It is time for a closer look
The demise of regional party branches [*]

Sofia Collignon

Royal Holloway, University of London [†]

August 1, 2018

Abstract

Traditionally, decentralization has been linked with the stability of the party system because it helps parties to succeed in national elections. Yet, previous research has frequently obviated the intertwined nature of multilevel party competition. This research takes a closer look at parties sub-national electoral trajectories while arguing that decentralization increases the risk of new party demise by making sub-national elections more attractive for all kinds of parties to compete in. The argument is tested applying survival analysis to the electoral trajectories of 1,235 regional branches of political parties in 12 European countries. Results show that contrary to what has been stated previously on the literature, decentralization increases the risk of parties to disappear. This effect fades away the older and more consolidated the party becomes and it is of particular relevance for regionalist parties. These findings have important implications for the literature on second order elections and multilevel party competition.

Keywords: regional party system, survival analysis, second-order elections

---

[†]Sofia Collignon@rhul.ac.uk

1 Introduction

Today, most democratic countries organize their government in multiple tiers or levels and have granted citizens the right to elect local officials. This form of organization has changed the nature of party competition as political parties can compete in national and sub-national elections. It has been argued that multilevel elections have contributed to the national success of new parties (for example, **???**), particularly these classified as "niche" (**?**), because they can take advantage of regional elections to signal their viability and boost their performance in national elections. But how are regional party branches affected by the extent of decentralization? This paper takes a closer look at parties sub-national electoral trajectories to study the effect of decentralization in their survival.

Despite recent literature claiming that the study of parties suffers from "nationalism bias", the analysis of sub-national dynamics of party competition and political parties' regional trajectories is still scarce (**???**). There are two important elements in the study of sub-national party systems: THeir composition, which relates to the number and diversity of parties that compete in a given election, and its stability, which relates to the survival of the parties competing in elections.

The literature on the nationalization of party systems has mainly focused on explaining differences between regional and national party systems. It suggests that decentralization motivates parties to transfer their electoral focus to sub-national elections (**??**), providing opportunities for cleavage mobilization (**???**). More relevant sub-national elections should increase the number of parties competing in regional elections and the variability in their success leads to differences between national an sub-national party systems. However, there is also empirical evidence suggesting that the number of parties react slowly to institutional changes (**???**), especially when the social diversity across electoral districts is high (**?**). Findings derived from this body of literature have lead to important conclusions regarding the extent to which parties are equally competitive in number and results countrywide or only in certain regions (**?**). However, less research has been done that looks at regional and national party systems' *stability*. This is, we know little about the factors that allow some parties to prevail competitive in multilevel elections while others do not.

Current research that looks at the link between multilevel elections and the survival of parties has been traditionally grounded in the literature on second order elections. This stream of the literature suggests that regional elections are subordinated to national elections and thus, they can be used by citizens as a mechanism to express dissatisfaction with the government and their true political preferences (**???????**), encouraging supporters of regional, small, new and, particularly, niche parties to go out and vote, changing turnout

and results (**?**) and providing such parties with higher chances of remaining competitive in subsequent national elections (**???**). Nevertheless, the condition of regional elections as second-order has been called into question as it depends on how strong the link is between regional vote and government formation (**?**), and because in extremely decentralized regions the patterns of turnout are similar to those observed in first order elections (**?**). Yet, despite important advances made to understand the mechanisms that lead niche parties to survive, this framework focuses on explaining the survival of parties in national elections, leaving the door open for future research to study the survival of parties competing in regional elections.

Recently **?** analyzed congruence between regional and national vote share. His findings suggest that regional cleavages explain initial differences in national and regional electoral patterns. However, variations over time are better explained by the degree of authority in the region. These findings are very relevant since they suggest that decentralization affect regional party systems in a different way than it affects national party systems: opening the door for further research oriented at answering the effect of decentralization in the fate of individual parties at the regional level.

In sum, the existing literature lead to the expectation that decentralization will be beneficial for the survival of new parties in the national electoral arena and their inclusion on national parliaments. But does the same hold at sub-national level? Why do we observe variation in the number and type of parties that succeed in some regions and not in others?

This study does not focus on the relationship between national and sub-national party systems, but rather looks at how decentralization affects the success and survival rate of new parties competing at regional level. It explicitly recognizes that the fate of new parties is intertwined with that of their consolidated competitors (**?**) and that making the decision to develop a regional electoral strategy does not necessarily guarantee the success of the party. This research contributes to filling the gap previously identified by **?** and **?**, that party studies still have a "regional blind spot". By doing so, it does not focus on aggregate effects but rather shows the direct consequences of institutions on the survival of parties competing in regional elections in Europe.

This research builds upon previous literature to argue that the variation in the number of new parties that prevail competitively at regional level can be explained by focusing on the incentives faced by new and consolidated parties to compete in sub-national elections. Parties can choose strategically where to compete. They can participate in elections at the regional or at the national level or both (**?**). For new parties it is easier to start competing in regional elections, gaining experience and organizing their support base (**?**). However, decentralization makes regional elections more relevant for consolidated parties who become more likely to participate in regional elections as well. This makes it more difficult for

new parties to take advantage of regional elections to gain experience and visibility, as they have to "hit the ground running" to effectively compete against consolidated parties who already have experience and resources. This ultimately places difficulties on new parties to consolidate their position and increases their risk of disappearing.

Empirically, the argument is tested applying survival analysis to the electoral trajectories of 1,235 regional branches of political parties in 12 European countries between 1956 and 2009 (**?**). This study provides evidence that decentralization increases the hazard of survival, making it more difficult for new parties to prevail competitively at the regional level. The risk of party demise is of particular relevance for regionalist parties who lose their reason to exist once decentralization takes place and for other niche parties who are never completely safe (**???**). These are important findings that in some respects runs counter to arguments advanced by emerging literature on multilevel party competition stating that decentralization contributes to the consolidation of new, regional, small, and niche parties. Instead, this research shows that in the long term, more attractive regional elections increase incentives for all parties to compete in the same election, eliminating the potential benefits of a sub-national electoral strategy.

2   A closer look to the intertwined nature of the fate of new parties

There are different ways to classify parties depending on the issues they advocate, their size and potential to form government or their age. Parties are commonly divided according to their programmatic profile into niche and mainstream. Niche parties are parties that reject the traditional class-based politics, have non-centrist or extreme ideologies and care about a limited number of issues (**???**). Regionalist parties are one special type of niche party since the issues they emphasise are decentralization, devolution and regional empowerment. Another way to classify parties relates to their size. The discussion of which parties can be categorised as small is still ongoing but scholars agree that small parties are parties that get a small number of votes and therefore can not take representation for granted (**??**).

Regardless of their programmatic profile and size, in democracies parties can be new (of recent formation) or consolidated (formed several elections ago) (**??**). In many cases the classifications overlap, but not always (**?**). The centre of interest of this article is the survival of parties and therefore, the main focus of the causal mechanism is in the parties condition as new or consolidated but it is to be expected that the programmatic profile of a party and its size will play a role as well (**?**).

New parties enter into politics for multiple reasons such as the collapse of a major party, disagreements between elites, the lack of representation of certain interests, voter's demands of more political options and territorial cleavages (????????). Right after their formation, new parties face important challenges. They must consolidate their support base and organize their members, as well as sending a message about their viability as a political option and competing in elections. All of this with limited economic and human resources.

Literature on the nationalization of party systems and second-order elections suggests that new parties benefit from participating in sub-national elections. This is because it is easier for them to coordinate regional campaigns which allow their candidates to gain experience, their members to organize and use more affordable electoral marketing (??). Besides, voters favor alternative options in regional elections as a means to send a message of discontent about government policies (???). This too can boost the initial success of new parties (??). Thus, a strategy that focuses on regional elections is attractive for new parties as they will obtain advantages to overcome initial challenges and gain experience and visibility (??).

However, the benefits that new parties can obtain from a regional electoral strategy stem from them being less relevant than national elections (?). Thus the advantage enjoyed by new parties in regional elections are functional to the importance that voters assign to such elections (?). It is fair to say that how much citizens care about regional elections depends upon the type of policies to be designed and implemented by the regional government, and the availability of resources to do it. If the regional government has no faculties to design and implement its preferred policies, all decisions are made by central government and the meaning of regional elections will be low.

The degree of regional authority is given by the capacity of the region to self-govern, deciding freely and without interference from the central government on its tax base, policies and administration of resources and its capacity to influence national politics, either in coordination with other regions or alone (??). Both elements set the importance of the regional election and provide parties with different motives to compete in them. On one hand, the capacity of the region to self-govern will give the winner a political arena for policy experimentation and differentiation (?). On the other hand, consolidated parties have strong incentives to participate and win large vote shares in regional elections when these (indirectly) affect national law making. Yet, the level of regional authority is not static. Decentralization occurs when we observe a new shift of authority towards local governments and away from central governments (?). Thus, we can think of two elements that make regional elections salient: the degree of the regional authority and recent changes on it.

More meaningful regional elections have two implications for the fate of new parties.

Firstly, citizens will value highly the outcome of the election and will be more likely to favor parties that have previously demonstrated their capacity to govern, producing governments that are congruent with the national government coalition (**??**) and overlooking the possibility to vote for a new party. Secondly, while consolidated parties will not care about losing regional elections when they are unimportant, this changes when they become relevant, since they represent an additional platform to implement policies and influence national politics. This motivates consolidated parties to focus on regional elections as well, increasing regional electoral competition.

These implications are particularly damaging for the future of new parties because they do not compete in isolation and their fate is intertwined with the actions and strategies implemented by consolidated parties (**?**). When consolidated parties have more interest in regional elections they will put more attention and resources into their local campaigns. They can use their previous experience, skills and resources to organize successful participation in elections. Besides, they enjoy more flexibility than new, particularly niche, parties to adapt to the median voter without being penalized by their core supporters (**?**). Meanwhile, for new parties to be competitive in regional elections they will have to "hit the ground running", coordinate their supporters, obtain resources and organize the campaign without previous experience. This is even more important as they cannot count on voters favoring alternative options any more. Thus, the more consolidated parties become interested in regional campaigns, the more difficult it will be for new parties to use regional elections to gain campaign experience.

This means that decentralization makes it more difficult for new parties to consolidate. This is because it makes the election outcome more relevant, motivating all parties to put their best effort into winning regional elections and reducing the possibility for new parties to take advantage of the particular electoral patterns observed in second order elections. Therefore, we can say that decentralization contributes to increasing the hazard of party survival. While the level of regional authority have a long term effect on the number of parties that survive in the regional party system, recent changes in decentralization provide a short-term shock in the risk of new party demise. The expectations derived from the argument can be summarized in the following general hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 *The more decentralization the larger the risk of new party demise observed in regional elections.*

Hypothesis 2 *The effect of decentralization in party demise gets smaller the more consolidated (older and bigger) the party becomes.*

Finally a word about the fate of regionalist parties. Citizens in under-empowered regions

can demand the formation of new regionalist parties to press the central government to devolve power, solve economic asymmetries and recognize their distinctive culture (**?????**). The second-order election model postulates that voters are more willing to experiment with their vote in less important elections and vote for new contenders (**?**). Therefore, regionalist parties enjoy an electoral advantage in regional elections and have a clear mandate to demand more decentralization.

However, there is still a debate among scholars about the role of decentralization in their fate. Some researchers have found evidence that national parties decentralize resources and decision-making power as a reaction to the strengthening of regionalist parties (**?????**). Other researchers suggest that citizens do not have incentives to vote for regional or provincial parties until they have already gained some power from the central government (**??**) and some others have argued that regionalist parties lose their reason to exist once decentralization takes place (**??**).

Contributing to this discussion and derived from the general argument, it is possible to expect that regionalist parties will be in even higher risk of demise. This is because while their formation is explicitly demanded by citizens who want more decentralization, consolidated parties have additional incentives to fight them in regional elections: prevent them from getting even stronger and avoid having to decentralize even more power in the future. This puts additional pressure on regionalist parties, increasing their risk of demise. Thus, regions with less authority may see more new regionalist parties appearing but their risk of demise will increase if more regional authority is transferred to the region. This can be summarized in the following statement:

Hypothesis 3 *New regionalist parties tend to be shorter -lived than other parties once decentralization takes place.*

3   Data and variables

To test the argument that decentralization increases the risk of party demise, I compare the trajectories of 1,235 unique branches of parties that contested regional elections, as defined by (**?**), in 12 European countries. The dataset includes elections held in the 198 different regions of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and the UK between 1956 and 2009. In total, there are 5,804 party-election observations.

Data was collected from different sources: regional electoral results were extracted from **?**; the classification of niche parties from **?** and the classification of regional and ethnic parties comes from (**?**); data on regional cleavages and dissimilarity scores come from **?**;

and measures of decentralization from **?**. Only countries from which complete information is available are included in the sample.

3.1 Outcome variable

The causal mechanism proposed in the article focuses on the survival of parties competing in regional elections. The main argument is that the risk of party demise increases when more power is at stake in regional elections. This argument looks at the long-term effect of decentralization in the survival of parties and explain why some of them prevail competitive in some regions and others do not.

Much of the current literature that looks into how niche parties can benefit from second-order elections focus on their potential for vote gains in national elections. This has been traditionally tested using as dependent variable the share of votes that parties obtain in national elections. This variable is appropriate to measure the party's immediate success and gains while linking regional and national elections. Yet, the focus of this article is on the continuous presence of the party in the regional electoral arena and therefore, it requires of a different selection of dependent variable.

While it is undoubtedly crucial to understand why parties emerge and what are their drivers for national success, this study accounts for the systematic survival variation of parties at the regional level. New parties are here defined as those that compete for the first time in a given regional election. This includes all parties that compete for the first time in the region regardless of whether they have competed in other regions before, splits of old parties and mergers that result in a new party. This broad definition responds to the fact that new parties are more vulnerable to demise since they still need to build their support base. Parties that merge face the challenge of keeping their old supporters, and parties that split face the risk of weakening (**??**). Parties are named and classified (in order of priority) following **?**, secondary literature and changes in names (new name means new party) (**?**).

The outcome variable then, is measured as the number of regional elections in which the party competes before its demise. It begins with 1 for the first election, 2 for the second and so on until 18 which is the maximum number of elections that a single party in the sample competed in. The status of the party is 0 if it remains competing in the next election and 1 if it does not. This is, for each political party the regional election in which it first competed provides our indicator of party birth. The last regional election in which it competed serves as our marker of party death.

The selection of the outcome variables is appropriate as it combines the elements of durability in the number of regional elections that a party competes in and its demise, when

the party stops competing altogether in elections. The demise of a party is broader classified to include parties that disband, change their names or merge with a competitor (**??**). Mergers require special attention because they are treated as births of new organizations and the disbanding of their independent predecessors as party deaths. This should not be a problem given the fact that the analysis is not concerned with the reasons for a new party to appear but the risks associated with being a new competitor and the effect of decentralization on exacerbating regional electoral competition. It is just to be expected that this additional competition manifests on different ways that lead a party to succumb.

It is important to keep in mind that the first sub-national election occurred at different points in time. For example, while Austria, has held regional elections since the end of World War II, it was not until the 1980s that Spain introduced regional elections. Moreover, the last election observed can also vary because the last year in which data was collected was 2009. That is, the data is right-censored. This particular structure of the dependent variable is accounted for with the selected method of analysis, I offer further details later. '

3.2 Explanatory variables related to decentralization

In order to test the argument concerning the survival of parties, a number of covariates were specified. The key explanatory variable is **decentralization**, measured using the Regional Authority Index (RAI) disaggregated at regional level (**?**). The RAI is used here due to its comparability over a long period of time and a large set of countries and its capability to formally differentiate between regions and levels of government. It also has the advantage of being a comprehensive score that includes the traditional components of fiscal, administrative and policy decentralization (**?**) but divided into two meaningful concepts: shared-rule and self-rule.

Self-rule is the component of RAI that reflects the authority exercised by a regional government over those who live in the region. This is the extent to which a regional government is autonomous rather than de-concentrated and has the faculties to design policies in key areas, set the tax base, borrow money, have an independent legislature and executive branch.

Shared-rule indicates the degree of authority exercised by a regional government or its representatives in the country as a whole, for example, the capacity to co-legislate in the national assembly and participate in budgeting processes. It is composed by five components: a)The extent to which regional representatives codetermine national legislation. b)The extent to which a regional government codetermines national policy in intergovernmental meetings. c)The extent to which regional representatives codetermine the distribution of national

tax revenues. d)The extent to which a regional government codetermines sub-national and national borrowing constraints and e)the extent to which regional representatives codetermine constitutional change (**?**).

Changes in decentralization are operationalized as the difference in the RAI from one year to the next (at regional level). Changes in RAI can be positive for decentralization and negative for centralization.

I rely on this differentiation between shared and self-rule to test for a more nuanced analysis of the causal mechanism and in consequence, I included the separated scores in the model. Including decentralization as a level and change allows to test for the immediate effect of a change in the distribution of power and its long term effect as the context in which parties compete.

3.3   Explanatory variables related to type of party

As I mentioned in the theory section, niche parties present distinctive voting patterns (**??**) and are susceptible to benefiting from second-order elections (**??**). A variable that takes the value of 1 if the party has been categorized as niche by **?** and zero otherwise is included in the analysis to control for the differences in voting patterns and appeal between niche and mainstream parties.

I also included a binary variable indicating whether the party has been classified specifically as **regionalist party**, or not, by **?**. Making the distinction between regionalist parties and other type of niche parties is important as regionalist parties include devolution and regional empowering specifically in their manifestos, and therefore, are most likely affected by decentralization.

Another way to divide parties relates to their **size**, they can be small, medium-sized or large. A party is classified here as being small if it achieves less than five percent of the vote share. Medium-sized parties are not classified in the literature but this research defined them as those that have been in risk of becoming small at some point but managed to raise their electoral success rates. A big party then, is one that has never faced that risk (**??**). This variable takes the value of 1 if the party at any point in its history has obtained 5% or less of the vote share and therefore is small or medium-sized and zero otherwise. Controlling for party size is important as it directly relates to popularity and the confidence with which it has surpassed any existing threshold.

It has been argued that niche parties are always new as they disturb the existing party system (**?**). But there is no real reason as to why older parties cannot have or change to a niche programmatic profile (**?**) or for that matter why new parties should not have a more

mainstream profile. Niche parties tend to be smaller than mainstream parties but not all small parties are niche (**?**). Thus, it is expected that in some cases categories overlap but this is not always the case (**?**).

3.4 Control variables

To **test for alternative explanations** I added the regional electoral rule as a categorical variable indicating if the region used majoritarian, proportional representation or mixed electoral rules. Additionally, I included measures for regional grievances and economic asymmetry as the difference between GDPpc in the region with respect to national GDPpc (note that data available is very recent, so this test only from 1990 onwards). These measures have been collected and used before by **?**.

The survival of a party in a given election can be affected by its electoral performance observed in previous elections. **Sub-national electoral performance** is accounted for by including the percentage of votes obtained in the regional election. Using percentage of votes instead of the nominal count of votes is suitable in this case because different regions have different electorate size. **Turnout** in regional elections is also included in the model.

The **degree of integration** of the party, also referred in the literature as dissimilarity of the vote, is operationalized here as the difference in vote share between the regional and national elections (**?**). The larger the value the stronger the party at regional level, compared with the party's national support. This is included to account for the idea that citizens vote more sincerely in sub-national elections, favoring small, niche, and new parties and to determine the degree of regionalization in the party's support base. It also helps to control for the support that the party enjoys at the national level.

The **electoral strength of a party in other regions of the country** is operationalized here as the mean vote share of the party in other regional elections. This control is included because when a party is electorally strong in another region the conditions contributing for its survival (i.e. membership, finance, etc.) may spill-over in the region where the party is electorally weaker.

Additional controls include a dummy that takes the value of 1 if the party is in opposition. This responds to research indicating that the status of the party, either as government or in opposition, affects the support of voters in regional elections (**??**).

It can be argued that the analysis should control for the electoral threshold applied in a regional election because it directly affects the survival of parties. Electoral thresholds are established to limit the number of parties that enter the assembly. They are of particular relevance in PR or mixed systems because in FPTP or majoritarian systems the effective

threshold is (almost always) 50% of the vote (**?**). However, the effect of thresholds in party survival is correlated with the vote share of the party in a given election and it is of particular relevance for small parties because they still need to signal their viability and consolidate their party brand (**?**). Omitting this variable the analysis does not lead to biased conclusions here because the empirical strategy already controls for the three elements that link thresholds with party survival: the regional electoral system, the regional and national vote share and the size of the party.

4   Method and empirical analysis

The argument requires an analysis of how long it will take for a new party to disappear, whether decentralization influences the risk of new party demise and weather this effect is particularly strong in certain types of parties. Therefore, I used survival analysis, specifically, the proportional hazard model developed by **?**. This is a semi-parametric model that enables an assessment of the time it will take for an event to occur and the relationship of several variables to time-to-event.

There are important advantages of using Cox models. First of all, they do not require the researcher to choose a probability distribution for the hazard function in advance, but in general fit the data well and produce robust results (**?**). Secondly, they consider the likelihood of an event happening and also take into account right censoring, which occurs when the event under study is not experienced by the last observation. This is particularly important for this analysis since not all parties in the sample competed in the same number of elections and not all failed to survive during the period analyzed.

Finally, while Cox models have been used in medical sciences for a long time, their use in political science has recently become more popular. Some examples include the work of **????** and, of particular relevance, the study of party density undertaken by **??**.

4.1   Results

If the argument and hypotheses presented above hold true, we should observe that parties that compete in decentralized contexts will have a higher hazard than those competing under centralization (H1), and that this risk posed by decentralization fades away the older and larger the party as this indicates that it became a consolidated party (H2). We should also observe a positive hazard ratio in regionalist parties (H3).

Figure 1 present the Kaplan-Meier survival curve of parties in the sample. This is a useful first exploration of the data as they present the proportion of parties that remain
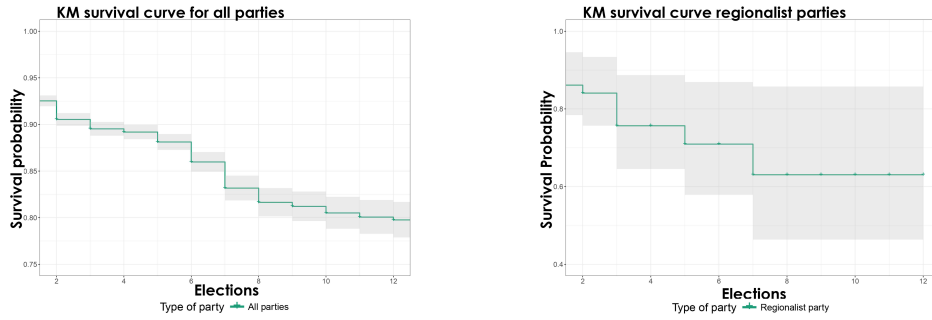
(a) Survival curve for all parties (95% CI)

(b) Survival curve for regionalist parties (95% CI)
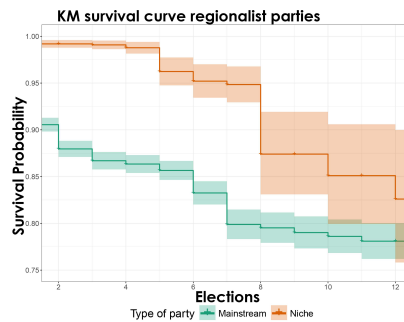
(c) Survival curve for niche and mainstream parties

Figure 1: Kaplan-Meier survival curves

competitive in each election while taking into account right-censoring. As can be seen in figure 1a, the analysis of sub-national parties shows a large survival rate of approximately 80%, sustaining a general idea of stability in the number of parties that prevail competitive in regional elections. Figure 1b shows the survival rate of regionalist parties, which have a success rate of around 62%, lower than the aggregate.

Figure 1c compares the lives of niche and mainstream parties. When sub-national elections are analyzed, niche parties have a higher survival rate than mainstream ones. However, while at the beginning of their careers niche parties experience higher survival rates than their mainstream counterparts, the latter stabilize after five elections and niche parties do not reach that point, indicating that niche parties do not see themselves safe from the risk of party demise. On the contrary, their survival rate drops from 95% in the seventh election to 87% in the eight. The mean age at the time of demise also varies according to the type of party. For mainstream parties it is 2.32 elections, for niche parties 5.63 and for regionalist parties 2.69. Together these figures show graphically that the complete disappearance of a party is a relatively rare event experienced by approximately 20% of the sample. This is not

surprising since the cases in the sample are all of long-established democracies.

I then proceed to test the argument statistically. This is achieved using Cox proportional-hazards regression with time-varying covariates. Data is stratified by type of party (niche or mainstream) to allow each group to have a different baseline function, thus modelling more accurately what was observed in figure 1c. The Cox proportional hazards model assumes that the covariates shift the underlying hazard proportionally. To address this I estimate all models, controlling for the time varying variables of turnout, self- and shared-rule and their interaction with time in its linear form.

Table 1 shows the coefficients and standard errors of three models. M1 is the baseline model and M2 shows that effects are robust to the addition of controls, M3 adds a Heaviside function and M4 includes the overall RAI score instead of its two components separately. Robust standard errors are presented between parenthesis.

Examining the individual predictors more closely, all models yield the expected results for the effect of decentralization, corroborating hypotheses 1, 2 and 3. Looking at the results, the coefficients show that the overall score of regional authority is positive and significant. Indicating that parties that compete in more decentralized regions are in significantly higher risk of demise. To look more closely to the elements of regional authority that affect its relationship with party demise it is necessary to focus on the models that include share and self-rule separately. The immediate effect of self-rule is not significant. But it becomes significant as it grows progressively at a rate of 0.03. Meanwhile, increases in shared-rule have an immediate effect, significantly raising the hazards to parties. The negative sign of the interaction term between shared-rule and number of elections indicates that this effect becomes progressively smaller with time, at the rate if -0.01 per additional election. This is also significant at the 95% confidence level. In all, this suggests that the effect of decentralization is different depending on the type of authority granted to regions. Both types of decentralization increase the hazard of parties, increases in shared-rule do it more immediately and positive changes in self-rule do it later.

The immediate effect of a change in regional authority is also positive and significant. In general, positive changes in regional authority (decentralization) in any of the components have a positive and significant effect on the hazard to parties, with a coefficient of 0.07. This corroborates the argument that changes in decentralization give a shock that increases the risk of disparaging in the short term. Thus, parties competing in decentralized contexts are at a higher risk of disappearing than under centralization (H1). It is possible that new parties opt to compete in regional elections with the aim of taking advantage of this additional arena to gain experience. However, they do not significantly benefit from it in the immediate election and the longer they keep this strategy the more they risk their decline.

13

Table 1: Cox proportional-hazards regression with time-varying covariates

|	M1	M2	M3	M4
Regional party	1.86***	0.95*	0.93*	0.83*
	(0.32)	(0.37)	(0.37)	(0.35)
Vote share regional elections	−0.11***	−0.07***	−0.08***	−0.08***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Party is in opposition	−0.78***	−0.87***	−0.81***	−0.83***
	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.14)
Self-Rule	−0.13*	−0.03	−0.02	
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	
Shared-Rule	0.06	0.08*	0.08**	
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	
Changes in Regional Authority	0.04***	0.07***	0.07***	0.06**
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Self-Rule:election	0.04***	0.03***	0.03***	
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	
Shared-Rule:Election	−0.01	−0.01*	−0.01*	
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	
Regional cleavages		−0.10	−0.09	−0.04
		(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Economic asymmetry		0.00*	0.00	0.00
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Diff. v. share national and regional elections		−0.01	−0.01	−0.00
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Turnout		−0.07***	−0.07***	−0.06***
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Majority		0.09	0.13	0.19
		(0.78)	(0.77)	(0.81)
Mixed		1.26	1.24	0.94
		(0.65)	(0.65)	(0.70)
PR		1.05	1.00	1.04
		(0.62)	(0.62)	(0.61)
Party strength in other regions		−0.07***	−0.08***	−0.08***
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Turnout:Election		0.01***	0.01***	0.01***
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Decentralization in medium-sized and small t<3			0.53	0.59
			(0.35)	(0.36)
Decentralization in medium-sized and small t>3			−0.58***	−0.61***
			(0.16)	(0.17)
Regional Authority				0.04*
				(0.02)
AIC	3395.17	3317.29	3303.23	3332.82
R^2	0.06	0.07	0.08	0.07
Max. R^2	0.47	0.47	0.47	0.47
Num. events	308	308	308	308
Num. obs.	5801	5801	5801	5801
PH test	0.01	0.24	0.36	0.05

***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$

14
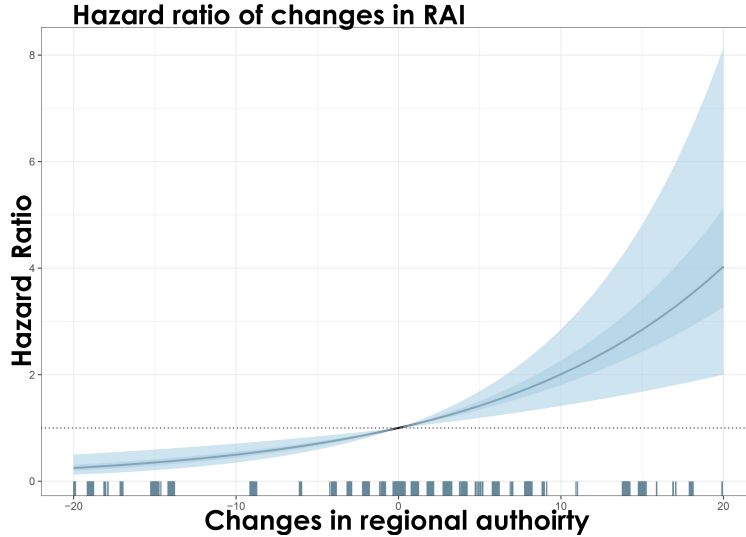
Figure 2: Hazard ratios for changes in decentralization with 95% CI

Figures 2 and 3 show the hazard ratios of changes in decentralization and shared-rule as well as the uncertainty obtained after 1,000 simulations. The interpretation of hazard ratios is relatively straight forward: a value above 1 indicates a greater likelihood of the party disappearing in the next election as the value of the independent variable increases, whereas a value below 1 suggests that their demise is less likely. Figure 2 shows that when changes in regional authority are negative (centralization), the hazards decrease and when positive changes in RAI take place (decentralization), the risk increases. There is no significant effect (hazard ratio=1) when no changes in the level of regional authority are observed. In the case of shared-rule (figure 3), when it takes the value of 10, parties are at approximately 2.5 times more risk than when shared rule is 0.

I still need to show that consolidated parties are not affected by decentralization in the same form. That is, that the effect of decentralization becomes smaller the older and bigger the party becomes (H2). This time and size-dependence is examined in M3 by including an interaction between changes in levels of decentralization and time for small and medium sized parties[1]. The results show a positive but insignificant coefficient for the effect of decentralization in small and medium-sized parties in their first three elections, indicating that they are not affected differently than large parties by decentralization at the beginning of their political lives. However, this effect is negative and significant once the party has competed in more than 3 elections, indicating that when small and medium-sized parties gain more experience, the effect of decentralization reduces because they have consolidated

---

[1]This is a Heaviside step function also called the unit step function. It is a discontinuous function whose value is zero for negative argument and one for positive argument (**?**).
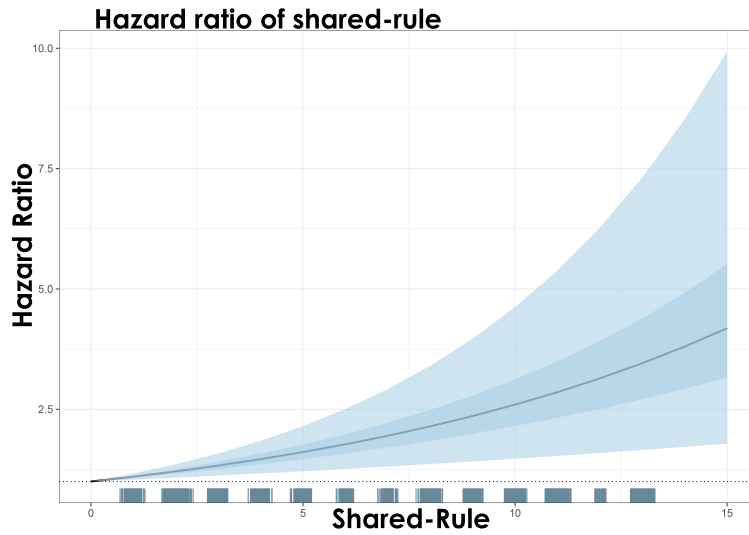
Figure 3: Changes in hazard ratios for different values of shared-rule. Shaded area represent 95% confidence intervals
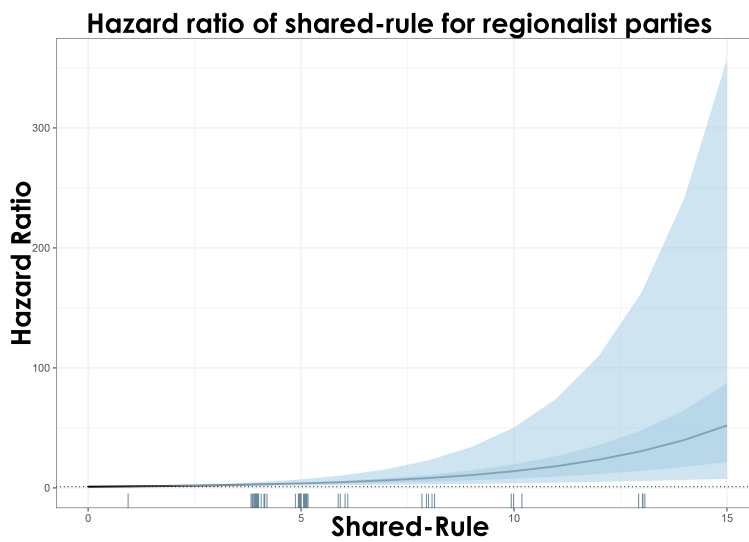

Figure 4: Effect of shared-rule in regionalist parties with 95% CI

their support base. These findings corroborate the second hypothesis.

As I mentioned before, regionalist parties are in higher risk of disappearing than other parties, supporting H3. This finding suggests that parties that priorities a territorial agenda put themselves a ceiling to the support they can attract, which increases their risk of demise. But are they significantly affected by decentralization? Figure 4 show changes in the hazard ratios for different values of shared-rule in regionalist parties. As can be observed, the effect is significant and the hazard ratios are positive. This finding goes more in-line with arguments that suggest that devolution debilitates regionalist parties, as observed by **??** and **?** than arguments that suggest that decentralization empower them.

Finally, control variables further increase confidence in our results as they exhibit the expected effects. The coefficients show that strong performance in sub-national elections and being electorally strong in other regions reduce the risk of disappearance. This effect is independent from national electoral success as the difference between regional and national vote-share is not significant.

Parties in opposition face a lower risk than those in government. This corresponds with previous literature indicating that government parties are penalized in sub-national elections. Moreover, increases in turnout significantly reduce the hazard of parties. This is consistent with previous findings that indicate that new parties benefit from participating in regional elections where the electorate is compelled to go out and vote but, interestingly, this effect does not fade away with the age of the party.

It is worth mentioning that these results are independent from regional cleavages, economic asymmetry and electoral rules as these covariates are not significant. Thus, while they may explain the emergence of new parties, they do not significantly affect their longevity at sub-national level.

The Cox regression requires that the proportional hazards assumption hold. A global test for the full model is reported at the bottom of the table. In all three cases, the analysis of Shoenfield residuals indicate that we can reject the null hypothesis that the proportional hazards assumption is violated (PH test > 0.05).

I now proceed to examine the robustness of the findings to the specification of the model. Models presented in the table are calculated with robust standard errors. However, heterogeneity and event dependence induce bias if left un-modeled, even in large-N analysis. To show that the results are not due to model misspecification, I have estimated the same model clustering by region and country and using a joint frailty model, as suggested by **??**. In all cases, the results are consistent with what was presented here. Results of these models are presented in the appendix.

5   Discussion and concluding remarks

This article asked if decentralization makes it more difficult for new parties to survive. It argued that to respond to this question, it is necessary to examine the fate of individual parties competing in regional elections and how the context in which they compete affects their survival likelihood. Moreover, it is important to take a closer look at the electoral performance of parties in sub-national elections, as it is at this level where changes in decentralization are more likely to have an effect.

This is a party-centered perspective that clarifies why previous research on decentralization has found divergent empirical evidence about the role of this institution in the fate of parties. It is based on the idea that for new parties it is crucial to overcome the challenges associated with lack of experience, resources, and visibility and do well in their first elections, because their prevalence as a political option is at risk. Since sub-national elections are easier to organize and voters are more benign in terms of favoring new political options, it makes sense to start out in regional elections.

It is theorized that decentralization changes the stakes of power: when more power is transferred to the regions, sub-national electoral outcomes become more relevant, encouraging new parties to put even more effort into the associated elections. Yet, the consequences of decentralization are not necessarily beneficial because all other consolidated parties will also target newly-empowered regions. This in turn, increases regional electoral competition and endangers new parties. Nonetheless, as the party grows in size and experience, the risk reduces as the party finds other ways to consolidate.

Applying survival analysis to a data-set covering party-level electoral results in 198 regions from 12 European countries over nearly five decades revealed the following: Parties that decide to compete in regions with more authority are in general at higher risk of experiencing political demise; strong regional results, of course, reduce the risk of parties disappearing; the hazard is higher for those parties that achieve under 20% of vote share but stabilizes after that; and medium-sized and small parties are not at a particularly higher risk than other parties at the beginning of their lives, but see their risk reduced significantly after their third election.

Thus, it is possible to conclude that decentralization contributes to the risk of party demise. These findings stress the importance of systematically looking at the context in which elections take place when studying new party performance. This research also explains puzzling findings made by other researchers that have analyzed aggregated data and national elections. For example, **?** found that the Greens in the UK opted for a regional strategy to boost their national electoral performance. The regional success of the Greens is reflected in

their 160 principal authority councillors around England and Wales. However the Scottish Greens only have 12 councillors. This variation in strength can be explained by the fact that the Greens experience higher competition in Scotland than in England due to additional pressures imposed by the Scottish National Party and Labour party; a long-established party that seeing its position challenged in the region has concentrated in winning back seats.

The findings lead to three broader issues that deserve closer examination in future cross-national comparative research. Firstly, it highlights how the context of electoral competition affects parties in different moments of their life cycle, an issue raised previously by **?**. Secondly, it highlights the importance had by interactions between consolidated and new parties in the fate of the latter. As **?** previously stated, the fate of parties is intertwined and this should be taken into account in the analysis of second-order elections. Finally, this research highlights the importance of the analysis of sub-national el ections in its own right but has concentrated solely on the number of parties in the party system. Future research should go beyond the number of options presented to citizens during elections to the analysis of the existing effective options, namely the effect of decentralization on the diversity of policy choices.

The impact of decentralization on parties and party systems have wider normative repercussions. An important implication relates to the number of choices available to voters during elections. The creation of new parties corresponds to an interaction between social cleavages and institutional features. When more parties are created new policy platforms and forms of representation become available. This can potentially increase representativeness. When this new parties disappear, they leave a sector of the electorate unrepresented in elections.

Another implication relates to the strategies that parties use to attract new voters. In principle, a strategy supporting decentralization may be attractive for niche, particularly regionalist parties who see in decentralization an opportunity to access power, even if this is at the local level. However, this article has shown that this type of parties should be careful when opting for this strategy as it is potentially dangerous for their consolidation. On the other hand, findings and empirical evidence indicate that decentralization makes it more difficult for new and regionalist parties to survive, but if they manage to do so, they will be well prepared to face mainstream parties in national elections.

References