5.27
Constant	3.48***	.81	.61	.66	.01*	.35
Number of cases	340		340		340	
Groups	20		20		20	
Time periods	17		17		17	
Wald chi-squared	.04		213.87		702.54	
p > chi-squared	.85		.00		.00	

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

parties in nonethnically decentralized countries to the same factor. Strong performances by ethnoregional parties in nonethnically decentralized countries would provide powerful evidence that decentralization galvanizes ethnoregional parties. Alternatively, the lack of an increased vote share would indicate that decentralized institutions alone do not result in greater ethnoregional party success.

I created cross-sectional regression models of the share of votes won by ethnic and regional parties in 71 countries from 1990 through 2011 in order to measure the impact of ethnic and nonethnic decentralization. Table 3 presents coefficients and standard errors from cross-sectional time-series generalized least squares

regression models with clustered standard errors. Beyond the key variables of interest—*ethnically decentralized* and *nonethnically decentralized*—the models control for a number of other factors. Ethnoregional party success likely depends on the percentage of ethnoregional minorities that live in areas where a party based in the minority group could win seats out of the country's population; *percent ethnoregional minorities* controls for this factor.

Some countries with proportional representation reduce the legal threshold that parties must overcome to receive seats for ethnic minority parties. Accordingly, *lower threshold* controls for the additional minority population that lives in areas where they could support

TABLE 2 Cross-Sectional Time-Series-Forced Generalized Least Squares Models of the Share of the Vote Won by Regional Parties in Congressional Elections in Spain, 1977–2008

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Decentralized (1 = Yes)	.45	.35	.23	.25	.06	.12
Andalusia			4.29***	.73	6.18***	1.07
Aragón			10.88***	1.37	5.85***	1.56
Asturias			1.10*	.53	1.11**	.35
Balearic Islands			5.52***	1.34	5.50***	1.49
Basque Country			45.07***	5.42	45.20***	5.21
Canary Islands			17.38***	4.25	12.54***	4.77
Cantabria			1.47	1.13	1.47	1.14
Castile-La Mancha			.00	.50	.01	.15
Castile and León			1.00	.57	1.02**	.36
Catalonia			30.32***	2.38	22.45***	1.85
Extremadura			1.14	.72	1.18*	.52
Galicia			10.75***	1.12	7.47***	2.21
Murcia			.01	.69	.56***	.16
Navarre			15.43***	3.94	21.24***	4.26
La Rioja			1.77*	.83	1.78*	.71
Valencia			3.22*	1.27	1.10	1.64
Ceuta			4.21***	1.21	5.19***	.98
Melilla			2.77	1.87	-.01	1.82
Andalusía x Decentralized					-2.20	1.19
Aragón x Decentralized					7.19***	1.88
Canary Islands x Decentralized					11.29***	2.07
Catalonia x Decentralized					7.85	5.57
Galicia x Decentralized					4.15	2.47
Murcia x Decentralized					-.68***	.15
Ceuta x Decentralized					-9.23	5.05
Melilla x Decentralized					3.20	1.70
Navarre x Decentralized					-2.34	1.59
Valencia x Decentralized					7.15*	2.98
Constant	7.73***	.83	-.04	.40	.06	.14
Number of cases	190		190		190	
Groups	19		19		19	
Time periods	10		10		10	
Wald chi-squared	1.67		454.08		2364.26	
p > chi-squared	.20		.00		.00	

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

a viable ethnoregional party. Numerous studies have shown that small parties fare less well in countries with presidential elections, so the models control for a *simultaneously elected strong president*. Additionally, four countries in the dataset—Brazil, Ghana, Hungary, and Peru—have cross-regional *ballot access requirements* that make it more difficult for regionally based parties. Both variables are weighted by the share of ethnoregional minorities, since their influence on ethnoregional party success is likely proportional to their population share. The models control for income,

measured by *purchasing power parity*, as Hale (2000, 44) suggests that separatism is stronger in comparatively wealthy regions while Hechter (1992, 275) argues the opposite. All models also control for the *year*.

The regression coefficients presented in columns 1, 4, and 7 of Table 3 indicate that ethnic and regional parties perform no more strongly in nonethnically decentralized countries than in centralized countries. By contrast, both ethnic and regional parties score a higher share of votes in ethnically decentralized countries. These models suggest one of two things:

TABLE 3 Cross-Sectional Time-Series GLS Regression Models with Clustered SE of Votes Won by Ethnoregional Parties

	Ethnoregional Parties			Ethnic Parties			Regional Parties		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Ethnically decentralized	7.16*** (1.21)			2.82*** (.92)			1.86* (.85)		
Nonethnically decentralized	.13 (.65)			-.03 (.26)			.63 (.64)		
Percent ethnoregional minorities	.40*** (.02)	.35*** (.03)	.42*** (.02)	.32*** (.02)	.25*** (.03)	.31*** (.02)	.00 (.00)	-.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Lower threshold x Percent additional ethnoregional minorities	1.03** (.38)	1.15** (.40)	1.26*** (.38)	.56* (.26)	.53* (.26)	.52* (.26)	.06 (.15)	.02 (.09)	.01 (.17)
Simultaneously elected strong president x Percent ethnoregional minorities	-.24*** (.04)	-.19*** (.04)	-.24*** (.04)	-.16*** (.04)	-.10** (.04)	-.16*** (.04)	-.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	-.02** (.01)
Ballot-access requirements x Percent ethnoregional minorities	-.11* (.05)	-.12* (.05)	-.13*** (.05)	-.12* (.05)	-.12* (.05)	-.14** (.05)	.01 (.01)	.00 (.00)	.03* (.01)
Purchasing power parity (\$1000)	-.01** (.00)	-.02** (.01)	-.00 (.00)	-.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	-.01 (.00)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.00)	-.00 (.00)
Year (1990 = 0, 1991 = 1, . . . 2009 = 20)	-.00 (.00)	-.00 (.00)	-.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.01*** (.00)	.00 (.00)	-.00 (.00)	-.00 (.00)	-.00 (.00)
Nonethnoterritorial decentralization		1.18 (1.32)			-.26** (.10)		1.19 (1.40)		
Ethnoterritorial decentralization with dominant nation split up		8.47*** (1.69)			4.18*** (1.22)		3.37* (1.51)		
Ethnoterritorial decentralization on national lines (Belgium)		22.94*** (1.25)			26.47*** (1.12)		-.03 (.07)		
Ethnoterritorial decentralization with dominant and minority nations split up (Switzerland)		-6.85*** (.76)			-6.34*** (.64)		1.36*** (.32)		
Asymmetric decentralization with centralized dominant nation		2.86*** (.68)			.38 (.48)		-.03 (.08)		
Institutional depth (0-3)			.04 (.06)			-.01 (.02)			
Law making (0-2)									.54*** (.16)
Executive control (0-2)			2.61*** (.65)			2.71*** (.65)			
Fiscal control (0-2)						1.10** (.41)			.46** (.15)
Constitutional reform (0-3)						-.56** (.20)			
Constant	.33** (.11)	.50** (.19)	.08 (.12)	.06 (.11)	.14 (.14)	.26 (.15)	.02 (.11)	-.00 (.01)	.06 (.12)
Observations	400	400	400	400	400	400	400	400	400
Panels	71	71	71	71	71	71	71	71	71
Wald chi-squared	707.25	8582.43	512.72	307.83	11855.73	347.70	7.16	26.89	14.72

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

either decentralization only has an impact in countries in which ethno-regional cleavages were already salient, so ethno-regional cleavages are especially strong in countries that are ethnically decentralized; or the strong showing by ethno-regional parties in these countries reflects the preexisting strength of these ethno-regional cleavages prior to decentralization. Decentralization may result from the high power of ethno-regional parties, not the reverse.⁸ Among the eight ethnically decentralized countries, the minority region already had a completely different party system in two—Belgium and St. Kitts and Nevis—before decentralization. In two others, Canada and South Africa, the immediate impact of decentralization was to reduce ethno-regional party support. Decentralization is linked to more variable levels of ethno-regional party success in the remaining four countries. The quantitative cross-regional models of support for ethno-regional parties in Spain and Italy show that decentralization has no systematic impact across regions with ethno-regional parties winning more votes in some and less in others. In the United Kingdom, Plaid’s support grew even as the vote for the SNP remained unchanged in statewide contests. Northern Irish politics was largely divorced from the rest of the United Kingdom prior to decentralization. India has seen major increases in the share of the votes gained by ethno-regional parties, though their blossoming occurred decades after independence and the linguistic reorganization of states. Even if the prior success of ethnic parties explains much of their success after decentralization, the same does not hold as true for regional parties, suggesting that decentralization—combined perhaps with the example of ethnic parties—may stimulate the regional party vote. At less than 2%, the effect, however, is small.⁹

Models testing the impact of different territorial approaches to decentralization presented in columns 2, 5, and 8 confirm that *nonethnoterritorial decentralization* does not increase the success of regional parties and slightly undercuts the share of the vote won by

ethnic parties. Ethno-regional parties perform stronger in countries with *ethnoterritorial decentralization with the dominant nation split up* among multiple regions, though not as strongly as in *Belgium*, a country decentralized on national lines. These results support Hale’s (2004) claim that dividing the dominant nation undercuts ethnic parties, though it rests on a single case in which the party system was completely ethnicized before decentralization and ethno-regional parties still do better than in non-ethnoterritorial countries even when the dominant nation is divided among several regions. Intriguingly, Switzerland indicates that dividing the minority as well as a dominant nation may reduce ethnic party success below that of even centralized countries; however, regional parties perform better and, again, one should be cautious about generalizing from a single case. *Asymmetric decentralization* has a relatively weak impact on ethno-regional party vote share—there is no significant effect in separate models of ethnic and regional parties—when the dominant nation remains centralized. This finding is consistent with Bunce’s (1999b, 233) conclusion that strong dominant regions propel nationalism.

A third set of models examines the effect of different components of decentralization on votes won by ethno-regional parties. The eight dimensions of Hooghe, Marks, and Schakel’s (2008) Regional Authority Index (RAI) measure the impact of different aspects of decentralization. Four “self-rule” dimensions rate the control that regional governments possess over their own territory. Regions with autonomous decision-making power are deemed to have greater *institutional depth* than regions that administer central government decisions or lack any sort of regional administration. *Policy scope* assesses the range of independent policy responsibilities and *fiscal autonomy* the independent taxation powers held by regional governments. Regions score higher in terms of *representation* when they have an independent assembly and executive. Four “shared rule” dimensions gauge the influence that regional governments have over statewide decisions. Regional governments rate higher in *law-making* power when regional governments select members or form units for representation in the statewide legislature. Regions gain *executive control* as they set policy and *fiscal control* as they determine the distribution of central government revenues in negotiations with statewide authorities. *Constitutional reform* measures the control exercised regional governments over constitutional change.

High correlation between the eight RAI dimensions precludes crafting models of ethno-regional

⁸Note that this result does not imply that decentralization always stems from ethno-regional party pressure. Decentralization may result from a number of causes, such as the desire to weld previously separate territories into one country. Nor is this conclusion meant to suggest that ethno-regional parties always create decentralization—a transparently inaccurate claim. Even if all ethno-regional parties promoted decentralization—and not all of them do—many may lack sufficient leverage ever to achieve the goal of reorganizing state institutions, a task that inherently requires some support from the majority group.

⁹The impact of ethnic decentralization on regional parties declines to 1.15% ($p < .05$) if one excludes St. Kitts and Nevis, which had completely regionalized party system prior to decentralization.

party support that contain all of them. Separate models were first constructed with each dimension with only dimensions that achieved statistical significance ($p < .05$) tested together in the models presented in columns 3, 6, and 9 of Table 3. The most striking finding is the lack of impact of the self-rule dimensions. Greater autonomy may augment the strength of ethnoregional parties in regional elections but does not have any systematic impact in statewide contests. In contrast, the shared-rule dimensions have a greater effect on the strength of ethnic and regional parties in ethnically decentralized countries.¹⁰ The positive impact of law making (column 9) validates Brancati's (2009, 57) conclusion that giving regional governments the power to select representatives of a central legislative body aids regional parties. Executive control boosts ethnic party performance (column 6) while fiscal control enhances the ethnic and regional party share (columns 6 and 9), though to a lesser degree. Unlike other shared-rule dimensions, power over constitutional reform undercuts ethnic parties (column 6). Leaving this dimension aside, components of decentralization that raise their influence in statewide governance increase support for ethnoregional parties in statewide elections in ethnically decentralized countries but components of decentralization that give them more power within the region do not.

Implications

The multiple methods utilized here—historical analysis, quantitative case studies of Italy and Spain, and multivariate models of the share of votes won by ethnoregional parties in 71 countries—show that not all forms of decentralization increase ethnoregional party success in statewide elections. The division of decentralized countries into types reveals that decentralization does not have a positive impact if it is not ethnic or not ethnoterritorial. Even the impact in ethnically decentralized countries may result from preexisting ethnic tensions or ethnoregional parties that led to the adoption of decentralized institutions. Contrary to Bunce (1999a, 39), Brubaker (1996, 30), Roeder (2007, 14–15) and Snyder (2000, 206) but in line with the findings of Lijphart (1996, 260), McGarry and O'Leary (2009) and Stepan, Linz, and Yadav (2011, 47, 55), these findings suggest that

institutional designers should not necessarily shy away from the creation of regional governments with meaningful powers out of fear that decentralization will unwittingly reinforce ethnic tensions through the promotion of ethnoregional parties.

At the same time, the analysis of which dimensions of decentralization positively influence ethnoregional party performance suggest tentatively that one can undercut the tendency of past forces to continue to promote ethnic and regional parties through emphasis on crafting decentralized institutions that augment regional autonomy but not regional power over statewide governance. The division of minority as well as majority areas into multiple regions, or the limitation of decentralization only to minority regions, may also make electoral success more difficult for ethnic and regional parties.

Though this study does not speak to the direct impact of decentralization on ethnic conflict, the absence of a consistent link between decentralization and ethnoregional parties suggests that carefully constructed decentralized institutions will not indirectly undermine any salutary impact on interethnic relations. The success of ethnoregional parties in decentralized countries tends to reflect the preexisting strength of ethnoregional parties and ethnic divisions. The mindful creation of decentralized institutions with a focus on autonomy rather than influence within statewide institutions can help assure that decentralization does inadvertently incentivize ethnic and regional parties.

The results suggest several avenues for future research. The study includes many countries that transitioned recently to democracy; however, further study of “partly free” democratic countries would help assure broader generalizability of the conclusions, though such studies would also need to take greater account of the impact of undemocratic practices. The breakage of both majority and minority regions into multiple units in the manner of Switzerland in order to undercut ethnic cleavages warrants additional study, as also suggested by Horowitz's (1985) similar conclusions regarding Nigeria. Finally, efforts to mitigate ethnic conflict would benefit from greater investigation of which aspects of regional autonomy work best and why various forms of decentralization have different effects.

Decentralized institutions give ethnic and regional minorities a greater stake within the political system and encourage their representatives to pursue their goals within that system. Decentralization does not necessarily exacerbate existing ethnic cleavages in the national party system and should remain an option in the effort to craft stable democratic institutions that

¹⁰Models constructed with separate terms controlling for the effect of each statistically significant RAI dimension confirm that their impact is overwhelmingly within ethnically decentralized countries.

meet the challenges posed by ethnic divisions to interethnic peace and democratic stability. Attention to the components of decentralization can help augment its chance of success.

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