Multilevel Party Politics of Immigration: Territorial Rescaling and Party Competition

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### Introduction

Immigration is one of the most pressing concerns in Western democracies, becoming a key source of polarization amongst political parties and public opinion (Boswell, 2003; Odmalm, 2012). However, while the integration of immigrants is increasingly managed at the sub-state regional level, as demonstrated by Ricard Zapata-Barrero and Fiona Barker in Chapter 2, thereby becoming an important issue in the agendas of sub-state territorial actors as we shall see below, studies on immigration have focussed almost exclusively on the central- or nation-state level. This limited state-level focus prohibits a full understanding of the party politics of immigration in multilevel states. This is because states are no longer (if they ever were) homogenous political entities with the same statewide parties competing on the same statewide policy issues across the entire space of a given country. Instead, we have witnessed a dramatic decentralization of powers to sub-state territories, which has enabled regional political actors to advance distinct sub-state policy agendas, leading to policy divergence across states (Loughlin, 2001; Keating, 2001). This process has been described as spatial or territorial ‘rescaling’, whereby power and authority is dispersed across several territorial levels within states (Keating, 2009). In response, political parties have themselves undergone degrees of territorial rescaling by transforming themselves from unitary organizations into decentralized multilevel creatures (Deschouwer, 2003; Hopkin, 2003; Bradbury and Mitchell, 2006; Thorlakson, 2006; Fabre, 2008; Detterbeck and Hepburn, 2010). As a result, sub-state regional branches of parties are allowed to
fashion their own policy programmes and campaigns in order to cater to the interests of the regional citizenry and to compete with homegrown stateless nationalist and regionalist parties (SNRPs) which advocate greater self-determination for the territory. Often, this requires parting from central-party policy to develop more appropriate policies for the sub-state region. Therefore, similar to the levels of government themselves, as Zapata-Barrero and Barker have shown us in Chapter 2, different levels of political parties may also adopt more synchronized or divergent positions on immigration policy matters.

The territorial rescaling of states has led to increasing policy differentiation and divergence across states, as regions seek tailored policy solutions to regional problems (Keating, 2009). Yet so far, studies have focussed on traditional social policy issues such as childcare, health, or education, whereby regional parties have ‘broken’ from central-party agendas to meet the specific socioeconomic and cultural needs of the sub-state territory. However, immigration represents another key policy issue that has become decentralized in certain states – especially in relation to reception and migrant integration – leading to possibilities of regional policy divergence. Furthermore, immigration has become a source of competition between political parties at the sub-state regional level, and to that end it deserves careful attention. A focus on the multilevel party politics of immigration has generally been lacking from the literature (see, Zapata-Barrero, 2009a; Hepburn, 2009b), and the aim of this chapter is to begin a discourse that seeks to redress this imbalance.

The dynamics of regional party systems are often distinct from state-level party systems – not only in immigration matters but also in other policy areas. In particular, the issues contested in regional party systems are often influenced by a ‘territorial cleavage’, which in some cases takes prominence over the left-right dimension (Hepburn, 2010). This cleavage revolves around three issues of territorial concern:

1. the politics of territory, that is, issues of political autonomy, self-determination, and representation within state structures (here, parties often take positions along an independence – unitarism continuum)
2. the culture of territory, such as issues of language, identity, and culture (here, the main polarizing issue tends to be language, whereby, in the case of the existence of a regional minority language, parties take positions along a unilingualism – bilingualism continuum)
3. the economics of territory, whereby parties may seek to follow local forms of economic development, and support either increasing state subsidies or increased economic autonomy for the region (thereby