EXTENSIVE OR INTENSIVE GROWTH?
AVENUES FOR ETHNO-REGIONALIST PARTIES
TO TRANSCEND THEIR CORE CONSTITUENCY

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I, the undersigned Jad Marcell Harb hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this work is to identify what strategies present themselves for European ethno-regionalist parties to transcend their core (ethnic) constituency, and to determine based on what factors it can be predicted that an ethno-regionalist force takes the path of either strategy, provided it is prone to opt for any 'irregular' innovation. After empirically finding two such strategies in Europe, lateral expansion from the core territory to the whole country, called the *extensive strategy*, and developing an ideological profile, the *intensive strategy*, variables are distilled from the corresponding literature that are supposed to account for confining ethno-regionalist parties to specifically take either of the two modes of growth: the three independent variables are the strength of regional identity, the level of regional autonomy, and the desire to participate in the national government and to be a determining force there. After formulating the hypotheses, a qualitative comparative examination of four European cases follows. Altogether, these cases provide sufficient support for the hypotheses to see them largely satisfied. That is, European ethno-regionalist parties where the regional identity is weak, the level of autonomy is low or non-existent, and where it is a primary aim for the party to seek governmental positions will be likely to opt for the extensive strategy, while their peers with the opposite characteristics are expected to go for the intensive path. The theory is also able to predict the behaviour of ambiguous cases in-between the two ideal types, but its applicability to cases beyond Europe remains an open question.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Italy's *Lega Nord* (Northern League) achieved something unique among ethno-regionalist parties in Europe during the 1980-1990s. The party invented a new identity for North Italians, the 'Padanian,' building on a new, previously absent cleavage in Italian politics, ethnicity (Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro 2016), by contrasting the socio-economically different northern and southern parts of the country. *Lega* was so ardent in defending the interests of the North that, at one point, the party went as far as demanding independence for the northern parts of the country (Diamanti 1997). This strategy – built on distinguishing between a positively evaluated (honest, hard-working and simple-living) Northern 'us' versus a negative 'them' that included lazy, unproductive Southerners, whose interests were served by the corrupt political elite in Rome exploiting affluent North (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2005, 960-961; Diani 1996, 1060) – came to an abrupt end when Matteo Salvini took over party leadership in 2013. He soon 'went on to apologize for the insults he had directed at southerners throughout his political career and claimed to have become persuaded that, either Italy saved itself as a nation, or else all of its regions, without exception, would face ruin' (Albertazzi et al. 2018, 5-6). *Lega*'s new sister party soon established a firm presence in the South, where the pro-North movement had understandably been virtually absent previously, and before the 2018 general elections the two forces eventually merged. The northern character of *Lega* (now without the adjective *Nord*) faded. Subsequently, the party became more popular than ever: in the 2018 parliamentary elections *Lega* received 17.35 percent of votes and got into government as the junior partner of the Five Star Movement. As of May 2019, the party is well ahead of its competitors in the polls, and is set to win the European elections in Italy with over 33 percent of the votes (European Parliament 2019).

The strategy that may be called 'deregionalisation' is indeed a remarkable development. It might be the first case when an ethno-regionalist party took party rhetoric, issue ownership so far from the original regionalist cause that it completely jettisoned the quest for regional autonomy or independence. According to Albertazzi et al. (2018, 18), *Lega* can no longer be included in the ethno-regionalist but the radical right party family.

Similar to *Lega Nord*'s origins, the Scottish National Party (SNP) was also founded as a strictly ethno-regionalist formation promoting Scottish independence. Until the 1960s, SNP competed exclusively along territorial issues (Elias 2018, 15), but even before the 1980s, the single-issue character of SNP enabled people with any kind of personal ideology to join the party, provided they supported Scottish independence:

> The SNP billed itself as the party for all of Scotland, transcending class and ideological lines. The result was that the SNP was a composite of socialists, Tories, radicals, small-town businessmen, farmers, and even a number of persons who claimed to be apolitical. The ultimate common goal which hopefully would keep the party united was the demand for independence.
>
> (Kauppi 1982, 328)

Nonetheless, as the result of a factional power-struggle in the party, proponents of social democracy eventually managed to push the SNP to the left subsequent to 1981; during the 1980s the SNP developed a strong social democratic profile resulting from the realignment of internal power relations (Kauppi 1982, Newell 1998). Addressing Scottish voters through left-wing economic issues beside regionalist ones paid off for the party: it became a fairly stable and determining player in Scottish politics afterwards. Notwithstanding, unlike *Lega Nord*, the SNP has remained committed to its original aim, Scotland's independence throughout its transformation, and has not moved beyond the territorial confines of Scotland.

Extending reach geographically and addressing voters through ideology: both *Lega Nord* and the Scottish National Party did something that is unexpected from an ethno-regionalist party. Originally vying for autonomy or independence – the essence of ethno-regionalism –, they started looking for other ways to gain popularity; ways that are seemingly rather unconventional for parties of their type. Their puzzling cases indicate two possible ways ethno-regionalist parties can transform themselves in the quest for a new, wider constituency. The aim of this work is to investigate what reasons led the originally similar parties to opt for poignantly different strategies in terms of vote-maximisation, and to check whether the factors that are present for *Lega Nord* and SNP apply to other parties with similar strategies.

1.1 Research question

What strategies present themselves for ethno-regionalist parties to extend their support base beyond core voters? How do they lure supporters that are not susceptive to mainstream ethno-regionalist messages? The literature has essentially overlooked this topic so far, undeservedly: the subject's relevance lies in the probable effects ethno-regionalist party (re-)positioning may have on regional, or even national, party competition, meaning it has crucial implications for the wider electoral arena as well.

According to Türsan's 'parsimonious definition,' ethno-regionalist parties have two common features: (1) a subnational territorial border, and (2) an exclusive group identity (1998, 5). Commonly, it is argued that ethno-regionalist formations compete primarily along the autonomy/decentralisation issue dimension, and the most salient issue owned by them is the demand for the reorganisation of state structures with respect to the right to self-determination of the community they represent – some authors call this 'the' issue they own (De Winter et al. 2006, 17; De Winter 1998b, 204). Moreover, several scholars even count ethno-regionalists

among niche parties competing along *one* newly introduced issue in the electoral space (e.g. Meguid 2008, Libbrecht et al. 2013, Basile 2015). Nonetheless, there are a number of works which demonstrated that ethno-regionalists' agenda is indeed more colourful (e.g. Gomez-Reino et al. 2006; Massetti 2009), and, what is more relevant from the perspective of this study, it is not as rigid, exposed and defenceless to external actors as for example proposed by Meguid (2008), but actually ethno-regionalists can actively shape party competition in a country, by various (and changing) issue positions (Tronconi 2005).

Thus, how do European ethno-regionalists address voters outside their respective 'natural' constituency? The objective of this work is to distinguish between two viable, empirically existing, options open to these parties, and discern the underlying conditions incentivising them to go in either direction. The hypotheses will be derived from the literature: although an understudied subject, academia has certain, if mostly indirect, suggestions for the possible causal factors. The initial qualitative analysis of two ethno-regionalist parties, Italian *Lega Nord* (Northern League) and the Scottish National Party, major and well-known forces of their family, reveals that the proposed incentivising factors for choosing different growth strategies are largely there, moderately strongly supporting the hypotheses of the paper. Thereafter, an analysis of two ambiguous – but to either side leaning – cases will indicate that there is a correlation between the independent and dependent variables, which makes the theory work for cases 'in-between,' being on an imagined regression line. In the following, a brief reasoning about applicability outside a European context will strongly suggest that the often vastly differing qualities of party systems (including common indistinctness of regional and regionalist parties) and the lack of sufficient information on non-European ethno-regionalists usually make the theory inapplicable to a non-Western environment. The last section includes concluding remarks.

1.2 Variables

1.2.1 Two options – the dependent variable

Responding to the question of how ethno-regionalists can grow beyond their natural, core constituency, based on the introductory puzzle two options present themselves empirically in Europe. That does not automatically mean, certainly, that there cannot be more options, but the fact that *Lega Nord* and the SNP managed to transform themselves in either way, and that they were ostensibly successful in augmenting their respective constituency, creates a solid ground for treating these two strategies as viable routes for ethno-regionalists. That is, these forces have a feasible opportunity of becoming a party with a strong ideological character, holding positions on issues other than those that relate to ethnic rights and autonomy, while remaining nested in their original territory (*intensive growth*); or, they could extend presence laterally, possibly to the whole country – the crucial motive here is that for doing so the party needs to, to a substantial extent, de-emphasise its ethno-regionalist character (*extensive growth*).

It needs to be strongly stressed here that it is not expected that every ethno-regionalist party will, at one point in its history, try either strategy. On the contrary, parties venturing to adopt intensive or extensive growth schemes are the exception rather than the norm here – and exactly because the norm for ethno-regionalists should be to remain ethno-regionalists, while these strategies come with de-emphasising that core theme. Therefore, these innovative strategies should apply to relatively few cases, i.e. it cannot be expected that the mainstream among ethno-regionalists would be to try out either scheme. Nevertheless, this does not mean that this work would be about a marginal phenomenon. First, because the topic is of serious theoretical importance that goes beyond the particular cases (e.g. why are such strategic changes typical to ethno-regionalists specifically), and even the sphere of ethno-regionalist parties (e.g. to what extent is voluntarism, repositioning based on utility maximisation considerations, possible in a

party). Second, because these strategic alterations for ethno-regionalists have grave real-life consequences: parties can rise to local or national government, multiply the number of supporters, and, as a result, be considerably more determining due to the strategic changes described and discussed in this paper.

Another caveat related to the strategies is the name 'growth.' As ethno-regionalists' natural electorate is rather clearly defined and separated from the rest of voters (e.g. Swedes in Finland, Hungarians in Romania, Germans in Italy), ideally ethno-regionalists can rely on a stable electorate with no incentives for change. On the other hand, this work intends to investigate those very cases when such parties still decided to grow out of this situation. From this a question arises: how should we count those cases when ethno-regionalists resorted to either of these strategies, but clearly out of necessity, in order to compensate for an electoral loss for example? Can the complementation of lost voters with new ones with the help of these strategies be called a *growth* strategy? This paper's argument is that it can, because of two reasons. First, because in practice it is occasionally a nearly impossible task to decide whether a party decides to change strategy out of ambition or the intent to make up electoral losses. It is not viable to fully map why party leaders reasoned for certain strategy modifications in every case. Also, what amount of electoral loss should count as the boundary here? Did *Lega Nord* leaders fear electoral losses, or rather they were motivated by ambition in their decisions? Second, even if the increase happens from a lower, reduced level, and might not even rise above the heyday levels of a certain party, supplementing electoral loss by the methods described here *can* be regarded as an innovative growth strategy, as the voters attracted by it could probably not have been won over by the traditional ethno-regionalist issues. Therefore, even if it is only relative progress in some instances, the term 'growth' adequately describes the essence of the party strategies discussed here.

1.2.1.1 Intensive growth

Apparently, one way for an ethno-regionalist to instigate an upward trend electorally is to develop a more ideological character for the party, while remaining in the territory it originally represents, i.e. to somehow grow at home 'intensively.' Massetti and Schakel (2015) denoted that it is possible for ethno-regionalists to 'subsume Left-Right into centre-periphery politics.' This equals to the dilution of the ethno-regionalist quality of the party by including 'mainstream,' economic and social, issues in its discourse, and competing along these with others. There is considerable evidence that ethno-regionalist parties tend to use this strategy, i.e. they, while remaining within the original confines of the territorial presence of the ethnic group represented by them, they develop a profile of being a party that cares about other issues as well (e.g. Tronconi 2005; Gomez-Reino et al. 2006; Massetti 2009). Two considerations could lie behind such a move. First, the expectation that the party will be able to address more voters that are not responsive to ethno-regionalism, but care about more mainstream issues. Second, the reasoning that, entering the terrain of mainstream parties, the ethno-regionalist force would be able to compete with them in their primary issue dimensions with the hope of luring voters from them.

The operationalisation of intensive growth is rather straightforward. We should regard as evidence for this strategy the cases when the salience of issues that are not directly connected to ethno-regionalism increases in party discourse, something that should be clear when examining party manifestos, campaign rhetoric, or communication in heightened, crisis situations. In the meantime, the party should continue to address its core, territorially-ethnically defined voter base, and not try to expand laterally, e.g. by founding party offices and fielding candidates in other parts of the country.

Two caveats need to be added here. First, the parties following this way need to be distinguished from ethno-regionalist forces that have had an ideological character from their beginnings, and

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for whom this growth strategy cannot be applied. For example, the *Südtiroler Volkspartei* (South Tirolean People's Party) was dominated by conservatives in its early history, from its foundation in 1945, until the mid-1950s (Holzer and Schwegler 1998, 164). Second, an ideological face does not always serve as a means to transcend the core constituency. It may simply follow the ideological orientation of (the majority of) the core constituency, which means a natural convergence towards the mean *core* voter. Also, an external force, feasibly a strong/governing party from the kin state of a national minority, may induce kin ethno-regionalists to align with its ideology, in exchange for support.

1.2.1.2 Extensive growth

The other option empirically open for ethno-regionalist forces is *extensive growth*, i.e. expanding territorial presence, becoming a nation-wide party. This strategy can be seen as a more radical one compared to intensive growth, as in the latter case there is no need for the explicit de-emphasising of ethno-regionalist issues, while the former comes with directly de-stressing, in extreme cases even disowning it, for autonomy or independence claims for a certain region would probably not resonate well with the nationwide electorate. This also comes with a different party character, but not necessarily a comprehensive, poignantly ideological one, although it is naturally clear that the parties in this case need to include non-ethno-regionalist issues in their agenda. Thus, there might be elements of the intensive, ideological growth strategy present in the extensive case, making the two strategies to some extent overlap and mix. Nonetheless, the decisive momentum for identifying the extensive strategy should be clear even in this occasion: the fact of territorial expansion.

Operationalising extensive growth is more complicated than it seems to be at the first glance. It is obvious that it needs to contain an element in which the party extends its presence to parts of the country from where it was previously absent, and which is not inhabited by the people it

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hitherto addressed. Nonetheless, this may not be sufficient evidence for the party pursuing such a strategy: it may well be possible that it only aims at gathering votes from the members of its core ethnic base who, for various reasons, e.g. work opportunities, migrated or moved there. Hence, an additional rhetorical element is also needed, whereby the party expresses its motivation to address voters that are not territorially or ethnically confined to its previous ethno-regional voter base.

1.2.1.3 Growth strategies in the academic literature

Understanding this phenomenon, i.e. ethno-regionalist growth strategies, is currently a gap in the respective literature. Not much theorising has been done in this respect. Clearly, one notable exception has been Zuber who, writing about ethnic party strategies in Serbia, already touched upon this topic (Zuber 2011). Among the four viable strategies she identified, *lateral underbidding*, meaning 'escap[ing] the narrow confines of ethnic appeal and one-dimensional competition' (767), for which parties need to 'include positions on a new dimension of competition' (768), considerably concurs with the *extensive growth* strategy proposed in this paper. In her particular case, the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (Hungarian: *Vajdasági Magyar Szövetség*; Serbian: *Savez vojvođanskih Mađara*; SVM) stepped up to the *regional* level, Vojvodina. This, even if not a straightforward example, as SVM did not become a nation-wide party, can be regarded as an instance for the extensive strategy, for '[r]egional appeal is wider than appeal to Hungarians because the centre-periphery cleavage between Belgrade and Vojvodina does not overlap with, but cross-cuts, the Hungarian–Serbian ethnic divide. Hungarians constitute a minority also in Vojvodina' (768). SVM also 'widened its appeal beyond the group [the Hungarians] and shifted toward a more moderate position regarding autonomy for Hungarians on the ethnic dimension' (767), which signals the need to at least

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partially de-emphasise the ethno-regionalist (in this particular case, rather the ethnic) party character when extending presence geographically, beyond core ethnic voters.

Another strategy denoted by Zuber was *lateral bidding*, which apparently mirrors *intensive growth*. She defines it as follows: 'A party that begins to appeal to a wider electorate but maintains its original position on the ethnic dimension chooses a strategy of lateral bidding' (761). Although turning ideological is not pronounced in this conceptualisation, it is implied, which is made obvious by Zuber as in the particular example examined by her the Sandžak Democratic Party (*Sandžačka demokratska partija*; SDP) developed an ideological, social democratic, profile (768-769). More precisely, and partially going against Zuber's own conceptualisation of the lateral bidding strategy,

> SDP did not simply add social-democratic to ethnic positions. SDP went one step further and split the party into two parts during the time of observation: the original 'Sandžak Democratic Party', now under the leadership of Resad Hodžić remains in charge of appealing to voters in Sandžak. The new party, the 'Social Democratic Party of Serbia' founded by former SDP leader Rasim Ljajić in October 2009, now presents a non-ethnic, social-democratic offer.
>
> (Zuber 2011, 769)

Altogether, Zuber assesses that '[r]easons for lateral bidding mirror the reasons for lateral underbidding as both constitute decisions to appeal beyond the ethnic category' (769). However, her evidence from Serbia is not decisive from the perspective of this study, as she (1) did not measure to what extent the strategy was successful, working, and (2) did not aim at acknowledging possible incentivising factors for choosing either way, and did not attempt to establish causality; (3) her examples did not show the proposed strategies in a considerably clear form in either case: the laterally underbidding party remained within the regional framework instead of extending to the national scene, while the party doing lateral bidding in fact remained the same ethno-regionalist force, but established an ideological, non-ethno-regionalist twin party, and the two entered into an alliance. Thus, further testing, a better clarification, and discerning of the causal effects is desirable.

1.2.2 Independent variables

What factors drive ethno-regionalists vying to transcend their core constituency into either direction? Based on what preliminary hunch suggests, three arise that merit to be investigated as potential twisting forces: the strength of regional identity, decentralisation achieved, and striving for national governmental positions. I argue that these variables, if present or not, do not *make* ethno-regionalist parties embrace either growth strategy, rather, they confine them – in case they decided to opt for widening their electoral basis – which path to go down on, with great possibility rendering them unsuccessful if they go against these confines.

1.2.2.1 The strength of regional identity

The strength of a minority population's national/ethnic identity arguably has an influence on ethno-regionalist support. As Türsan (1998, 9) writes, 'the relation between high identification with regional identity and the strength of ethnoregionalist parties (…) [depends on] how the party's support is distributed and how ethnic group support is distributed.' Hence, we can expect that if a regionalist party regards itself as unable to win enough votes with the promise of autonomy or secession in its represented community, it may try to do so with 'more conventional' issues. It may be seen perverse that this work expects a relative de-emphasising of the ethnic character when the ethnic identity is strong. However, the argument here only stipulates that in case an ethno-regionalist party is motivated to transcend its ethnic constituency, *and* when the ethnic identity of this ethnic constituency is strong(ly distinct from the rest of the society, or the majority society), it will probably choose the intensive growth strategy, as it comes with a less radical change in terms of the ethno-regionalist character than the extensive one.

In Türsan's widely used definition (1998, 5), the territorial dimension element (a subnational territorial border) is more exact than the other one, exclusive group identity. Whether this 'consciousness of group membership identity and belonging' (Dandoy 2010, 197) is in fact strong and there, or it is lacking, can differ from region to region. It also varies whether the represented group, the *ethnie*, is conceived geographically – comprising of every people living in a definite territory –, or rather, it is based more on ethnicity – a common language, and/or culture, history, experience, etc., thus excluding people from the community within the region. Massetti and Schakel identified three factors contributing to regional identity distinctiveness: 'the presence of a regional language; the presence of a distinct institutional history of the region (e.g. having been an independent state in the past; relatively recent annexation in the current state, etc.); geographical isolation, especially in the form of island regions' (2016, 61). There can be cases of ethno-regionalism when these differences between the majority and minority ethnicities are not obvious, or when the region's ethnic composition is mixed with people with different ethnicities (e.g. the majority nation). In these cases, an ethno-regionalist party may decide that it can never be successful enough if it exclusively strikes ethnic chords; electoral response to such politicking would relatively be little due to the low level of identification with the particular *ethnie* among the people. This creates an incentive and opportunity for the party to go beyond its ethnic constituency and expand laterally throughout the country, as (1) the people originally targeted by it are weakly responsive to ethno-regionalist messages; (2) ensuing from (1), the party has little to lose, as it is feebly embedded with the regional ethnic constituency; transcending it would probably not come along losing a catastrophic amount of political offices, while a non-ethno-regionalist approach entices with much more. Thus, we can hypothesise that:

H1: Ethno-regionalists with an ethnic constituency of weak ethnic identity are likely to opt for extensive growth

In turn, if regional ethnic identity is strong, the party with an ethno-regionalist appeal is likely to be well-embedded in the region, thus it is seriously threatened to lose its core support if it decides to significantly de-emphasise this character. Thus, our second hypothesis suggests that:

H2: Ethno-regionalists with an ethnic constituency of strong ethno-regional identity are likely to opt for intensive growth

The operationalisation of ethnic identity strength is rather problematic, as objective indicators, i.e. self-identification of being a member, or the use of language might not always be sufficiently good indicators for it, because they are not necessarily able to catch the *strength* of the identity, especially in the case of secondary identities. Therefore, we may to rely on additional qualitative sources, accounts on the identity strength of the particular group, or even on more indirect indicators, such as the temporal volatility of people's identification as belonging to a certain ethnic group.

1.2.2.2 Decentralisation

Ethno-regionalist parties may insist on their above-mentioned primary demand, and issues revolving around it – how the process of decentralisation should be implemented, how policy-formation in a future autonomous entity should look like. However, when they are eventually given, then the so much desired self-rule, this issue may get, at least to some extent, emptied out. When their foremost objective gets achieved, a 'programmatic gap' is created, a situation called 'accomodatism' by Massetti and Schakel, i.e. 'electoral loss due to policy accommodation' (2013, 797), which can incentivise ethno-regionalist parties to fill their programme with different issues, no longer revolving solely around autonomy. Moreover, a new, not as *ethnie*-based discourse may develop because the autonomous territory's population probably consists of other nationalities as well – e.g. from the majority nation – who may also

need to be converted by the party for achieving a decisive position – getting elected to political offices – in the region.

Decentralisation can also mean more resources for a party that is strong in a particular region, called the 'institutionalist' argument by Massetti and Schakel (2013), as it can take many newly created regional positions with their financial, and other sorts of, benefits.

Medeiros et al. (2015), in a paired case study, provide evidence that even in a heated situation such as the 2012 Catalan regional elections, 'highlighted by the debate around centre-periphery issues' (20), space remained for economic and social matters that were outside the realm of 'centre-periphery issues.' Moreover, in the Quebec elections the same year, the *Parti Québécois* even ruled out holding an independence referendum had they won a governing majority, indicating that sovereignty played a relatively modest role in the vote (Medeiros et al. 2015). This argument sheds light on another possible strategic consideration for ethno-regionalists. Territorial institutions may allow for ethno-regional parties to get closer to being regional parties by de-emphasising their ethnic character and keeping the ethnic appeal only implicitly, i.e. by simply being present only in the region the particular ethnic group inhabits. This comes with the strategic advantage to campaign on secondary, non-ethno-regionalist issues without losing their core voters.

What we can deduct from this is the following. First, that decentralisation for the region the ethno-regionalist formation stands for creates political and other kinds of political and civil service positions and offices that the party can occupy and utilise for its own ends (e.g. for more effectively propagating its cause, patronage, etc.). If the party pondered to change strategy and to laterally expand to a wider area, because of the necessary programmatic and rhetorical changes it should realise that the extensive strategy comes with a great risk that it will (partially) lose its regional support, thus the political and other offices it currently occupies, ultimately incentivising it to remain in its safe home territory, and to try an intensive growth strategy

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instead, i.e. gathering more support among the regional population with non-ethno-regionalist issues. On the other hand, regional parties in non-decentralised countries do not have such impetuses. Even though a direct causal drive for lateral extension in unitary states cannot be discerned either, the opportunity remains for them to do so, i.e. we can contend that ethno-regionalists in non-decentralised countries are more likely to choose the extensive strategy than their peers in regions that do enjoy autonomy. Altogether, we can state only one hypothesis regarding the direct causal effects on ethno-regionalist strategy choice:

H3: Ethno-regionalists in autonomous regions are likely to opt for intensive growth.

Being operationalised, decentralisation should mean territorial autonomy, especially that there is either a regional parliament or a regional executive, or both, with their respective apparatuses and civil servants that are elected by the local population (i.e. they are not appointed from above), which, with all of its benefits in terms of finance, power, and patronage, thus can serve as a realistic aim for the ethno-regionalist party to seize, or gain a substantial portion of.

1.2.2.3 Striving for positions in the national government

'For the vast majority of autonomist parties, operating at several territorial levels simultaneously is vital if they are to meet their primary goal, namely the re-distribution of political authority across different territorial levels within the state' (Elias and Tronconi 2011, 521). Hence, from the perspective of issue ownership, for ethno-regionalist parties much depends on the coalition potential of the party with other mainstream formations, i.e. whether it is set to, in order to better promote its agenda, participate in coalition government with other parties. They have to be careful, as Albertazzi and McDonnell write (2005), as they are to retain a fragile balance in terms of being a governmental as well as an opposition party in the same time – due to their aims easily seen by other parties as disruptive towards the integrity of

the state, while voters may regard the party in government as having given up its principles in exchange for power. In other words, they have to appeal both to their coalitional partners, and their electorate, and thus resolve a programmatic clash between the two.

Nonetheless, joining coalition governments can eventually be useful for new parties (Bolleyer et al. 2012), which is probably the reason for many new parties having done so in recent decades (Deschouwer 2008). Also, participating in regional government and coalescing with other parties in the regional level could be an indicator for similar strategies on the nation-wide scene (Elias and Tronconi 2011, Tronconi 2015).

The empirical analysis by Elias and Tronconi suggests that 'when it comes to being in government, autonomist parties are less distinctive, and more conventional, political actors than is often suggested in much of the scholarly work on these parties' (2011, 521), i.e. they can, and usually do, adapt to the demands a coalition government comes with. Arguably, if in coalition, an ethno-regionalist party will have to – due to the collective responsibility in governments and because of the cabinet positions it gets, i.e. for portraying itself as competent – develop a more varied political agenda comprising several issues outside the ones relating to regionalism.

Logically, parties with an extensive growth strategy can be expected to have goals in taking a more active part in the state-level political life, and to strive for positions in the national government, as they can more easily get rid of their ethno-regionalist character. Nonetheless, strong regional parties may also have such aims, which can be realistic if they are strong enough, and/or the region is sufficiently big. The fine distinction that can be made here is while parties with an extensive growth strategy are expected to primarily go for winning elections on the national level, their peers remaining within a particular region most probably consider the regional level to be their primary electoral arena. The bottom line is, parties whose central aim

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is to strive for positions in the national government, rather than doing so regionally, are more likely to follow the extensive growth strategy, which is itself our next hypothesis:

H4: Ethno-regionalists with the central aim to strive for positions in the national government are more likely to opt for extensive growth.

Whether a party genuinely and primarily strives to gain positions in the national government can be rather ambiguous. Naturally, one sort of evidence is that it regularly participates, or at least aims at participating, in a governing coalition – as the chance of a to any extent ethno-regionalist force being able to govern alone (democratically) is rather low. Nonetheless, even classical ethno-regionalists can, and often do (see above), participate in national governments. Thus, the only data we can rely on is the party's declaration as a primary, arch intent of wanting to govern nationally, the seriousness of which may be underpinned by other parties' communication or deeds, which could indicate whether they consider it as sincere and a real threat to them. Altogether, this qualitative evidence has to be evaluated very prudently.

1.3 Definite hypotheses

Putting together the hypotheses' suggestions gathered so far, this paper further hypothesises that if regional identity is strong, decentralisation has been achieved, and the party does not strive for positions in the national government, an ethno-regionalist force with irregular growth intents will 'opt' for the intensive way, as otherwise de-emphasising ethno-regionalism could seriously harm its core voter support, thus its political offices gained in the region, and it has no motivation to compensate that probable loss on the national level. On the opposite end of the spectrum, ethno-regionalists in areas with weaker regional identity and no decentralisation do not have these strong constraints, while the desire to be in government stimulates them to appeal to a wider electorate, thus it is hypothesised they will try to grow extensively. It is

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important to note that for now this paper considers the independent variables as being jointly sufficient for a party to decide either way. Therefore, the main hypotheses of this work are:

H5: Ethno-regionalists will opt for intensive growth if ethno-regional identity is strong, decentralisation has been achieved, and it is not a main aim of the party to strive for positions in the national government.

H6: Ethno-regionalists will opt for extensive growth if ethno-regional identity is weak, decentralisation has not been achieved, and it is a main aim of the party to strive for positions in the national government.

It is worth noting again that the two strategies, as described above, are ideal types. That is, in reality it cannot be expected that all innovator ethno-regionalists will either develop an ideological profile and remain in their core area, *or* extend territorially while not having a coherent, strong (not rudimentary) ideological face. There can exist parties that do both, territorial extension *and* ideology development at the same time. From that the question arises: which category should we relegate these 'mixed' type parties into? It was argued above, although not in a conclusive manner, that in this case the territorial extension should count as a more decisive momentum, simply due to practicality: it seems that from the two factors (expansion and ideology) used to distinguish the territorial is the stronger one, i.e. based on it we are better able to differentiate and classify these overlapping cases. Also, the particular hypotheses seem to more strongly refer to a party's opportunities and obstacles for and against territorial expansion, and somewhat more weakly to that of ideological changes, which also corroborates the sort-of-primacy of the territorial factor. Thus, when a case appears, and one desires to classify it as belonging to either category, the territorial outreach factor may be considered first: if there is territorial extension, then the case should belong to the extensive

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growth strategy type (although an incidental overlap with the intensive category should naturally be emphasised); if there was no territorial extension, but a new ideological profile was developed for the ethno-regionalist formation, then the case is clearly part of the intensive growth category. With all this reasoning I do not want to contend that territorial extension is more important than ideological developments in the theory, but that taking territorial extension is more apt for making distinctions between the two major strategies discussed in this work. That is, territorial extension's relative importance vis-à-vis ideology is not a theoretical, but a methodological one, and concerns unambiguity and parsimony.

1.4 Research design

This hypothesis testing paper seeks to answer the question why ethno-regionalist parties opt for different paths when trying to transcend their core ethnic constituency. For testing this, it will make inferences from the information gathered about ethno-regionalist parties that managed to move beyond their core constituency, i.e. which are to a substantial extent supported by voters who do not belong to the ethnic/national group they claim(ed) to represent, and that chose either intensive or extensive growth as strategy. As a reasonable scope limitation, so as to the examined parties' behaviour be more comparable, the investigated cases are European post-World War II parties. Another apparent limitation of the paper is that it does not scrutinise other possible growth strategies, but only those two that have been observed in effect.

The hypotheses subject to testing are distilled from relevant literature. Based on them, it is possible to systematically analyse the cases. The two initial cases, *Lega Nord* and the Scottish National Party are regarded as similar cases, close to being purely single-issue ethno-regionalist parties at their inception, which evolved in poignantly different directions later. By analysing

similar cases we are able to reduce indeterminacy, i.e. make sure that the effects were caused by the proposed hypotheses, and not something else that was not accounted for.

Thereafter, in order to further reduce indeterminacy, the paper tests the hypotheses on two more, ambiguous, cases by deeming the relation between the independent and the dependent variables as a correlation, instead of the initially suggested set-relation. This second investigation is apt for diminishing the possibility of making a false judgement on the hypotheses in the first investigation, i.e. that the different outcomes were thanks to contextual factors that do not travel to more cases. Based on that, a sounder verdict can be delivered in terms of the hypotheses, and it can be demonstrated that the theory is able to predict cases in-between, i.e. being somewhere between the endpoints of an imagined regression line.

The number of investigated cases is thus four, making this work a small-N study. The main reason for that is that this work is a pioneer in the chosen field, therefore the profound qualitative scrutinization of the particular cases is especially important, for they can serve as basis for further studies.

Chapter 2: Lega Nord – from Padanian to Italian nationalism

Italy's *Lega Nord* (Northern League) achieved something unique among ethno-regionalist parties: it has invented a new identity for North Italians, the Padanian, building on a new, previously absent cleavage in Italian politics, ethnicity (Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro 2016), by contrasting the socio-economically different northern and southern parts of the country. At one point, the party went as far as demanding independence for the northern parts of the country (Diamanti 1997). This performance would be noteworthy in itself, but *Lega* also developed a populist (protest) character beside regionalism (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2010; Abbondanza and Bailo 2018) – it is considered by some the main xenophobic party in Italy (Abbondanza and Bailo 2018) –, and even managed to portray itself as a governmental party, participating in national governments and leading regions, in the country.

2.1 Inception and the beginnings

The ideological roots of the *Lega Nord* can be traced back at least to the period after World War II, when certain intellectuals wrote about Northern Italy being distinct from the South based on its economic, moral, and linguistic uniqueness. The main related argument was that the North was being exploited by the Italian State due to the economic subsidies it channels to the poorer Southern parts of the country; a noteworthy example for these figures was future *Lega Nord* senator Gianfranco Miglio, calling the northern regions of the country as Padania as early as of 1945 (Brunazzo and Roux 2013, 3). Notwithstanding, the first *leghe* (leagues) defending Northern regional interests, the *Liga Veneta* in Veneto and the *Lega Lombarda* in Lombardy were founded only in 1979 and 1984, respectively (Gobetti 1996, 60), and saw their first successes in the late 1980s, with the demise of the previously unchallengeable force

Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democracy). Seeing the political space freed up in the right, the several regionalist movements present in Northern Italy merged into a single party, the *Lega Nord*, in 1989 (Brunazzo and Roux 2013, 3-4) – with the leadership of *Lega Lombarda* chief Umberto Bossi, who became an insurmountable figure in the party.

Concerning the party's programme in these years, its 'thin and malleable' ideological core (Giordano 1997, 139) became federalism by the second half of the 1980s. By that time, emphasising narrower ethno-regional differences by the local *leghe* no longer payed off electorally, argues Giordano (1997, 138). Thus, *Lega Nord*, the author further contends, the astute defender of the Italian North's economic interests, saw fiscal autonomy as the best device for getting rid of the tyranny of economic redistribution by the Rome government at the expense of the North – and to the benefit of the South (164). Thus, we can say that *Lega Nord*, in the initial phase of its history, acted as a 'mainstream' ethno-regionalist party hostile to the central government, and the social groups dominated by it (in their view, it was the Southern Italians). *Lega Nord* owned issues related to this characteristically ethno-regionalist concern, with one notable exception: they were already very critical to the allegedly loose immigration controls (Diani 1996, 1060).

Their anti-political and populist rhetoric (Diani 1996, 1060) became politically rewarding at the time when economic problems, parallelly with political scandals, instilled resentment within the social milieus of the petite bourgeoisie and small-industry owners: their fears of corruption, immigration, and crime resonated with the *Lega* discourse in the late 1980s, and early 1990s (Diani 1996, 1058-1059). As a result, more and more people refused positioning themselves on the traditional political left-right scale in Italy (Martinotti and Stefanizzi 1994), which again was fruitful for the *Lega*, its main invention being regionalising the most important political cleavage of the country, the economic one, i.e. interpreting it as a primarily territorial matter (Ferrera 1997, 245-246) and not one based on class (which connects to the left-right opposition).

A stronger identification on the political left-right dichotomy would have rendered *Lega*'s success less feasible.

2.2 The quest of independence

In the 1992 general elections, the last one held in the Italian 'First Republic,' the newly created *Lega* achieved its thus far best results. The outsider image, demanding decentralisation, bigger role for the regions, and the positioning as the defender of the North's economic interests, i.e. a largely ethno-regionalistic programme, along with the immigration issue played well with many disillusioned 'Padanian' voters (Massetti and Toubeau 2013, 360). This happened again in 1994, and the party joined the right-wing coalition government as a junior partner. Notwithstanding, the coalition led by *Forza Italia* (Forward Italy) leader Silvio Berlusconi only lasted for less than a year due to 'constant clashes' launched by *Lega* towards the prime minister, forcing him to resign in December (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2010, 1319).

This fiasco, the ostensible inability to effectively take part in Italian governments, and to sway their policy into a preferred direction, pushed *Lega Nord* onto the course of strengthening its ethno-regionalist character instead of opening up to other issues. Namely, the party now favoured the secession of 'Padania' from Italy; it even issued an 'Independence Declaration' in September 1995 (Diani 1996, 1053).

Albertazzi and McDonnell (2005, 955) explain with three factors why the party left behind the issues owned by it until then, and now sought independence instead. First, its issue ownership regarding federalisation, of which it had been the sole advocate for a long period, was now contested by many mainstream forces on the Left and Right, and the party, from a utilitarian standpoint, needed new issues which would have distinguished it from others. Second, it expected (in vain) that the left-wing Italian government would fail to meet the criteria for

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joining the European Monetary Union, leaving northern industry in a very unfavourable situation, and naked to further 'exploitation' by the 'inviable South.' Third, *Lega Nord* foresaw a support boost because the Padanian independence demonstrations initially attracted a lot of media visibility serving well *Lega*'s spectacular mode of doing politics.

This move however, even if seemed to be successful initially, soon became to be deemed as a dead end for the party. While by the 1996 elections *Lega*'s support base changed from shopkeepers and businessmen to workers and artisans, and it even became the most voted party of the North with a record result of 10.1 percentage (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2005, 954), in terms of the territorial spread of support it receded back to its pre-1992 electoral borders (Beirich and Woods 2000, 131-132), which should have been a serious warning. Even if '[t]he invention of 'Padania' shows that such identities do not necessarily have to be inherited from primordial roots but can actually be created almost from scratch in contemporary society' (Giordano 2001, 36), the fact that the 'Padanian' nationalist turn of *Lega* materialised in virtually no electoral gain (see above, also Giordano 2001) showed that this 'imagined community' showed few signs of existence, or at least the 'Padanians' were not very responsive to the nationalist-secessionist stimulation. Therefore, from all these we can conclude that the Padanian ethnic identity among North Italians was rather weak.

2.3 Towards governability

The processes described above eventually materialised in the major setback for *Lega Nord* in the 1999 European elections. Responding to the crisis, party leaders decided that they needed to change strategy and try reclaiming ownership over the territorialist issue in another way, which was allying more with centre-right parties' preferences (as no nation-wide political force was quite fond of *Lega*'s secessionist turn). Therefore, party leaders were committed to

developing a characteristic right-wing profile for *Lega Nord*, enabled by the ideological proximity already existing with the Right on issues like taxation and immigration (Massetti and Toubeau 2013, 368). These decisions thus steered *Lega Nord* in the direction of some rudimentary sort of an intensive growth strategy – a rudimentary one as this turn was still very closely bound to ethno-regionalist issues.

The strategic realignment was worth it in the light of subsequent events. Not because the electorate would award the party right at the next general election: the 2001 3.9 percent was the worst ever result for *Lega Nord*, and its voters were decimated even in key areas such as Lombardy, Veneto, Piedmont, and Friuli-Venezia-Giulia (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2005, 954). Nonetheless, the recent shift in party rhetoric – promoting devolution instead of Padanian independence – made *Lega* able to be seen as a credible coalition partner on the Right. Thus, after pledging to unconditionally support Berlusconi in exchange for the governmental promise of promptly implementing devolution to the regions (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2005, 956), the party joined the second Berlusconi government along with coalition leader *Forza Italia*, the now moderate post-fascist party *Alleanza Nazionale* (National Alliance; AN), and the *Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e Democratici di Centro* (Union of Christian and Centre Democrats; UDC).

In the subsequent right-wing administrations (2001-2006, 2008-2011) – all of them led by key ally Silvio Berlusconi –, the junior coalition partner *Lega Nord* established itself as a credible owner of two issues, '*la devolution*,' and '*la sicurezza*.' The way it managed to achieve that was (1) by getting the coalition government to put on its agenda the issues the party promoted, and (2) by effectively distinguishing themselves from other coalition partners, especially from AN and UDC, in the eyes of the electorate.

'*La sicurezza*' (security) is a buzzword referring to both immigration and law-and-order in Italian politics (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2010, 1319). In this regard, *Lega Nord* was, right in

2001, quick to push through the government a new, stricter immigration law. However, the so called 'Bossi-Fini' law (after the names of the *Lega Nord* and *Alleanza Nazionale* party leaders) was seen as too soft, a compromise for the *Lega* (Akkerman and de Lange 2012, 586). The fact that the party did criticise AN for being too soft on immigration, *Lega Nord* did not only overtake the moderating post-fascist AN 'proudly' from the Right (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2005, 963-964; 969). It also attacked AN for building up a centralised state to the detriment of the North, serving the South's interests (Zaslove 2012, 433), further distinguishing *Lega* from AN – it was needy as *Alleanza Nazionale* was still the party closest to *Lega Nord* on immigration –, and building credibility among voters for owning the issue 'la sicurezza.'

In 2008, *Lega Nord* was more prudent than before in the coalition negotiations in terms of the ministerial positions. Namely, it gained less, but more salient ministries, which was significant for the party's issue ownership. By controlling the Ministry of the Interior, they were in a better position for controlling the governmental agenda on security (Brunazzo and Roux 2013, 13-14). In terms of '*la sicurezza*,' the party had already placed a huge emphasis on the immigration issue even in its campaign leading to the 2008 election: its slogan was 'Let's close our borders!' The coalition's electoral manifesto included the topic of immigration, which gave leverage to the *Lega* Interior Ministry over the possible resentment coming from inside the government, so the two 'security packages,' i.e. decree laws initiated by *Lega* Minister Maroni, 'had to be' adopted by the Council of Ministers, in 2008 and 2010 respectively, with the aim to contain immigration influx into Italy (Brunazzo and Roux 2013, 20).

Concerning devolution, the 2001 Berlusconi pledge, the backing of Berlusconi's judicial reform in exchange for a federal one (Brunazzo and Roux 2013, 13), and the 2008 inclusion of the theme in the manifesto of the electoral alliance *Il Popolo della Libertà* (The People of Freedom) (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2010, 1323) were of crucial importance. It is worth noting that the to date only Italian federal reform was adopted in 2001 by the outgoing centre-left government

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– and with the objection of *Lega Nord*, due to the lack of ambition in the design (Brunazzo and Roux 2013, 18). As soon as it got into government, *Lega* thus wanted to augment regional autonomy: the proposed constitutional reform package, which would have ceded more power to the regions was eventually passed by Parliament in 2005, defeating the initial reservations of the AN and UDC in the coalition, only to see a defeat in a confirmation referendum next year (Zaslove 2012, 436). Nonetheless, the opportunity to blame voters and other parties for the failure saved the face of the *Lega*. Indeed, the party never faltered in being a harsh critic of AN and UDC, accusing them of promoting a centralised state, and more intervention in the South – at the expense of *Lega*'s base, the North (Zaslove 2012, 433).

Table 1

Election	*Lega Nord/Lega*
1992	8.65
1994	8.36
1996	10.07
2001	3.94
2006	4.58
2008	8.30
2013	4.09
2018	17.35

Table 1: Lega Nord (1992-2013) and *Lega* (2018) vote share in Italian parliamentary elections (Chamber of Deputies results), 1992-2018 (percentages)
Source: Italian Ministry of the Interior (n.d.)

In 2008, the party boss himself, Umberto Bossi, became Minister of Institutional Reform, with the task of overseeing federalisation, which served very well for gaining credits for *Lega*'s highly important issue ownership of the devolution process. The party now ventured into a very sensitive territory: fiscal federalism. The 2008 *Lega* proposal 'sought to establish a territorial link between taxation and public services and foster efficiency in regional spending by increasing the financial autonomy of the regions,' i.e. it would have let more resources in northern hands at the expense of the redistribution benefitting the South (Massetti and Toubeau

2013, 373-374). *Lega* initially aimed high in order to reach an acceptable compromise with the pro-southern elements in the coalition, thus the original proposal was eventually replaced by another one, more in line with the principle of national solidarity (Massetti and Toubeau 2013, 374). In the end, the diluted bill was approved by Parliament with an unusually wide consensus (Scuto 2010, 71).

As a consequence, *Lega Nord* built a credible image around itself as the rightful owner of the issues of security (including immigration), and devolution, i.e. federalisation, during the decade between 2001 and 2011, when it participated in the Berlusconi coalition governments. By 'intelligent communication strategies,' acting in ministerial positions responsible for the key areas, and by effectively distinguishing themselves from the forces which they fought over issue ownership and governmental credibility with, *Lega Nord* appeared in the face of its voters as the party that 'gets things done' (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2010, 1335-1336). This was a smart strategy, as they managed to locate easily identifiable issues that at the same time did not contradict with the party's previous programme and discourse (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2010, 1335-1336), and even if *Lega*'s radical proposals were often not passed in actuality, the communication side seems to have mattered more for the electorate, i.e. the picture that the party remained loyal to its core principles made them believe that the *Lega* achieved substantial results (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2010, 1329). Along with less salient issues protectionism and Euroscepticism (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2010, 1336), and its populist style (Bartlett et al. 2012; Passarelli 2015), the party became more multi-faceted programmatically than before. As mentioned before, the strategy described in detail above could be seen as some sort of an intensive growth scheme. Nonetheless, it is not really so, as except for security, all the party's main issues held had strong ethno-regionalist connotations, i.e. *Lega Nord* remained in fact close to pure ethno-regionalism. We could see that the party joined (right-wing) governments when it could, i.e. undoubtedly it steadfastly strived for positions in the national government.

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This, with the weak 'Padanian' identity incentivised ambitious leaders in another direction: extensive growth. But how did regionalisation affect strategic considerations?

The conclusion of this subsection in the light of the work's regional autonomy hypothesis is that there was decentralisation in Italy after 2001, but the regions never gained nearly as many powers as the *Lega* wanted to assign to them; its last attempt to widen regional autonomy met with the electorate's resistance. It is also worth noting that *North Italy as a whole* did not have any special status or autonomy, not to mention independence that the party desired in the 1990s, which could have commended *Lega Nord* more, and more important, political offices in the territory. With some reservations, my verdict should be that decentralisation for North Italy(ian regions) was not achieved to the extent to be so meaningful for *Lega* to suffice hypothesis H3. This is to some extent a subjective measure indeed but can be seen as a more exact verdict if we consider that the subjective affection of *Lega* towards Italian decentralisation is the key aspect in terms of H3. That is, future *Lega* decision-makers under Matteo Salvini probably did not regard the existing regional institutions with all their material and political power-related benefits as a sufficiently strong incentive to remain on the regional level, North Italy – or put it differently, there was a realistic possibility of gaining much more benefit on the national level. It has to be admitted that this reasoning is somewhat shaky, but it is obvious that the party strived for significantly more regional autonomy. Another important underlying factor, already touched upon, is that the party was established on a Northern Italian basis, which, *as a unit*, did not any enjoy any autonomy, as it did not – and does not – exist as one administrative unit. This means that the highest party leadership could not have a firm, safe basis in a North Italian autonomous territory, only lower-level regional elites did, thus no special impetus was present, in terms of the benefits autonomous regions can offer, for the top leadership to remain nested in North Italy only: there was no North Italian government, parliament, or bureaucracy. It was

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because North Italy only existed in the minds of the *Lega* leaders and affiliates, while it had no legal, administrative standing.

2.4 Deregionalisation

In 2012, a huge scandal broke out around long-time party leader Umberto Bossi and his 'magic circle' (Brunazzo and Roux 2013, 21). Namely, judicial investigations found that certain high-ranking party officials, including Bossi himself, mismanaged party funds, using them for personal reasons. This caused a serious disillusionment in the electorate: many people turned away from the party, which lost more than half of its electorate in the 2013 general elections compared to 2008, gaining only 4.09 percent of the ballots cast (Italian Ministry of the Interior n.d.). Bossi was ousted as leader in 2012, and, after an interim period, Matteo Salvini was elected to the position in 2013, who effectuated radical changes within *Lega*.

Salvini delivered his maiden speech under a banner that read 'The future is independence,' only to apologise from the Southerners whom he may have affronted throughout his *whole career* a few days later (see Albertazzi et al. 2018, 5, emphasis added). Salvini virtually eliminated regionalism from the party rhetoric eventually, and *in lieu* he started arguing that Italy *as one nation* needs to struggle united against a 'totalitarian' EU that only advances German interests. This reasoning was applied to left-wing Italian prime minister Matteo Renzi, who was understood to be the 'Germans' henchman,' and against whom opposition parties should have fought united (Albertazzi et al. 2018, 5-6), according to Salvini. For that end, the new leader set up a sister party named after himself (*Noi con Salvini* – Us with Salvini) competing in the South, where *Lega Nord* had practically not been present (Ivaldi et al. 2017, 362). Ultimately, for the 2018 elections, *Lega Nord* merged with *Noi con Salvini*, creating *Lega*, now without

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'*Nord*,' because, as Salvini in 2015 said: 'what mattered was that they were all Italians' (see Ivaldi et al. 2017, 362).

By the 2018 electoral campaign, Salvini's campaign completely jettisoned regionalism, instead the discourse revolved around *nation-wide* nationalist issues, which were nonetheless not completely new for the party: immigration, law and order, and identity (Albertazzi et al. 2018, 6). This complete and utter 'deregionalisation' of the party discourse ostensibly payed off: the *Lega*, with 17.35 percent, achieved its best result so far, increased popularity throughout the whole country (Italian Ministry of the Interior n.d.) – partly by gaining foothold even in the South – and entered into coalition with *Movimento 5 Stelle* (Five Star Movement), a populist anti-establishment party; not with Forza Italia, which it overtook for the first time. Salvini became Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior in the cabinet of Giuseppe Conte.

Albertazzi et al. (2018) discern three idiosyncrasies that characterise contemporary *Lega*. First, 'empty nationalism,' nativism that does not include addressing regional socio-economic differences nor the North-South divide. Second, populism, which is no longer aimed towards Rome, the centralising administration (which now *Lega* occupies in any case), but the 'totalitarian' EU. Third, the personalisation of the party has also gained pace, at the focus of which is Salvini.

Based on the previous and the current subsections, it seems clear that for *Lega Nord* a primary aim was to get into the national government. The party, whenever it saw the opportunity entered coalitions and alliances with its competitors and took part in governing Italy. Even so, that in the Salvini era this aim's importance apparently overtook that of the core ideological ethno-regionalist goals. *Lega*'s strife for positions in the national government is undeniably strongly supported by the data. This, with a weak 'Padanian' identity and without a sufficiently strong regional autonomy, ultimately draw the party to the path of extensive growth. The strategy

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seems to have paid off so far: *Lega* has become much more popular than ever before, the times when it was an ethno-regionalist force.

2.5 Conclusion

The strategy that may be called 'deregionalisation' is indeed a remarkable development. It makes *Lega*'s a very strong case for the extensive growth strategy, i.e. an instance when an ethno-regionalist party took party rhetoric, issue ownership so far from the original regionalist cause that it literally jettisoned the quest for regional autonomy or independence. According to Albertazzi et al. (2018, 18), *Lega* can no longer be included in the ethno-regionalist but the radical right party family.

Lega as an ethno-regionalist party clearly chose lateral expansion eventually. As the 'Padanian' identity was found rather weak, and *Lega* very much strived for governmental positions, we found evidence for H1 and H4. Altogether, with the finding that regionalisation, decentralisation did not happen to the desired extent and was not applied to North Italy as a whole, decentralisation was not achieved for *Lega* (i.e. nowhere close to the desired extent), the data strongly support H6, the extensive growth strategy, based on the three independent variables, all of which were present for the party. The three incentives making the basis of this work's theory were there for *Lega* (*Nord*), the party acted in line with the theory, and became much more successful, by far the most popular Italian party by April 2019 (Poll of Polls n.d.) as a result.

Chapter 3: Scottish National Party – ideology's cruciality in success

3.1 A short history of the SNP

The Kingdom of Scotland lost its independence with the creation of Great Britain in 1707, by which time the Acts of Union were passed by the English and Scottish parliaments. Nonetheless, Scotland was not incorporated into England, unlike Wales, and enjoyed a degree of autonomy in the field of education, and it also maintained its established church, the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland. For long, the national assembly of the Church, and influential spokesmen in it, acted as advocates for Scotland, which helped to maintain national conscience among Scottish people (Fusaro 1979, 367).

The first organisation demanding Scottish independence in modern times was the Scots National League, founded in 1919, which, after the failure of the Westminster Parliament to provide home rule for the country in the 1920s, merged with more moderate Scottish Home Rule Association, forming the National Party of Scotland in 1928; it adopted the name Scottish National Party (SNP) in 1934 (Newell 1998, 106).

Nonetheless, the party remained a minor player even in Scotland until the 1960s, when it started competing not only on the territorial, but on other, economic issues as well (Elias 2018, 15). This made party support and organisation soar: the SNP managed to politicise Scottish identity through economic arguments, as many Scottish people felt being let down by mainstream parties unable to solve Scotland's economic problems (Kauppi 1982, 326). SNP's number of local branches skyrocketed to 475 in October 1975, up from 18 in 1962 (Kauppi 1982, 328); it claimed a membership of 120 thousand in 1969 (Mansbach 1973, 185). The electoral breakthrough occurred in the October 1974 general election, when the party garnered 30.4

percent of Scottish votes, even though they could not maintain that rate of sympathy among voters for subsequent elections (Wyn Jones and Scully 2006, 117-118). Still, the threat it posed to nation-wide mainstream parties was enough to put Scottish self-government onto the political agenda, making other parties react (Dardanelli 2009, 55-56). However, when the Labour government under Harold Wilson organised a referendum on establishing a Scottish assembly in 1979, the SNP was extremely prudent and internally divided over supporting it (Dardanelli 2009, 57-58) – as it was favouring independence. As a consequence, even if the majority (51.6 percent) voted 'Yes,' they constituted only 33 percent of Scottish voters (turnout was 62.9 percent), below the 40 percent threshold, set by Conservatives and Labour rebels, needed for the plebiscite to be valid (Mitchell et al. 1998, 167-168; Dardanelli 2009, 58).

Subsequently, the issue of Scottish devolution fell off the agenda for long, and the SNP struggled with internal divide (Newell 1998, 111-112), eventually turning to the Left (Kauppi 1982, 341): after the 1981 party conference, we can call SNP a social democratic party. The 'period of post-referendum indecision' ended in 1989, when the strong opposition to Margaret Thatcher's poll tax – framed as anti-Scottish by the party –, and the new 'Independence in Europe' campaign revitalised the party (Newman 1992, 22). Scottish voters were quite susceptive to the newly wrapped messages of SNP, so it was again setting the agenda in Scotland (Newell 1998, 113). Its support was over 20 percent in 1992 and 1997 (Bennie and Clark 2003, 138). When the 'New Labour' under Tony Blair organised a new referendum on Scottish self-government, the now more pragmatic SNP's majority decided to back (Mitchell et al. 1998, 176-177): the overwhelming victory for self-government resulted in the creation of a Scottish Parliament (Mitchell et al. 1998, 179). The party broke out of its secondary status behind Scottish Labour and became the biggest party in the Scottish Parliament in 2007, having governed the country since then. In the 2015 general election, SNP effectively wiped out the others in Scotland, winning 56 out of 59 constituencies, although this was not mimicked in

2017, when they conquered 'only' 35 (Agnew 2018, 2-3). Nonetheless, the monocratic stance of the party in Scotland during the 2010s made SNP leaders feel that it was probably an auspicious time to secede from the rest of the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, the 2015 Scottish independence referendum was a disappointment for the party: only 44.7 percent supported break-away.

The 2016 Brexit referendum made things more complicated for the SNP: its opposition to Brexit based on the notion that the majority of Scotland voted against it made the case for holding another independence referendum, did the UK really exit the EU. Nevertheless, it is the SNP heartlands in the Northeast that are poignantly against its current policy – it experienced serious setbacks there in the 2015 referendum, and in 2017 –, which may create serious ramifications for the party in the future (Agnew 2018, 2-3).

As we saw, the SNP has never disowned its central aim, independence. But the adoption of other issues in the agenda, starting as early as the 1960s (Elias 2018, 15), and gaining pace after the failed 1979 referendum (Newman 1992, 19-20) have been a determining feature of the party since then. The reasons for building such a party profile, executing an intensive growth strategy, are manifold, and will be discussed in the sections below, one by one.

3.2 Social democracy

The status of Scotland may be susceptive to interpretations that emphasise its peripheral stance in terms of location, population size, and the support of governing parties in Westminster. It is true that SNP rhetoric was heavily influenced by centre-periphery tensions, through which they addressed economic and political grievances vis-à-vis the British state (Elias 2018, 16). Many Scottish people felt let down by the centre and by mainstream parties, and they were to be better

mobilised through (left-wing) economic issues, not simply by independence itself (Kauppi 1982, 326).

As Kauppi writes, before the 1970s, the single-issue character of SNP enabled people with any kind of personal ideology to join the party, provided they supported Scottish independence:

> The SNP billed itself as the party for all of Scotland, transcending class and ideological lines. The result was that the SNP was a composite of socialists, Tories, radicals, small-town businessmen, farmers, and even a number of persons who claimed to be apolitical. The ultimate common goal which hopefully would keep the party united was the demand for independence.
>
> (Kauppi 1982, 328)

The fast success and subsequent decline of the party during the 1970s brought internal divisions to the fore. Primarily, the conflict concerned the attitude towards independence, whereby radical fundamentalists clashed with moderate gradualist 'social democrats' (Kauppi 1982). The party until then was reluctant to holding positions on left-right issues, fearing that these stances would harm internal party unity (Newell 1998, 112). Eventually, social democrats won that strife in the 1981 Annual Conference of the party, when they managed to sideline other factions (Kauppi 1982, 341): they were convinced that in order to achieve independence the party has to appeal to voters with issues different from secession, as people are more interested in other topics (Newman 1992, 19-20). As those in power were now ideologically committed, this change had the consequence that SNP moved to the left during the 1980s (Newell 1998, 112), becoming a proponent of social democratic ideas. That is, the SNP underwent an intensive growth strategy phase.

Recently, the SNP in government has been known for promoting social justice. Moreover, the party rhetoric has tried to underpin the seminal case for independence with economic arguments of such kind, namely that a seceded Scotland 'would lead to more inclusive and egalitarian welfare provisions and social relations' (Scott and Wright 2012, 449). SNP distanced itself from 'New Labour' and neoliberalism (Scott and Mooney 2009, 387). As in Scotland, 'at least at the

level of policy rhetoric and legitimation' social policy is closely tied to Scottish identity, social programmes are the cornerstone of nation-building (Scott and Mooney 2009, 387). The SNP has 'framed' the issue of independence in economic terms, which comes with adopting several new issues into the party agenda (Elias 2018, 1). Altogether, a social democratic turn was carried out in the 1980s and has persisted since, clearly marking an intensive growth strategy choice for the Scottish National Party. What factors can explain this strategic shift?

3.3 Supporting independence – in a gradualist way

The SNP has never stopped expressing its sympathy towards independence as its ultimate plan for Scotland. What made a difference here from the perspective of issue ownership was the power-relations between hardliner pro-independence party members, and gradualists. The change of these internal power-relations made it able for the party to execute any novel strategy.

Internal rifts within the party first came to the fore dramatically around the time of the first Scottish devolution referendum of 1979. Namely, the main difference between fundamentalists and gradualists were not in the question of the need of secession, but rather in the way they believed it should happen. Gradualists accepted devolution as a first step towards independence, while fundamentalists dismissed it, claiming it to be a 'poisoned chalice:' a device in the hands of the central government to soothe and satisfy the Scottish people with a half-solution, in order to decrease popular support for break-away (Dardanelli 2009, 57-58).

More precisely, as Kauppi explicates (1982), among the four identifiable 'strands of thought' emerged at the September 1979 Party Conference, only one, the social democrats belonged to the gradualist camp. Beside 'mainstream' fundamentalists demanding 'independence or nothing,' separatists decried the overly inclusion of SNP MPs in the 'Westminster game,' and contended they should be present in Parliament only if Scottish matters are on table. Also, they

missed extra-parliamentarian activity from the party. The final formation was that of the radicals, who formed the 79 Group, aimed at creating a Scottish republic – in contrast to the others who wanted Scotland to remain within the British Commonwealth –, and embracing socialism.

Table 2

Election	Type	Vote share
1945	General	1.2
1950	General	0.4
1951	General	0.3
1955	General	0.5
1959	General	0.8
1964	General	2.4
1966	General	5.0
1970	General	11.4
1974 (Feb)	General	21.9
1974 (Oct)	General	30.4
1979	Referendum	51.6
1979	General	17.3
1983	General	11.7
1987	General	14.0
1992	General	21.5
1997	General	22.0
1997	Referendum	74.3
1999	Scottish	28.7
2001	General	20.1
2003	Scottish	23.7
2005	General	17.7
2007	Scottish	32.9
2010	General	19.9
2011	Scottish	45.4
2014	Referendum	44.7
2015	General	50.0
2016	Scottish	46.5
2017	General	36.9

Table 2: Scottish National Party vote share in general elections (share in Scotland), Scottish Parliament elections (constituency votes), and regional referenda (pro-devolution and pro-independence results), 1945-2017 (percentages)
Sources: Newell (1998); *BBC* (n.d.); Scottish Parliament (n.d.)

Initially, the 'classless' approach of fundamentalists had prevailed, but when it did not improve SNP's stance in polls the alliance of radicals and social democrats overcame them and pushed

the party to the left (Kauppi 1982, 341). Soon, the radical 79 Group was evicted from the party (Newman 1992, 21), and social democrats gained a dominant position.

The victory for gradualists was a victory for social democracy within the party. This resulted in developing a new, broader agenda for the party instead of the previous (aside from independence) prudent agenda-formation that had to keep an equilibrium among the demands of the numerous groups. A nuclear-free Scotland, housing, transport, high-technology jobs, the use of oil wealth appeared immediately among the programmatic claims of SNP, all in strong logical relation to independence (Newman 1992, 21). Later, with the 'Independence in Europe' programme in the late 1980s, the party became a left-wing political formation with a stance on many more socio-economic issues (Newell 1998, 112). Even though the SNP has never jettisoned independence as a long-term goal, it seemingly fell back to secondary importance vis-à-vis more conventional economic matters in post-devolution Scotland. That means, the party has mostly framed independence in economic terms, and not reversed, as would be more conventional for a classical ethno-regionalist party (Elias 2018, 15-16), i.e. often using independence as an extra factor for boosting popularity. Therefore, the determining factor for a more diverse issue ownership in the case of the SNP was not the shift from a pro-independence stance to a more moderate one, but the defeat of the hardcore independentists by more pragmatic, ideologically flexible forces.

3.4 The peculiar Scottish identity

The Scottish identity is usually referred to as a 'civic' one, based upon being a resident of Scotland rather than ethnicity (Henderson 1999), over which there is an additional British identity overarching every subject in the United Kingdom, the base of which is loyalty to the state (Langlands 1999, 64). This relatively strong, although declining (Tilley and Heath 2007),

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British identity was probably an obstacle for the SNP to effectively address every Scottish people with the promise of independence.

Moreover, the complexity of the Scottish identity renders it impossible to make essentialist statements about the voting behaviour or the support toward independence among those identifying as Scottish or Scots (see Leith 2008, 85). That is, simply because one has a strong Scottish identification it does not automatically follow that one would back independence or be sympathetic towards the SNP, the party portraying itself as the defender of Scotland and the Scottish people's interests. Also, British identity can cross-cut with a Scottish one. From all this ensue that the SNP is incentivised to make other programmatic claims in order to be more successful in vote gathering.

Leith's (2008) thorough scrutiny of SNP manifestos between 1970 and 2005 concluded that the party indeed became less nationalist during that time frame, which 'may have had the result of making it more palatable to a wider section of the electorate than was previously the case' (85). Namely, the propagation of ethnic-based Scots identity, and anti-English sentiments disappeared from party manifestos, with SNP now cultivating a more inclusive multicultural Scottish identity, one based on territory, i.e. people living in Scotland. Leith argues that SNP today cannot be called more Scottish than the Scotland sections of the nation-wide major parties; nothing except the quest of independence distinguishes it from the others in this regard (Leith 2008, 90). It is not a surprise that the change discerned by Leith largely coincided with the party becoming more multi-faceted throughout the 1980s. After the failure of the 1979 referendum, the party realised that Scots were not yet prepared for self-government, not to mention independence, so SNP started building credible ownership around issues such as unemployment, the use of North Sea oil, opposition to the European Common Market, and land speculation (Newman 1992, 19-20). The fact that the Scottish electorate could be better

mobilised not on regionalist issues but on others even for an (ethno-)regionalist party is summed up the best by Newell:

> The problem for the nationalists was (and still is) that while a great many, if not a majority, of Scots wanted some form of self-government, the latter was not the subject of strong attitudes; and to the extent that other issues, such as unemployment or inflation, might provoke discontent, such discontent was more effectively mobilised by the established, English-dominated parties.
>
> (Newell 1998, 106)

What all these qualitative data suggest is that the territorially defined civic Scottish identity is inclusive, not related to ethnicity or the support of independence. This makes it able for *all* people in Scotland to identify as such. The Scottish identity thus can be regarded as strong, and potentially widespread in Scotland. According to the latest, 2011 census, out of 5.3 million people living in Scotland, only around 900 thousand did *not* identify as Scottish; the well-embeddedness is marked by the fact that 3.3 million gave Scottish as their only identity (Scotland's Census 2014). The Scottish National Party thus has a well-bounded natural ambit where it can primarily compete, Scotland, where the majority of Scottish people live in terms of the UK, and where every voter is potentially – the overwhelming majority factually – Scottish. In the case traditional ethno-regionalist messages are not sufficient for persuading them, then the party has an incentive to partially change strategy, but it is also motivated to remain a Scottish nationalist force, because it is so well-embedded in Scotland with – the considerable number of – Scottish nationalists.

3.5 Competition with Labour

The Labour Party, which has heavily relied on Scottish seats to win a majority in Westminster, is usually seen as a natural contender of SNP in Scotland. Therefore, the question whether it is legitimate to talk about internal competition, and its issue ownership effects, between the two

is worth to be investigated. For long, Labour was seen as a party defending Scottish interests, having a strong emphasis on welfare policy and promoting self-government for Scotland – in contrast with the Tories, who were generally regarded as anti-Scottish (Bennie and Clark 2003, 136-137). Thus, Labour posed a threat to SNP's primary regionalist issue ownership, as well as, since its 1980s social democratic turn, to SNP positions on other matters. There is no evidence however, whether this phenomenon has pushed the SNP into developing a different sort of issue-ownership. Rather, the party emphasised its credibility over the 'contested' subjects.

First, in the 1979 referendum proposed by Labour, despite SNP's tactical support of devolution, the Scottish party made clear that it ultimately stood for Scottish independence (Dardanelli 2009, 57-58), a strong distinction from Labour. On the other hand, Labour's backing of Scottish self-government was not perceived as sincere in itself, but merely a reaction to the surging power of the SNP. These led to the lower credibility Labour issue-ownership over devolution (Dardanelli 2009, 58).

By the 1997 referendum, Labour-SNP relations were different, but the overall effect on issue-ownership was similar: SNP claimed more credibility for its agenda, both in the case of devolution, and social democracy. First, even if it co-ordinated with Labour in the 'Yes' campaign, its ultimate aim, as set out in its 'Independence in Europe' campaign, remained secession (Dardanelli 2003, 276-277). Second, regarding issues that were secondary from a regionalist perspective, the party markedly distanced itself from Blairite 'New Labour,' demanding that SNP embodied Scottish social democratic values the best (Scott and Mooney 2009, 387). The competition with Labour did not lead to extending issue-ownership either in terms of devolution, or social democracy; instead, SNP posed itself as being more compatible with Scottish interests than the Labour Party in these areas.

3.6 The effect of devolution and regional government participation

Scottish devolution came into effect with the first sitting of the Scottish Parliament in Holyrood in 1999. The thorough investigation of SNP's electoral strategy in devolved Scotland by Elias (2018) shows that the SNP usually tied an independence argument to its economic issue positions. By doing that, it downplayed the importance of independence, relegating it behind economic matters in importance. Also, another strategy of the party was to de-emphasise its left-right stance, i.e. blurring position, on the economy from 2003 onwards. A similar finding to an unclear stance on economic issues while in government can be discovered in Scott and Wright (2012, 449). They contend the SNP was 'either unable or unwilling' to thwart the erosion of Scottish people's social rights, a contradiction of the party's official social democratic character. However, the authors do not contend that this occasional position blurring strategy drastically changed the party's ideological stance – such moves are instrumental for gaining, or not losing, popularity, and helping to mobilise for independence (see Jackson 2017). Even so, as Nicola Sturgeon, and her predecessor as SNP leader Alex Salmond remained committed to social democracy in the party (e.g. Happold 2004; Ross 2018).

Hence, little has changed since getting into Scottish government in 2007 (Elias 2018, 17). The party's drive to shift away from independence to economic issues, in order to show the electorate the SNP can deliver on its promises has been hindered by opposition parties, which still try to lock SNP into the independentist box. In this regard, not even the defeat in the 2014 independence referendum helped. The main challenge for the party with regard to issue ownership 'remains that of balancing its long-term commitment to separating Scotland from the UK, with the need to build support for independence gradually as a party of regional government that can deliver on its electoral promises' (Elias 2018, 18). That means, we find no support that devolution or governmental participation have pushed SNP toward developing ownership *on a different set of issues* – that is, different from social democracy. Rather, due to

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the possibility of directly affecting Scottish policies, and because of the responsibility and accountability ensuing from that, the party has had the incentive of garnering more credibility on its already *existing* issue positions – so called 'other' issues that are not narrowly ethno-regionalist ones, e.g. independence. Nonetheless, the party is so Scottish and is seemingly regarded by others as being so deeply entangled in the Scottish nationalist cause that it is now extremely unlikely that it wants to, and would manage to without destroying itself, completely jettison ethno-regionalism. Devolution only consolidated this situation: the party is the dominant force in Scotland and occupies the main political positions. It cannot be seen why it would be in its interest to change that. Even though the 1997 devolution happened after the social democratic turn of SNP, and thus cannot be regarded as a causal factor in the turn itself, it is a factor in maintaining the situation of the SNP being 'locked' within the territorial boundaries of Scotland, unlikely to be able – and willing – to crash out of it. Even so, as its pro-independence stance would further hinder gaining sympathy in other parts of the UK.

From the above subsections it also seems clear that the SNP has never aimed at getting into (national) government, moreover, during the 1980s, several groupings within the party wanted SNP either not taking their seats in Westminster, or not being active in parliamentary activities, because for them it would have legitimised British rule over Scotland. Furthermore, the party competed with other British parties on the basis of defending Scottish interests, i.e. their scope for the debate was largely restrained to Scottish matters. Naturally, this does not mean the party does not comment on UK governmental policies at all, especially if they have repercussions in terms of Scotland. The most prominent example for this is Brexit. As Scotland voted against Brexit in 2016, the party leadership has remained opposed to exiting the EU, and criticises Westminster for the handling of the issue – while also contending that Brexit makes a stronger case for Scotland to leave the United Kingdom, and become independent, in order to remain part of the organisation (Scottish National Party n.d.; Gourtsoyannis 2018; *BBC* 2019).

3.7 Conclusion

The SNP of today is a very different party from its 1960 form, which is by a great deal due to the augmented issue-ownership, i.e. the implementation of an intensive growth strategy, and its underlying factors. From the single-issue party vying for the independence of the Scots, a multi-issue social democratic party emerged that lost its ethnic character, nonetheless retaining its demand for independence to *Scotland* as a territorial unit. The defeat of other factions in the 1981 party conference was instrumental in being able to implement any growth strategy transcending the core constituency.

However, as it turned out, SNP is not a perfect case for studying the causes of the intensive growth strategy of ethno-regionalist parties. While the scheme the Scottish National Party followed can clearly be identified as intensive, rather than extensive, growth – SNP remained within the territorial boundaries of Scotland, and remained an ethno-regionalist force vying for, at least in rhetoric, Scotland's independence, while it has gained a robust social democratic character as well in order to appeal to non-nationalist Scottish people – the hypothesised underlying causal factors are not fully there. It is clear that the Scottish identity is sufficiently strong to hold the party within Scotland (H2), and that the SNP has never strived for positions in the national government; however, decentralisation was not achieved at the time of its social democratic turn in the 1980s (H3) – even though after it was given in 1997 the party clearly had one further reason to remain within its territorial boundaries. Thus, as for hypothesis H5 one causal factor, decentralisation, did not antedate the cause, intensive growth, we cannot state that the evidence is very strong for that hypothesis. As it partially does underpin it, and the lacking part does not mean an argument in the opposite direction, we state that the data moderately strongly supports our hypothesis H5.

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Chapter 4: Discussion

4.1 Interim conclusion

This paper has the courageous goal to identify factors that cause ethno-regionalist parties vying to transcend their core ethnic constituency to choose either extensive or intensive growth strategies. For examining this, four intermediary and two definite hypotheses were laid down, which were investigated in two qualitative case studies: that of the Lega Nord in Italy, and the Scottish National Party in the United Kingdom.

Based on the first two cases, the two definite hypotheses (H5, H6) were to a satisfying extent confirmed. First, this paper could establish causality between Lega Nord's lateral, extensive growth strategy and the conjunction of the three hypothesised causing conditions, weak ethnic identity, the lack of (sufficient) decentralisation, and the strife for positions in the national government. Lega's can be regarded as a relatively strong case for the relation to be present. Second, for the Scottish National Party, only two of the hypothesised conditions were there when the party opted for the intensive growth strategy, namely strong ethnic identity, and no desire for positions in the national government. Decentralisation was not yet achieved when the party turned social democratic, although it was implemented later. Nonetheless, the lack of decentralisation was not hypothesised as directly working in the opposite direction, thus the definite hypothesis (H5) about the intensive growth strategy was moderately strongly confirmed. We should now turn to other cases in order to better corroborate our argument, reinterpreting the theory as a correlation: ambiguous cases.

4.2 Further analysis – cases in-between

In the hypothesis section of this paper it was claimed that the three independent variables are *sufficient* conditions for deciding which direction an ethno-regionalist party will take, in case it wanted to transcend its original, natural constituency. However, in case we instead considered the relationship between the three conditions (the independent variables) and the type of growth (the dependent variable) as a correlation, one way of doing a robustness test would be to carry out further investigation in terms of ambiguous cases along the imagined regression line. That is, cases that do not comply with all the requirements to clearly fit either category – parties prone to grown extensively or intensively –, but nonetheless seem to be closer to either end.

In other words, handling the relation as a correlation renders the theory potentially more powerful as it allows for scrutinising ambiguous cases as well. By showing how ethno-regionalist parties in not clear positions may experiment with different growth strategies can help to better uncover the internal logic, the mechanism of based on which properties these forces decide about which strategy to follow. In line with the preliminary hypotheses, we can expect that strong or weak ethno-regional identity has the same magnitude of effect on the growth strategy decision of ethno-regionalists (*H1: Ethno-regionalists with an ethnic constituency of weak ethno-regional identity are likely to opt for extensive growth; H2: Ethno-regionalists with an ethnic constituency of strong ethno-regional identity are likely to opt for intensive growth*), while the existence of an autonomous region will have a stronger incentive (*H3: Ethno-regionalists in autonomous regions are likely to opt for intensive growth*) than the lack of it in the opposite direction, and the desire to be in the national government has a stronger, more direct impact on guiding toward extensive growth (*H4: Ethno-regionalists with the central aim to strive for positions in the national government are more likely to opt for extensive growth*) than not having such aims on intensive growth. That is, because for H3 and H4 the opposite impact is only an indirect one. In the following, two more cases will be introduced,

showcasing more resemblance towards one ideal-typical end of the spectrum between clearly extensive- and intensive-prone cases than to the other, but not coinciding with either of them, i.e. remaining ambiguous cases. If the theory of this paper can predict the growth strategies even in these ambiguous – but to one side leaning – cases, then it is a sign that the correlation exists.

Chapter 5: Most-Híd – embracing binationalism

The *Most-Híd* party decided not to take part in ethnic outbidding in the electoral competition in Slovakia (Zuber 2012). It is indeed a borderline case among ethno-regionalists, being a nationwide cross-ethnic Slovak-Hungarian party, nonetheless dominated by Hungarians (Bochsler and Szöcsik 2013a). The reason why *Most-Híd* came to existence is because the ethnic Hungarian Party of the Hungarian Community (formerly Party of the Hungarian Coalition), from which it broke away, had lost its governing potential after 2006 and took and increasingly extreme stance (Bochsler and Szöcsik 2013a). Soon, it even fell out of parliament, while *Most-Híd* managed to get in, and remain there. Since 2010, with a centrist ideology, it has been part of right-wing as well as left-wing governments. Being an ambiguous case from this work's perspective, having a (Hungarian) constituency with a strong national identity, not enjoying territorial autonomy, while aiming for positions in the national government – as will be shown –, *Most-Híd* resides closer to the extensive growth end of the imagined regression line, which is in line with the findings below, giving support for the assumption that this work's theory is able to predict ambiguous cases as well. Nonetheless, a caveat should be added that in *Most-Híd*'s case, a further factor's role cannot be denied, that is, the existence of another party competing for the same ethnic constituency, a factor that could have also stimulated *Most-Híd* to look for voters outside the ethnic Hungarian community.

5.1 Hungarians and Hungarian parties in Slovakia

Hungarians live in Slovakia as the result of the 1920 Trianon and 1947 Paris peace treaties with Hungary, which lost its former northern territories to Czechoslovakia as a consequence. They constituted 8.5 percent of the country's population according to the 2011 census – down from 9.7 percent ten years earlier (Kapitány 2015, 232). Most of them live in ethnic blocks in the

southern part of the state, in Trnava/Nagyszombat, Nitra/Nyitra, and Košice/Kassa regions. We can regard the ethnic identity of the Slovakian Hungarian community as strong, a good measurement of which is that an overwhelming majority of the Hungarian minority has always voted for ethnic Hungarian (in the case of *Most-Híd*, ethnic Hungarian and Slovak) parties (see Szöcsik and Bochsler 2013), meaning that ethnicity was a more salient issue for them than other issues along which parties compete; in 2016 for example, ca. 84 percent of Hungarians cast their vote for forces standing explicitly for ethnic Hungarians (Szabolcs 2016, 84).

After the fall of communism, at the beginning of the 1990s, all three major Hungarian parties in Slovakia advocated territorial autonomy for their people (Bochsler and Szöcsik 2013b, 437). As electoral thresholds for parties and party alliances increased, they first formed an alliance called *Magyar Koalíció* (Hungarian Coalition) in 1994, and finally merged into one party, the *Magyar Koalíció Pártja* (Party of the Hungarian Coalition; MKP) in 1998 (Tokár 2017, 70-71). Throughout this time, these parties remained committed to territorial autonomy; nonetheless, they could not even influence the outcome of the centralising territorial organisation reforms that sought, among others, to prevent successful Hungarian autonomy claims during the 1990s (Bochsler and Szöcsik 2013b, 437). As a reaction to non-success, MKP changed strategy, and under the leadership of Béla Bugár it joined the right-wing coalition governments of Mikuláš Dzurinda (1998–2006). The essence of this new strategy was that the party stopped advocating autonomy for Hungarian-populated territories (Szarka 2002, 128) in exchange for becoming acceptable to majority parties in the country, and for being able to influence government policy from within. Consequently, even if MKP was not able to attain its main aim, the creation of the Hungarian-majority Komárno/Komárom county, due to their strong parliamentary presence they managed to achieve the establishment of the Hungarian-language Selye János University in Komárno, rebuilding the Márie Valérie/Mária Valéria Bridge between Esztergom in Hungary

and Štúrovo/Párkány in Slovakia (blown up by retreating German forces in 1944), and that the post of deputy prime minister responsible for minority affairs was established (Tokár 2017, 71).

Nonetheless, the unified representation of Hungarian interests started to crumble after the centre-right coalition was defeated by the populist left in 2006, even if MKP achieved its best ever results with 11.68 percent. As a result, the party lost its governmental position. Internal conflicts escalated within the party, which led to the ousting of Béla Bugár as party chairman, and the election of Pál Csáky to his position. Ensuing from the differing plans for the future of the party and the Hungarian minority, Bugár and several MKP-politicians left the party in 2009 and, joined by some Slovaks, founded Slovak-Hungarian *Most-Híd* (meaning bridge in Slovak and Hungarian) party in 2009 (Tokár 2017, 71).

The competition for Hungarian votes between the two parties were mostly based on the different strategy they aimed to pursue for enforcing their interests. Bugár's *Most-Híd* continued with the policy of MKP under his leadership: flexible, compromise-ready, and pragmatic (Tokár 2017, 71), and aiming to influence decision-making from within government; it should be mentioned that it remained a Hungarian-dominated party in terms of politicians (Bochsler and Szöcsik 2013a) and, with a decreasing tendency, voters (Szabolcs 2017, 88). As a semi-ethno-regionalist force, its target is to advance Hungarian minority rights indirectly, through promoting the idea of a multi-national, multi-cultural and multi-lingual state (Bochsler and Szöcsik 2013b, 438). MKP on the other hand, returned to a more nationalistic rhetoric: giving voice to Hungarian regionalism, and the representation of Hungarian interests (Tokár 2017, 71).

It was an ambitious idea to create a party crossing through ethnic cleavages in Slovakia, as before the forming of *Most-Híd*, cross-ethnic voting in Slovakia was minimal (Szöcsik and Bochsler 2013). Notwithstanding, the advocation of perpetuating the 'participation model' by Bugár won against the more confrontative style of MKP (Učeň 2011, 87-88) in the next, 2010 elections, when MKP lost its position as a parliamentary party, gaining 4.33 percent of the votes

cast, contrasted to *Most-Híd*'s 8.12 percent (Pink 2011, 6). *Most-Híd* has been successful at dividing Hungarian votes and additionally operating as a Slovak party outside the Hungarian-majority South – even if with less popularity (Harrach 2016, 51). The party, contrasted to MKP, which came under the criticism of not being competent enough, developed a multi-faceted identity, with a wide-ranging issue-ownership (Szabolcs 2017, 89). Thus, *Most-Híd*, even at its very first parliamentary election, was successful in implementing the extensive growth strategy, insofar as it gathered more votes than the purely ethno-regionalist MKP. *Most-Híd* and MKP together obtained 12.45 percent of the votes, a proportion MKP had never been able to gather alone before, further corroborating the assumption of successful extensive growth by *Most-Híd*.

5.2 Creating a face of governmental competence, appealing to voters outside the ethnic constituency

Ensuing from the type of politics *Most-Híd* was determined to pursue, and by defining itself as a Slovak-Hungarian force, the party needed to develop a discourse that revolved not exclusively around Hungarian minority issues in order to increase its odds for being involved in governments. This was probably a primary incentive for *Most-Híd* for opting for the extensive growth strategy: it wanted to pursue the old MKP strategy to represent ethnic Hungarian interests from within government – for which, in turn, it needed to look for more voters, as the divided Hungarian constituency in Slovakia was not necessarily big enough to accommodate two parliamentary parties (as it was proven by election results). Authors characterised *Most-Híd*'s new strategy of attracting votes from the Hungarian minority *as well as* the Slovak majority – the extensive growth strategy – as appealing to 'civically minded and moderately liberal voters of all ethnicities' (Hlavac 2016, 437), or as 'broadly pro-market, civically inclined

and minority-friendly' (Stanley 2011, 260), which underpin that the party indeed managed to create a face more diverse than MKP, a prerequisite for extensive growth to be successful.

In the 2010 elections, this strategy paid off as the party did gain a considerable number of Slovak votes, although it performed poorer in overwhelmingly Slovak than in Hungarian-populated territories (Hlavac 2016, 439; Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2012, 224). Also, attracting the votes of the majority population could have partially come from the inclusion of the small Civic Conservative Party's (*Občianska konzervatívna strana*; OKS) candidates in the party's electoral list, especially in the capital Bratislava (Učeň 2011, 93).

During the 2010 electoral campaign, Bugár stressed that a centre-right government can be formed only if *Most-Híd* can surpass the five percent electoral threshold, which it finally did with its over eight percent result (Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2012, 224). He was ultimately right, as the Christian democratic and centre-right parties, together with *Most-Híd* garnered a majority in the National Council, the Slovakian legislature. Due to their ideological proximity – being pro-market, and relatively moderate on intra-ethnic co-operation – they joined the centre-right four-party government led by Iveta Radičová (Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2012, 224). In the same time, MKP failed to surpass the five percent threshold, so it fell out of parliament for the first time during its existence, leaving *Most-Híd* the only parliamentary party dealing with minority protection issues – which also helped *Most-Híd* because, also due to its governmental position, it gained substantially greater media coverage than MKP in the running-up to the election (Szabolcs 2017, 85). The face of policy competence that the party wanted to create (Szabolcs 2017, 89) was successfully delivered to the extent that, besides the office of Deputy Prime Minister of Human Rights and Minorities, the party obtained the environmental and agricultural ministerial positions.

Among the centre-right government's priorities were minority issues, not unrelated to the inclusion of *Most-Híd* in the government. Nonetheless, the amendments of the State Language

Law and the Minority languages Act can only be seen as moderate advancements in minority protection (Agarin and Regelmann 2016), and in terms of the Citizenship Act, amended by the outgoing Fico Cabinet in 2010, which would make Slovak citizens acquiring the citizenship of another country lose their Slovak ones, threatening Hungarians after the Hungarian government enabled the acquisition dual citizenship for Hungarians across its borders, the Radičová Cabinet failed to deliver any changes (Malová and Učeň 2012, 283-284).

Eventually, internal fractures in the coalition over the European Financial Stability Facility brought down the Radičová Government (Malová and Učeň 2012, 283-284), and early elections were called in 2012. In terms of the Hungarian parties, the results replicated those of 2010, but the centre-right parties overall lost their majority to Robert Fico's left-wing Direction-Social Democracy party (*Smer-sociálna demokracia*; *Smer*), leaving *Most-Híd* in parliamentary opposition.

Nonetheless, the strongest sign of the 'moderation' attitude as a Hungarian-dominated party becoming mainstream-like became apparent in 2016. It was revealed how much *Most-Híd* sought governmental positions, placing it before ideological reasons, arguing that it is crucial for minority protection to be able to influence governmental decision-making from within.

Namely, the 2016 general elections saw Prime Minister Fico's *Smer* party losing its parliamentary majority. In order to break the deadlock, Fico needed to involve other parties beside *Smer* and its long-time left-wing populist ally, the Slovak National Party (*Slovenská národná strana*; SNS). Based on pragmatism – previously having been in coalition only with centre-right parties – *Most-Híd* interpreted the situation as an opportunity to getting into power again, and communicated to the electorate that it was necessary to join the government in order to avoid instability (Tokár 2017, 76) – which it eventually did, along with *Smer*, SNS, and *Sieť* (Network). The positions the party obtained included Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior (Lucia Žitňanská), Minister of the Environment (László Sólymos), and a few

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months later the Minister of Transport, Construction and Regional Development (Árpád Érsek), but not a position directly related to minority issues, which can be understood as a sign of (either intentional or unintentional) further shifting away from focusing on minority issues (characteristic for the external growth strategy), and a symbol of how much governmental participation mattered to the party. In the 2018 governmental crisis culminating in the resignation of Fico, it was the commitment of *Most-Híd* to keep governing with *Smer* and SNS that stabilised the crumbling governmental coalition, another poignant example of Bugár's strategy, even at the cost of alienating its ethnic Slovak politicians (Tokár 2017, 76). The party retained its three portfolios in the new Pellegrini Government, consisting of *Smer*, SNS, and *Most-Híd*.

Table 3

Election	MKP	*Most-Híd*
1994	10.18	N/A
1998	9.12	N/A
2002	11.16	N/A
2006	11.68	N/A
2010	4.33	8.12
2012	4.28	6.89
2016	4.04	6.50

Table 3: MKP and *Most-Híd* vote share in Slovak parliamentary elections, 1994-2016 (percentages)
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (n.d.)

5.3 Internal competition

As it was implied above, there is a further, previously not discussed factor that plausibly had an effect on *Most-Híd*'s decision of opting for extensive growth, namely, having an internal competitor, MKP – of which *Most-Híd* was a splinter party. *Most-Híd* and MKP have regularly campaigned against each other, which is not surprising taken that their Hungarian ethnic constituency, which has remained a core for both of them, is the same. For example, MKP was

critical towards *Most-Híd* in 2012, arguing that it wastes Hungarian votes, as MKP politicians expected *Most-Híd* would not be able to enter the National Council (Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2012, 223). On the other hand, reflecting on the common criticism that MKP became 'lazy' on issues other than ethnic ones, *Most-Híd* made serious efforts for picturing itself as a competent party especially in the areas of economic and social policy (Szabolcs 2017, 89). Ensuing from these, the two party – mostly because of personal differences – did not communicate with each other at all until 2012 (Tokár 2017, 88). The relation between the two has become strained again following the 2018 political crisis. *Most-Híd*'s controversial move to save the left-wing governing coalition further distanced it from MKP, which, for the first time in its history, had already begun co-ordination talks with non-ethnic minority opposition parties. (Tokár 2017, 78).

Notwithstanding, the currently unfriendly attitudes between the two Hungarian parties might change, and precisely due to the de-ethnicisation of *Most-Híd*. In the end, the overlap between the constituencies of the two may dramatically decrease in the future. *Most-Híd* lost many Hungarian voters between 2012 and 2016, and has become a 'significantly' multi-ethnic party in terms of its voter base: possibly only slightly over 40 percent of its voters were Hungarian in 2016; only 25.7 percent of its Hungarian voters chose it because of its minority programme, according to an exit poll (Szabolcs 2017, 84-91). The successful addressing of Slovaks and Rusyns made it possible for the party to establish itself outside Southern Slovakia (Harrach 2016, 51).

5.4 Conclusion

Most-Híd shows that there can be ambiguous cases whereby ad hoc variables can be of substantial explanatory force. If there was no competition for the Hungarian votes, *Most-Híd*

(probably not with this name emphasising its double identity) would have remained within the boundaries of the Hungarian community, or would have pursued the same strategy? This is the key question here that cannot be conclusively decided. On the one hand, MKP under the leadership of Bugár was a classical ethno-regionalist force vying for Hungarian votes, while seeking positions in the government as well, so if we regard only this, as the strength of ethnic belonging for Hungarians as well as the issue of (no) autonomy did not change since Hungarian parties were founded in Slovakia, we could say that for *Most-Híd*, it was ethnic competition that really made a difference: when Bugár, now in another party, wanted to do the same as he did in MKP, he now needed to look for supplementary votes as he could not expect the sympathy of all Hungarian voters. On the other hand, we saw that *Most-Híd* put the policy of governmental participation to a new level: while MKP coalesced only with the moderate centre-right, *Most-Híd* has taken part in government with forces spanning from the ultranationalist right SNS (with a great deal of anti-Hungarian history) to the left-populist *Smer*. That could mean that Bugár, taking party growth and governmental positions as a primary aim, would have eventually taken this step, opening up for non-Hungarians, regardless of the presence of an ethnic competitor.

Furthermore, the inclusion of the presence of an ethnic competitor in this paper's overarching theory would be problematic for two more reasons. First, because other factors can have an impact on how this variable plays out in terms of party strategy: beside the *Most-Híd* example above, we can ponder how regional autonomy or ethnic identity strength could overwrite the competitor's effect towards the extensive option in other cases. In Scotland, as we saw, the Scottish Labour Party, the main competitor of SNP for Scottish votes, did not move the Scottish nationalists by any means toward seeking votes outside Scotland. Therefore, even if it might be a valid factor in the case of *Most-Híd*, having an internal competitor is not expected to have a

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consistent, well-predictable effect, independent from the already existing three factors, on ethno-regionalist party growth strategies in general.

In the end, even in the ambiguous case of *Most-Híd*, the three-element theory was able to predict the extensive strategy aptly. More precisely, the party's core Hungarian constituency had a strong ethnic identity, which in itself was expected to push the party towards an intensive strategy – but crucially, the division of this massive constituency by two (relatively) big parties probably diminished this effect: *Most-Híd* could not expect winning the majority of Hungarian votes safely – an important aspect where competition most probably played a role, although not independently, influencing the effect of one of the three original independent variables. On the other hand, not having territorial autonomy, and ostensibly strongly striving for positions in the national government together exercised a strong effect towards the extensive strategy. As a consequence, *Most-Híd* did manage to grow extensively, less and less relying on Hungarian votes, and increasing its vote share among Slovaks. Notwithstanding, if we regard in absolute terms, the party lost voters subsequent to its first successful electoral performance in 2010 (8.12 percent), receiving 6.89 and 6.50 percentage points in 2012 and 2016, respectively. In sum, *Most-Híd*'s extensive growth strategy was a success in narrow terms, meaning it has continuously increased its non-ethnic Hungarian constituency, as well as in relative terms, contrasted to its ethno-regionalist rival, while in absolute terms, the initial growth stalled, and was reversed already by the 2012 elections.

Chapter 6: Volksunie and Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie – in quest of the median voter

Belgium presents an interesting case from the perspective of this paper. That means, first, most of the Belgian parties (in fact, all the big ones) have been regional parties since the 1970s. Nonetheless, the two parties examined in this section, *Volksunie* (People's Union), and its partial successor *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* (New Flemish Alliance; N-VA), have been distinct by putting federalisation, language and Flemish national rights onto the fore of their programme; thus, they can be called ethno-regionalist parties. Second, and ensuing from the fact that virtually every relevant party regardless of ideology organises itself on a regional basis – with the Brussels-Capital Region being an exception – it would be effectively inviable for a party to carry out a successful extensive growth strategy, especially if it emphasises regionalism in its programme to any extent. Still, it will be presented here how N-VA, after the demise of the *Volksunie* hamstrung by the factionalism of its different ideological groupings, was able to grow substantially, partially by dint of having a clear right-wing ideological character, a character its predecessor was never able to develop in a stable manner. The existence of substantial regional autonomy in a federalised state, and the strong Flemish identity support the intensive growth model. Further, even though strong governmental aspirations in principle encourage the extensive strategy, making the Flemish case and ambiguous one – altogether being closer to the intensive strategy nonetheless – it is also an excellent case for discovering a caveat for our theory: in federalised states, regardless of incentives there may be so strong institutional barriers, such as federal subjects with their own party systems, that they are effectively able to stymie the implementation of the extensive growth strategy.

6.1 Federalised Belgium and the Flemish identity

When Belgium gained independence in 1830, it was the result of the alliance between French-speaking elites. Even though Flemings constituted a demographic majority (ca. 60 percent), they lived in poor, agricultural regions, without considerable intelligentsia; that is why the French language and culture was overwhelming in the country throughout the 19th century (De Winter 1998a, 28-29). Based on the Herderian paradigm, equating nation with language, the in fact multilingual nation was officially treated as a monolingual French-speaking one (Maly 2013, 4).

Nonetheless, the Flemish national identity soon became strong: the Flemish had a highly organised civil society: 'social clubs, social movements, pressure groups and institutions that acted as agencies of cultural reproduction of regionalist feelings undoubtedly had a strong impact on the creation of this Flemish identity' (De Winter 1998a, 42). Soon, the Flemish national movement was born, organised 'solely around the rightful demands of an oppressed *linguistic* minority' (Blommaert 2011, 243; emphasis added). Thus, Flemings first strived for language rights in the officially monolingual country. This national movement was successful in preserving and strengthening the Flemish identity: in fact, the people of Flanders have a traditionally lower identification rate as Belgian than the rest of the country (De Winter 1998a, 42). In the last hundred years, Flemish nationalist parties have almost always been present in parliament, and since the 1960s they have gathered a considerable number of Flemish votes.

The first Flemish nationalist party that got into the Belgian parliament was the *Frontpartij* (Front Party) in 1919, vying for Dutch language rights (Adam and Deschouwer 2016, 1293), which won five seats then (Breuning 1997, 5). This marked the advent of another, new era: as the universal voting right was introduced after the First World War (only for men until 1948), the Flemish demographic majority could now result in a majority for Flemish parties in

parliament, which turned to language issues (Blommaert 2011, 245). The first opportunity for profound state reforms arose in the early 1960s, when the Christian Democratic and Socialist coalition lost the sufficient proportion (two-third) of deputies for voting through reforms in Parliament, so they needed the help of the fast-growing regionalist parties (Deschouwer 2009, 564). In 1963, the 'language frontier' was created, dividing Flanders as a Dutch-speaking region, and Francophone Wallonia, with the Brussels region remaining the only officially bilingual part of the country (Blommaert 2011, 246). Further state-reforms followed in 1980, 1988-1989, 1993, and 2001-2003, the result of which became a Belgium federalised multidimensionally, in a rather complex manner. This 'Byzantine political structure' (Blommaert 2011, 242) is best characterised in a succinct way by Blommaert (2011, 241-242):

> It is known that the Kingdom of Belgium has an exceptionally elaborate complex of language laws, the outcome of a history of language-related legislation starting in the late nineteenth century and persisting until today. This history has resulted in a Herderian state, in which three regions are being defined (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels) and three language-based communities (Flemish, Francophones and German-speaking). Flanders is a region that entirely overlaps with the Flemish community; Wallonia hosts both the Francophone community and the (small) German-speaking community; while Brussels is an officially bilingual Flemish-Francophone region. The regions and communities each have their own government, although the Flemish chose to have a single government for regional and community matters. The sub-federal governments have considerable power, and the powers of different governments can and do overlap and clash, resulting in never-ending appeals to further 'power-splitting measures. The country is blessed with six governments ruling the barely 10 million Belgians: the Federal Government, the Flemish Government, the Walloon Government, the Francophone Community Government, the Germanophone Community Government and the Brussels Government. The supra-state level of the European Union adds another layer of political and legislative complexity to this.

Also, the three major parties, the Socialists, Christian Democrats, and Liberals, that existed as nation-wide forces, broke up into separate Flemish and Walloon movements during the 1960s, well indicating the great vigour of nationalism that was present behind these complex state reforms.

6.2 The Volksunie – a roller-coaster of ideologies and policy accommodation

During the interwar period, the Frontpartij changed its name to *Vlaams National Verbond* (Flemish National Union; VNV), and it performed best in the 1939 elections, winning 17 seats in the Belgian Parliament (Breuning 1997, 5). This success could be partially attributed to the fact that the party espoused an ideology, namely, Nazism, by which it could appeal to a wider electorate. As it also collaborated with Nazis under the German rule, it largely discredited Flemish nationalism subsequent to the war (Adam and Deschouwer 2016, 1300). Therefore, when a new Flemish nationalist party was formed in 1954, it became a strictly ethno-regionalist force, a niche party, with no ideological affiliation. The *Christelijke Vlaamse Volksunie* (Christian Flemish People's Union), from the 1960s *Volksunie*, vied for a federal Belgium and related language issues until the early 1970s, reaching its electoral peak in 1971, with 11 percent of national (18 percent of Flemish) votes (De Winter 1998a, 30-33). Later on, it changed strategy: it espoused different ideologies, ostensibly turning to some sort of intensive growth strategy while it also remained committed to its original cause; the *Volksunie* even went into an outbidding game with its competitors, and started campaigning for a confederal Belgium with a quasi-independent Flanders in the 1980s, and for complete Flemish independence in the 1990s (De Winter 1998a, 34). Still, the party's popularity showed a declining tendency overall. The explanation for this phenomenon is twofold: first, the party's main long-term nationalist aims were gradually accommodated, while it had a credible competitor on more radical demands; second, and it is more interesting from this paper's perspective, addressing a wider pool of voters through ideology largely failed as in the *Volksunie* purification in the party ranks never happened, unlike in the SNP in the early 1980s, and rivalling ideological groupings and factions existed within the party throughout its history, hindering the stabilisation of one ideological direction in party programme, which directly led to *Volksunie*'s demise in 2001. Party ideology changed constantly, depending on the internal strength of either faction. It is also noticeable

that, due to the heterogeneous membership, embracing a particular ideology could never be complete and utter. 'The party never made a move towards embracing one of the three ideological families of the country; on the contrary, it presented itself as a pluralist party beyond the old cleavages' (Deschouwer 2009, 565). Additionally, because of the institutional framework of Belgium, an extensive strategy spreading over to other language communities, was out of question for the *Volksunie*, despite being theoretically possible and partly beneficial due to its endeavour to participate in national government.

The threat of electoral loss through policy accommodation appeared already as the result of the 1963 state reform: *Volksunie*'s aim for a bilingual Belgium was superseded by the actual reform. The party's slogan now became '*In Flanders Flemish!*,' i.e. a monolingual region for Flemish speakers only (Blommaert 2011, 247). Beside opting for the separation instead of coexistence between French and Dutch speakers, *Volksunie*, from around 1970, perceiving the pression for being seen as competent in a wider set of issues, made a party programme that now included mainstream issues as well (see Wauters 2005, 335). From now on, after the classical ethno-regionalist path was given up and the party seemingly opted for an intensive growth strategy, the main problem was which strategy to follow. As until the late 1970s, *Volksunie* was the party that integrated all kinds of Flemish nationalists, and all of them bar the extreme right wing thereafter, internal ideological rifts came to the fore constantly over the official party line, forcing it to change over and over, depending on which faction was stronger (for the problems of longitudinally locating the party on the left-right ideological scale see Massetti 2009).

First, after 1968, a new stream of members joined in, imbued with the left-liberal '68 ideology (De Winter 1998a, 34). As a result, three factions arose in the party: that of right-wing conservative nationalists, left-liberals, and participationists – striving for governmental participation, otherwise being close to left-liberals (De Winter 1998a, 38-39). As during the 1970s internal matters were decided along factional lines in *Volksunie*, and because left-liberals

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and participationists often voted together (De Winter 1998a, 39), the party moved to the left. Nonetheless, it was not able to profiteer from the strategy of developing an ideological profile, thanks to constant infighting, which 'corresponds to a stalling of the VU's electoral scores' (De Winter 1998a, 39). Unlike in the SNP, the new militant left-wing was eventually unable to dominate the party for a protracted period and to make the right-wing leave (Deschouwer 2009, 564-565), which kind of purification would have probably been a precondition for carrying out a successful intensive growth strategy.

Nevertheless, some right-wing members did leave. It meant a great victory for participationists that *Volksunie* joined the centre-left Tindemans IV government in 1977. By joining, it also had to accept the so called 'Egmont Pact,' which aimed at extending autonomy for regions, and crucially, granting additional privileges to Francophones living in the Brussels periphery, a territory belonging to Flanders. *Volksunie* – reluctantly – accepted the Pact, but its radical right wing, which was opposed to any concession given to Francophones, seceded, forming *Vlaams Blok* (Flemish Bloc; VB) (Deschouwer 2009, 565). Additionally, the Tindemans government soon fell, and in the 1978 vote, the electorate castigated *Volksunie*: its share in Flemish votes declined from 16 to 11 percent (Deschouwer 2009, 565), and the party was never able to fully recuperate.

A further problem was that *Vlaams Blok* broke *Volksunie*'s monopoly over Flemish nationalist votes. Initially, until its extremity remained within an ethno-regionalist frame, i.e. until VB only strived for Flemish independence, its popularity remained modest. Nonetheless, from the 1991 election onwards, it caught up and outpaced *Volksunie* in terms of popularity. There is one main reason for this. Namely, that was the time when VB changed strategy, and additionally to its original cause it started focusing on immigration and crime, becoming a harsh anti-immigration party (Adam and Deschouwer 2016, 1294), which *Volksunie* never was (Breuning 1997, 20-21). And, as it was shown that regardless of these changes between 1968 and 1995 Flemish

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nationalist votes were rather constant and fairly steady (Breuning 1997, 7), VB's success meant a further downturn for *Volksunie*.

During the second half of the 1980s, a new party president, Jaak Gabriels tried to reform *Volksunie*, giving it a different ideological profile. Namely, he tried to move it towards a more liberal direction. Naturally, many in the party were opposed to this move. As Gabriels did not do well on the ethno-regionalist front either, being unable to push through *Volksunie*'s demands for more autonomy – between 1988 and 1992, it was again a coalition partner in the centre-left Martens VIII government (De Winter 1998a, 41), proving that participationists again dominated the party –, this reforming attempt was also aborted. When the Flemish liberals moved to a more regionalist position in 1992, they managed to lure many liberal *Volksunie* politicians into VLD (*Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten*; Flemish Liberals and Democrats), including President Gabriels himself (Deschouwer 2009, 565-566). Another attempt to implement the intensive growth strategy failed because certain factions of the rank-and-file membership were reluctant to follow the leadership of the day.

Nonetheless, the successor of Gabriels, Bert Anciaux (1992-1998) ventured onto the same waters for one more time. Namely, it endeavoured to gear the party further to the left, giving it a social-liberal and green profile (De Winter 1998a, 34; Deschouwer 2009, 566). By this time, *Volksunie*'s popularity was in constant decline, particularly because most of its main ethno-regionalist demands regarding Flemish autonomy were accommodated by the mid-1990s. Anciaux's plan to give an ideological profile to the party was meant to remedy this situation. As Adam and Deschouwer (2016, 1293) argue, paradoxically, right because the salience of language issues was heightened, *Volksunie* became a victim of its own success (also see De Winter 2006); all mainstream parties, after their division into Flemish and Francophone forces in the 1960s, adopted regionalist issues into their agenda after the late 1970s. This did not only make *Volksunie* less visible but resulted in the situation that these parties were ready to

implement the state reforms *Volksunie* vied for – the party was asked to participate in governments both times because governing parties wanted it to help facilitating reforms. It is also an important point here that accommodation adversely affected only *Volksunie*, not *Vlaams Blok*. As VB, being much more homogeneous in terms of membership than *Volksunie*, was able to develop some sort of a rudimentary ideological, extreme right, face, the fact that the language conflict lost from its intensity was not harmful to it, because the party was able to channel in many voters that sympathised with its anti-immigration ideology (Massetti and Schakel 2013, 802-803).

 The misfortune for *Volksunie* was that vis-à-vis Anciaux's (and mostly the party elite's) strategic vision – giving *Volksunie* a left-wing profile and participating in government again – stood another vision, supported by the middle-level elite and rank-and-file, that of expanding Flemish autonomy further, and taking a right turn in terms of party ideology. In this environment, the intensive growth strategy could not work, and, even though Anciaux made an alliance with the social-liberal movement ID21 for the 1999 election (Wauters 2005, 336), the results were disappointing. *Volksunie* increased its share of votes marginally compared to 1995, from 4.7 to 5.6 percent, while VB outpaced it, gathering 9.9 percent, after 7.8 four years beforehand. Nevertheless, internal tensions became especially strained in 2000, when the party supported a new constitutional reform in the Flemish regional parliament – where it was part of the governing coalition –, while its deputies in the federal legislature – in opposition – voted it down (Beyens et al. 2017, 391).

These intra-party tensions culminated in a party referendum in 2001. There, as Wauters (2005, 336-337) explains, party members could choose between three options. *Niet Splitsen* (No Split-up) basically wanted to conserve the party as it was, with the important caveat that its members were opposed to governmental participation. *Vlaams-Nationaal* (Flemish National), led by former party president Geert Bourgeois (2000-2001) put the radicalisation of the party's ethno-

regionalist claims as their main purpose, and were also opposed to co-operating with other parties. Finally, *De Toekomstgroep* (The Future Group) advocated Anciaux's strategic vision: more focus on non-regionalist issues, and possibly allying with other forces.

Table 4

Election	Election type	*Volksunie*/N-VA	VB
1954	Belgian	2.20	N/A
1958	Belgian	1.98	N/A
1961	Belgian	3.46	N/A
1965	Belgian	6.69	N/A
1968	Belgian	9.79	N/A
1971	Belgian	11.11	N/A
1974	Belgian	10.02	N/A
1977	Belgian	10.04	N/A
1978	Belgian	7.02	1.37
1981	Belgian	9.77	1.10
1985	Belgian	7.88	1.41
1987	Belgian	8.06	1.90
1991	Belgian	5.89	6.58
1995	Belgian	4.67	7.83
1995	Flemish	8.96	12.33
1999	Belgian	5.56	9.87
1999	Flemish	9.25	15.54
2003	Belgian	3.06	11.59
2004	Flemish	26.09*	24.15
2007	Belgian	18.51*	11.99
2009	Flemish	13.06	15.28
2010	Belgian	17.40	7.76
2014	Belgian	20.26	3.67
2014	Flemish	31.88	5.92

Table 4: *Volksunie* (1954-1999) and N-VA (2003-2014) vote share in Belgian parliamentary (Chamber of Representatives results) and Flemish Parliament elections, compared to VB (1978-2014), 1954-2014 (percentages)
Source: Belgische verkiezingsuitslagen (2008); polling2007.belgium.be (2007); polling2009.belgium.be (2009); elections2010.belgium.be (2010); polling2014.belgium.be (2014)
* together with CD&V

According to the rules of the referendum, the group receiving an absolute majority could manage the party further, while losers were to be automatically ejected from the party, with the possibility to re-join per the winner's intention. If none of the factions received an absolute

majority, the history of the *Volksunie* had to terminate (Wauters 2005, 337). In the end, the latter scenario occurred: no grouping received a majority. *Vlaams-Nationaal* actually won, but it fell short of the 50 percent threshold by three percent; the anti-splitters received 30 percent, while the Anciaux-group got only 23 (Beyens et al. 2017, 391). In short, this was the end for *Volksunie*. Policy accommodation pulled the carpet from under its feet, while factionalism prevented it from developing a firm, stable ideological profile that could have helped for complementing losses. The party's former members founded two parties: Anciaux and his affiliates created *Spirit* – by a merger with ID21 – which never competed independently in elections, allied with the Flemish socialist party sp.a and was dissolved in 2009 (Wauters 2005, 338; Beyens et al. 2017, 391). Bourgeois and members of *Vlaams-Nationaal*, on the other hand, founded their own party, *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie*, in October 2001.

6.3 Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie – success through ideology

It can be debated to what extent we can regard *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* as the successor of the *Volksunie*. First, it has to be noted that the Bourgeois-faction clearly wanted to position N-VA as such. As their former grouping *Vlaams-Nationaal* won the most votes in the 2001 party referendum, they claimed to be the direct descendant of *Volksunie*, even if in a purer form: the party's first name for a matter of months was therefore *De nieuwe Volksunie* (The New Volksunie) (Wauters 2005, 338). Beyens et al. (2017) argue that 'N-VA is a successor party, building on its predecessor's ideology and programme, its electorate, activists and organization' (389), even though especially in terms of ideology it also has important differing features.

In the 2003 Belgian federal election, the party's first, N-VA performed rather bad: receiving only 3.1 percent of the national vote was almost half of what the late *Volksunie* gained last time, and resulted in one seat in the lower house. Afterwards, the party entered a 'cartel' (a sort of a

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permanent alliance) with the Flemish Christian Democrats. This indicates an important difference from *Volksunie*: while its leaders often sought alliances with the Left, N-VA showed that its place is on the Centre-Right. Indeed, N-VA's eventual success ensued from its beneficial combination of Flemish nationalism with a centre-right ideological position (Beyens et al. 2017, 394). First, in terms of its ethno-regionalist demands, N-VA has gone further than *Volksunie*, by striving for a confederal Belgium – instead of a federal one – in the short run, and for an independent Flanders in the long run (Maly 2013, 6). Nonetheless, this outbidding game in itself would not necessarily be sufficient for success; as we saw, *Volksunie* in its terminal stages experimented with something similar (among other things) without particular success. The real novelty comparing the party to *Volksunie* comes from the successful and stable implementation of what this work calls the intensive growth strategy, i.e. giving N-VA a clear ideological – right-wing and conservative – profile (Maly 2013, 6). This means, N-VA moved closer on both axes to *Vlaams Blok* – which, after a 2004 court decision ruled the party violated the law against racism, modified its programme and changed its name to *Vlaams Belang* (Flemish Interest) (Erk 2005, 493) – but, as it was neither as extremist nor xenophobic as VB, it was able to lure a substantial slice of the Flemish nationalist electorate, especially after 2010, because it was closer to the median voter in Flanders than VB (Adam and Deschouwer 2016, 1300).

After the modest beginning, N-VA became unprecedentedly successful within a matter of years. The cartel with the CD&V (*Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams;* Christian Democratic & Flemish) immediately won the 2004 Flemish elections, and the 2007 national one – although the CD&V remained the dominating force these years. The cartel eventually came to an end in 2008, when CD&V in government did not want to pledge for further devolution in Flanders (Adam and Deschouwer 2016, 1294-1295). Nonetheless, this break-up played out to be to the benefit of N-VA. The party, now facing the electorate alone, 'polled at 13 per cent in 2009 (regional elections), at 28.4 per cent in 2010 (federal elections) and at 31.9 per cent in 2014

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(both regional and federal elections)' (Adam and Deschouwer 2016, 1295; percentages within Flanders), which means that since 2010 it has been the most popular party not only in Flanders, but in whole Belgium. N-VA was in government between 2014 and 2018, even though it conceded the leadership to Charles Michel from the Francophone liberal *Mouvement Réformateur* (Reformist Movement). It eventually quit the government – causing its demise – in December 2018 over disagreements with its coalition partners around the UN Global Pact for Migration, which N-VA, being tough on immigration, refused to sign (Brundsen and Peel 2018).

In the federal elections in May 2019, N-VA retained its position as the biggest Belgian party (verkiezingen2019.belgium.be 2019), something unanticipated from an ethno-regionalist force. Altogether, N-VA's innovation of trying the intensive growth route, developing a stable right-wing conservative ideological profile for the party, combining it with radical but not extremist ethno-regionalist demands, played off with the electorate.

6.4 Conclusion

Returning to this paper's theory, what can we deduce from the case of the *Volksunie* and *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie*? The two parties operated in a very similar environment: the strong Flemish nationalism, and, from the 1970s onwards, the creation and incremental strengthening of autonomy in a monolingual Flanders both incentivised them towards an intensive growth strategy, in case they wanted to address voters outside their respective core constituency. On the other hand, theoretically their propensity to take part in governments – both parties were part of governing coalitions, although in *Volksunie* a strong faction opposed this – could have been a stimulus towards an extensive strategy, even though it would be most unlikely in Belgium, a country where not only ethno-regionalists, but all main parties became separated

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into Flemish and Francophone organisations. Thus, even though being ambiguous cases, like *Most-Híd*, it was clear that only the intensive growth strategy was viable for *Volksunie* and N-VA. Both of them did attempt to implement such a strategy, proving that the theory's predictions were correct in the Flemish case as well, but, while N-VA was successful, *Volksunie* failed to even regain the popularity it had lost by policy accommodation due to successive decentralisation reforms in Belgium. The question arises, if the ambience was analogous for the two, what made the big difference? The answer is case-specific: while *Volksunie* was unable to commit itself to one specific ideology, for N-VA it was from the start clear that the party line was a right-wing conservative one. This work does not venture to claim that this only factor determined the fate of the two parties, nonetheless it is clear that the constant changing between ideologies, depending on the strength of party factions, did not help *Volksunie*.

> We do find that all these forms of factionalism were present within the *Volksunie* and that these divisions were not cross-cutting among the members, which would have facilitated pacification within the party. As a consequence, we see three well-defined groups of members that take an adversarial position to each other on all five possible sources of factionalism.
>
> <div align="right">(Wauters 2005, 348)</div>

It seems clear that factionalism led to the lack of greater success and eventual demise of *Volksunie*. N-VA's success on the other hand could be predicated upon a number of factors, but it is ostensibly viable that its firm ideological positioning, close to where the Flemish median voter was, was a key in its success. The Flemish case – while primarily demonstrating that the theoretical considerations for the type of strategy were correct and recognised by the parties themselves – showed what case-specific internal factors can hinder an effective intensive growth strategy – especially clear if we compare *Volksunie* to the SNP in the early 1980s.

Chapter 7: Applicability stretch

This paper claimed that its theory about ethno-regionalist growth strategies and its underlying factors should be valid for Europe, based on the purported relative homogeneity of cases in terms of sociological and institutional similarities (e.g. about the notion of nation, party systems etc.). Overall, the comparative study largely supports the theory about when European ethno-regionalist parties, if vying to transcend their core constituency, will be more likely to choose the extensive or intensive strategies. In this section however, it will be briefly scrutinised whether the findings travel to further cases, i.e. non-European ones. This is a question of external validity, generalisability, i.e. examining whether ethno-regionalist parties can be expected to behave the same way everywhere on Earth. As not the main objective of this work, the cases here will not be thoroughly examined, nor it is a goal to give a definite, indisputable answer to why they chose either strategy, but rather to shed some light on the subject. That is, to suggest whether it seems worthy for scholars to investigate non-European cases in the future utilising this theory.

First, let us look at cases that, even though not in Europe geographically, can be expected to show great similarity to European ones, based on their country's cultural, political institutional resemblance with Europe, and shared history. The expectation is that ethno-regionalists will likely to behave the same way as their European counterparts, indeed based on their likeness to each other.

The case that will be looked upon here is the *Parti Québécois*, the in the literature often-discussed party of French Canadians. French Canadians regarded themselves as one of the two founding nations of Canada (Penrose 1994, 165). The *Parti Québécois*, founded in 1968, was instrumental in constructing the *Québécois nation*, French-speaking people living in the

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Canadian province of Québec. This resulted in two referenda on independence, strongly supported by the party, in 1980 and 1995, with both being defeated at the polls (although rather marginally in the latter case) (Clarke and Kornberg 1996, 676).

The party, reflecting on the 'Quiet Revolution' transforming Québec from a conservative, catholic, rural society into an industrialised, secular, progressivist one during the 1960s, adopted a social democratic profile, indicating that liberal progressive nationalism defeated the previously prevalent conservative, inward-looking one (Erk 2010). Subsequently, the social democratic, statist and nationalist *Parti Québécois* has been in government five times in the Province and has dominated its politics together with the centre-right, free-market and federalist Quebec Liberal Party (Tanguay 2004, 149).

What lesson can we draw from this short sketch? First, that the *Parti Québécois* would not fit in very well as a case for this work, as it has never been a 'classical,' narrowly taken ethno-regionalist party revolving around ethno-regionalist issues only. Therefore, the three incentives that are the basis of this work's theory cannot be applied here, although regional autonomy and the strong Québécois identity, as well as the fact that the party has never pursued governmental positions on the national level all suggest an intensive growth strategy. Also, we cannot assess how much the party's developing of an ideological face was a growth strategy, i.e. to what extent it was able to garner more votes by dint of it, compared to what it would have been able to do without. Nonetheless, what its example shows is that ethno-regionalists outside Europe, although within the European cultural sphere, can behave similarly, i.e. the intensive strategy possibly exists there, as there are ethno-regionalists with an ideological face to find. It is striking how similar the Québec case is to the SNP in Scotland, based on the three aspects of national identity strength, regional autonomy, and governmental aspirations. As a counterfactual, if we imagine that because of its different founding factions, they were not able to agree on ideology at the beginning – *Parti Québécois*'s foundation was a merger of the *Mouvement Souveraineté-*

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Association, founded by former Liberal cabinet minister René Lévesque, and *Ralliement Nationale,* a 'Quiet Revolution' new nationalist party (Erk 2010, 434; Crouch 2010, 51), sticking to purely ethno-regionalist issues as the common point resulting from that dissension, the logical step towards party growth built on the SNP's example would have been an intensive strategy, instead of an extensive one. Especially, as the 'Quiet Revolution' pushed the average voter into one direction, to the Left; taken the party wanted to transcend its existing core constituency, it would possibly have needed to eject resisting factions not agreeing with a left turn.

If we accept the above findings as a suggestion that ethno-regionalist behaviour can be similar throughout the West, not only in Europe, a further question arises: do these findings travel even beyond this sphere, to other areas, possibly to the whole world? If one was to examine ethno-regionalist parties outside the western perspective, he or she would run into certain barriers. First, the lack of sufficient literature on the particular parties. Second, the vagueness of ethno-regionalism in this context: while it is true that there have been several ethno-regionalist/regional parties in several countries, like India (Racine 2013), Sri Lanka (Feith 2013), or in general in Africa (Mozaffar, Scarritt, and Galaich 2003, 381), e.g. Benin (Creevey, Ngomo, and Vengroff 2005), Ghana (Morrison and Hong 2006), or Malawi (Ferree and Horowitz 2010), it is not always clear whether, and to what extent, these parties can be called ethno-regional*ist*s, i.e. parties that place the autonomy of their community before other issues. It seems that often regional presence is simply the natural organisation of parties in these countries, which does not necessarily come with ethno-regionalist claims. Mozaffar, Scarritt, and Galaich explain this phenomenon (particularly for African countries, but we could without particular hardships generalise its argument to a wider set of post-colonial states) as follows (2003, 382):

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At independence, therefore, African countries inherited a distinctive ethnic morphology with three defining features that are reflected in the structure of constructed ethnopolitical groups and that have shaped the pattern of their political interactions: (1) marked differences in group size, such that virtually no major ethnopolitical group comprises an outright majority in a country, although some comprise a large plurality; (2) considerable variety and complexity in ethnic markers, such that, even as they produce politically salient interethnic differences, they also produce politically salient intragroup heterogeneity but limited cultural differences among large agglomerations of such groups; and (3) the territorial concentration of some ethnic groups that facilitates their construction as large and cohesive units for collective political action. These three features have combined with the accommodation by postcolonial regimes of instrumental ("pork- barrel") ethnopolitical demands to foster communal contention as the typical pattern of political interactions in which ethnopolitical groups serve as cost-effective strategic resource for organizing political competition for power and resources.

Still, there are a number of autonomy movements that take the form of an ethno-regionalist party. However, the problem that arose with examining these forces was that in each case neither growth strategy was clearly identifiable. Or, when it was found, for example for the Telugu Desam Party in India – although itself dubiously an ethno-regional*ist* force – that adopted an ideological face (Suri 2004, 1486), no change in popularity ensued consequently. It really seems a problem in a non-western context that parties often organise differently, party systems are *a priori* much more fragmented, and ensuing from this the boundaries between (ethno-)regional and ethno-regionalist parties are often rather vague. It is important to note here that 150 years ago European party systems were similarly fragmented (Caramani 2004, Caramani 2005). That time, a 'nationalisation' or 'homogenisation' process started in politics, whereby the hegemony of the left-right cleavage reigned supreme over other pre-industrial – ethnolinguistic, religious, centre-periphery, and urban-rural – ones (Caramani 2004, 5). As a result, until the First World War, the territorial diversity of voting behaviour decreased, as mass parties were incentivised and able to reach out to whole countries (Caramani 2005, 302-303). Plausibly, the party systems of many Third World countries are in the same stage of development as Europe was in the mid-19th century. In this developmental level, certain parties

are simply not able to access every region, and pre-industrial cleavages are still strong, therefore we see many regional parties that are not necessarily ethno-regionalist ones.

Also, another reason for the lack of findings may be the insufficient English-language literature on Third World parties. There may exist similar patterns around the world, just it was not possible to access the appropriate information in English. Either way, this section has to conclude that the paper's theory seems viable in western democracies, in a western political, cultural, and institutional context. In terms of non-western parties, theoretically it cannot be excluded that they resort to similar strategies conscientiously, the main issue was that no party that would fit this paper's theoretical framework reasonably well was found.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This work intends to be pioneer in theorising the growth strategies of ethno-regionalist parties aiming at transcending their natural constituency, and trying to identify causal factors for them. Striving for parsimony, it was hypothesised that three variables can sufficiently well predict whether an ethno-regionalist force decides to choose the intensive or extensive growth path, taken it ventures to go for any strategic change.

The four cases examined here suggest that the theory is largely correct. That is, the two – to a great extent – unambiguous as well as the two ambiguous but to either side leaning cases all opted for the predicted path. Analysing ambiguous cases also revealed that it is more beneficial to interpret the relation between the variables as a correlation, instead of a set-relation, as this interpretation better allows for analysing to either side (intensive or extensive growth) leaning cases. Altogether, it seems that ethno-regionalist parties in autonomous regions with strong ethno-regional identity, with no particularly strong desire to get into the national government have an incentive to grow internally, i.e. to develop an ideological profile. On the other end of the spectrum, parties in regions with no ('sufficient') autonomy, and with weak regional/ethnic identity, but with a strong, primary desire to govern nationally have a strong impetus to opt for the extensive growth strategy, i.e. to territorially extend to the whole country.

Nonetheless, there are some important caveats and limitations for the theory. The first one considers external validity. In the paper it was initially claimed that the theory is predicted to apply to European parties. Later, it was suggested that applicability should extend to western ethno-regionalist parties in general. For non-western parties, patterns that could be accommodated with this theory were not found, even though I do not dare to claim that such parties do not exist at all.

The second caveat regards the number of dependent, as well as independent variables. There may be variables that add explanatory value to the theory; in this paper one, internal competition, was considered and dismissed for not having a consistent effect. Nonetheless, as long as the current theory can predict the outcomes well, I do not see it as by all means necessary to try to include more independent variables. What seems to be more desirable, especially for quantitative investigations, is achieving better measurability for the independent variables. That is, they should be more precisely operationalised and narrowed down. In terms of the dependent variables it was claimed that two strategies for transcending the original, core ethno-regionalist constituency exist in Europe empirically. Naturally, the contingency exists that there are more, that cannot be excluded theoretically. Also, several subtypes may exist within the categories.

Nonetheless, the above paragraph does not exclude that there may also be independent variables that actually explain better the ethno-regionalist choice than the three discussed in this paper; or, at least it may do in some instances. The examination of the particular cases was comprehensive enough to flash out a few possible factors, the effect of which could be investigated in further research. First, it could be considered how going for protest votes and an anti-establishment quality affects the choice of strategy. Levi and Hechter (1985) argue that a considerable amount of ethno-regionalists' support can come from protest votes, and certain authors have claimed that ethno-regionalists as protest parties is a phenomenon that is only workable *within* their primarily represented community (e.g. Levi and Hechter 1985, 139; Gordin 2001, 153). Nonetheless, the anti-establishment character of *Lega* seems to contradict this contention, as it was able to transform itself from regional to a national protest party. It should be investigated whether this is a wider pattern, i.e. there is any consistency in the effect of being a protest party on growth strategies in the corresponding cases.

It could also be checked whether there is a contingency of secessionist parties taking the extensive path. This supposition seems counterintuitive first, and is not supported by the

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existing data (neither the SNP, nor the quasi-secessionist N-VA chose this way), but it might seem reasonable for some (the potential to gather more votes, reaching out to diaspora living e.g. in the national capital). Otherwise, secessionism should be a strong indicator for the intensive growth path, with the caveat that certainly not all intensively growing ethno-regionalists can be expected to be secessionist.

The last factor recommended here is the relative size of the ethnic minority, compared to the majority or the country's population. The question is whether there exist magnitudes, size ranges in which one or the other strategy seems especially beneficial or prohibitive. For instance, was it easier for *Lega* to reach out to the whole country due to already addressing ca. half of Italy or not? Also, is it much harder (e.g. because of human, financial etc. resources) for a party of a small minority to execute an extensive than an intensive plan?

Not a further possible variable, but it is important to note here that in the Flemish case it was revealed how strong regional autonomy can be, i.e. so much that it may possibly overpower and repress the effects of the other variables in extreme situations, such as the Belgian one. The main observation here is that there can be circumstances where a party simply has no realistic possibility to carry out the strategy the independent variables suggest as beneficial (which was by the way not the case for *Volksunie* and N-VA).

Continuing with further limitations for this paper, the next one regards the meagre number of cases overall. Indeed, as it is not the normalcy but the exception for ethno-regionalists to try to transcend their core constituency after having been classical ethno-regionalists for a matter of time, not many cases can be discovered, which could hamper the possible future quantitative examination of the matter.

Also, future scholarship may investigate what the exact purpose of particular parties with the growth strategies could be, and whether it is possible to make generalisations based on the data

gathered. That means, one might scrutinise compared to what situation want ethno-regionalist parties increase their vote share by implementing the changes discussed in this work: their previous ever best result? Alternatively, perhaps they want to supplement a recent popularity loss with these strategies, or reverse a longer downward slope? Is there any tendency here, and can we also say under what circumstances a party is more prone to carry out such a change? Are there differences in this regard between the two strategies?

Finally, the last caveat concerns the causal mechanism. It should be better examined how the concrete independent variables cause the outcomes. Naturally, this is a rather arduous task as it to a great extent regards knowing what and how politicians think, and what happens beyond closed doors in a party regarding its strategy, but case studies about individual parties may meet this challenge. Related to this, it should also be noted that this work is not able to say *when* a decision will be taken in terms of the growth strategy, but only *what* such a decision's direction, when and if it is taken, is likely to be. It could have come with precious findings to investigate what concrete decisions led to strategic changes in the certain cases, nonetheless this work does not provide a definitive and elaborate answer to e.g. why *Lega Nord*'s strategic redirection happened in the early 2010s, and not ten years before due to space and time limitations. Again, a possible direction for future research is to unearth the exact chain of events, mechanisms in particular cases.

Thus, for future investigations the discovery of more cases, better measurable and more precisely defined variables as well as the inquiry of further possible independent variables, and more works on the exact causal mechanisms ought to be the most desirable.

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