# 'Red Belts' anywhere? The electoral geography of European radical left parties since 1990

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# Abstract

European radical left parties (RLPs) are on the rise across Europe. Since 1990 they became an integral part of the party systems across the continent and enjoy an increased level of government participation and policy clout. The main source for this improved position is their increasing electoral support in the past three decades, underpinned by a diversity of electoral geographies. Understood as the patterns of territorial distribution of electoral support across electoral units, the electoral geographies are important, as they indicate the effects of the socio-economic and political changes in Europe on these parties.

This thesis studies the sources of the electoral geographies of European RLPs since 1990. The existing literature on these parties highlighted the importance of their electoral geographies for understanding their electoral and governmental experiences. Yet, to this date, it lacks systematic research on these territorial distributions of electoral support in their own right. Such research is important also for the general literature on the spatial distribution of electoral performance. In particular, these works paid limited attention to the relevance of their theories for individual political parties, as they rather focused on party systems.

This research tests three alternative explanations for the emergence of electoral geography. A literature review of the works on European RLPs, electoral geography, party and party system nationalisation, and territorial politics indicated that the electoral geographies of European RLPs could emerge from the differences in the socio-economic circumstances between electoral units, from the different effects of the institutional framework of a country across a territory, or from the differences in the organisational capabilities of a party across electoral units. The basis for assessing the relevance of these hypotheses was the comparison of the cases of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM, the Czech Republic), The Left (Die Linke, Germany), and the Socialist Party (SP, the Netherlands) in the timeframe between 1990 and 2017. The three parties were representative for the diversity of electoral geographies of European RLPs and for the ideological and organisational heterogeneity of the radical left party family in Europe in the past three decades.

A qualitative analysis of series of semi-structured interviews with independent researchers, and with party officials from the three parties at local, regional, and national levels, supported by a rich amount of statistical data and secondary literature, led to two main conclusions. First, this thesis found evidence in support of all three alternative explanations. In particular, the differences in the historical legacies of mass mobilisation and in the contemporary socio-economic circumstances between electoral units, the influence of the party competition with a major centre-left opponent and of the system of regional governance, as well as the territorial outreach of the party organisation and the concentration of its members all make a significant contribution to the diverse electoral geographies of the three cases. Second, the process of the formation of electoral geography emerges from the interaction of these factors. In this context, the differences in the organisational capabilities of European RLPs between electoral units to build up and mobilise support rather filter the effects of the external political environment, represented by the diverse socio-economic circumstances across a country and its institutional framework. In doing so, this thesis revealed the importance of the party organisation for the electoral geographies of small and anti-political establishment parties. The theoretical implications of these findings are in the need to separate the effects of the ideological and programmatic offer of these parties from the role of their party organisation for their electoral performance.

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## Author's declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

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## 1. Research context

Three decades after the collapse of the Soviet bloc European radical left parties (RLPs) spurned the dust and established themselves as an integral and increasingly influential part of party systems across Europe. This can be seen in three main ways. First, RLPs achieve similar electoral results to their allegedly 'niche' competitors, Green and radical right parties (RRPs) (Adams *et al.*, 2006, p. 513), given, for example, the minor differences in their performances at European Parliament elections since 1989 (Table 1.1). Second, RLPs take an increasing amount of government responsibility. While the majority of such experiences are as a minor coalition partner (Table 1.2), recent years saw them exceed this role. As of 2018, RLPs are a major coalition partner in Greece and provide decisive parliamentary support for the Czech, Portuguese, and Slovenian governments without ministerial positions. Third, RLPs have noticeable policy clout, as their mainstream centre-left opponents remain responsive to radical left policy positions (Statham and Trenz, 2013; Meijers, 2017).

**Table 1.1. The electoral performance of niche party families in the European Parliament elections since 1989**

|              |            | 1989 | 1994 | 1999 | 2004 | 2009 | 2014  |
|--------------|------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| **Green**        | Vote Share | 5.8% | 7.5% | 7.7% | 5.5% | 7.5% | 6.7%  |
|              | Countries  | 8    | 12   | 13   | 14   | 14   | 17    |
| **Radical Right** | Vote Share | 3.3% | 3.2% | 5.6% | 6.5% | 4.3% | 11.5% |
|              | Countries  | 3    | 5    | 6    | 13   | 9    | 11    |
| **Radical Left**  | Vote Share | 8.1% | 5.4% | 6.7% | 5.2% | 4.8% | 6.9%  |
|              | Countries  | 7    | 8    | 10   | 14   | 14   | 14    |

Data source: March (March, 2011) and www.parties-and-elections.eu

Such an improved role is underpinned by a rise in their electoral support in the past three decades. The dismantling of the post-war social compromise mobilised opposition from traditional mass organisations (Kouvelakis, 2007, 2011) and from a broad palette of newly-emerged social movements (Jenkins and Klandermans, 1995; della Porta *et al.*, 2006). This seems to be reflected in the improved electoral performance of RLPs across Europe. As it can be seen in Table 1.4, the average electoral performance of European RLPs that entered at least once their national parliament (Table 1.3) grew from 7.5% in the 1990s to 9.1% in the 2010s. Beneath this improvement there are noticeable territorial variations. Previous studies particularly explored the major difference in the

levels of RLP national electoral performance across the continent. Specifically, whereas RLPs in Central and Eastern Europe achieve very strong or very marginal performances, their West European counterparts maintain a relatively stable mid-level support (March, 2011, pp. 1–4; 2012). There is, however, another significant pattern of territorial variation that needs scholarly attention: the one related to their electoral geographies.

**Table 1.2. Radical left participation in national governments in Europe, 1990-2018**

| Country | Party | Period in government |
|---|---|---|
| Cyprus | Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) | 2003-2007 (dominant coalition partner); 2008-2013 (coalition partner) |
| Czech Republic | Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) | 2018- (government toleration) |
| Denmark | Red-Green Alliance (Enhedslisten) | 1998-2001 (government toleration) 2011-2015 (government toleration) |
| Finland | Left Alliance (VAS) | 1995-2003 (coalition partner) 2011-2014 (coalition partner) |
| France | French Communist Party (PCF) | 1997-2002 (coalition partner) |
| Greece | SYRIZA | 2015- (dominant coalition partner) |
| Iceland | Left-Green Movement (VGF) | 2009-2013 (coalition partner) |
| Ireland | Democratic Left (DL) | 1994-1997 (coalition partner) |
| Italy | The Left – Rainbow Coalition | 1996-1998 (coalition partner) 2006-2008 (coalition partner) |
| Moldova | Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) | 1999-2009 (single-party government) |
| Norway | Socialist Left Party (SV) | 2005-2013 (coalition partner) |
| Portugal | Left Bloc (BE) Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) | 2016- (government toleration) |
| San Marino | United Left (SU) | 2006-2008 (coalition partner) |
| Slovenia | The Left (Levica) | 2018- (government toleration) |
| Sweden | Left Party (V) | 1994-2006 (government toleration) 2014-2018 (government toleration) 2018- (supplementary agreement) |
| Spain | United Left (IU) Podemos | 2004-2008 (government toleration) 2017- (both parties, government toleration) |
| Ukraine | Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU) Socialist Party of Ukraine | 1994-2002 (KPU, coalition partner and SPU, government toleration) 2006-2007 (SPU, coalition partner) 2012-2014 (KPU, government toleration) |

Sources: Olsen et al. (2010: 4) and parties-and-elections.eu

## Table 1.3. Radical left parties with representation in the national legislature, 1990-2017

| Country | | Party | Country | | Party |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Belgium | PVDA/PTB | Worker's Party of Belgium | Italy | PRC[7] | Communist Refoundation Party |
| Croatia | HL | Croatian Labourists - Labour Party | Italy | PdCI[7] | Party of Italian Communists |
| Cyprus | AKEL | Progressive Party of Working People | Latvia | LSP | Socialist Party of Latvia |
| Cyprus | ADIK | Fighting Democratic Movement | Luxembourg | Déi Lénk | The Left |
| Czech Republic | KSČM | Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia | Luxembourg | KPL | Communist Party of Luxembourg |
| Denmark | EL | Unity List - The Red-Greens | Moldova | PCRM | Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova |
| Denmark | SF[1] | Socialist People's Party | Moldova | PSRM | Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova |
| Estonia | EÜVP[2] | Estonian United Left Party | Netherlands | SP | Socialist Party |
| Finland | VAS | Left Alliance | Norway | SV | Socialist Left Party |
| France | PCF[3] | French Communist Party | Norway | Rødt[8] | Red |
| France | FI | Indomitable France | Portugal | PCP[9] | Portuguese Communist Party |
| Germany | Die Linke[4] | The Left | Portugal | BE | Left Bloc |
| Greece | SYRIZA[5] | Coalition of the Radical Left | Russia | KPRF | Communist Party of the Russian Federation |
| Greece | KKE | Communist Party of Greece | San Marino | SSD[10] | Democratic Socialist Left |
| Greece | DIKKI | Democratic Social Movement | Slovakia | KSS | Communist Party of Slovakia |
| Iceland | AB | People's Alliance | Spain | IU[9] | United Left |
| Iceland | VGF | Left-Green Movement | Spain | Podemos[11] | We Can |
| Ireland | DL | Democratic Left | Sweden | V | Left Party |
| Ireland | S-PBP[6] | Solidarity–People Before Profit | Switzerland | PdA | Labour Party of Switzerland |
| Ireland | SP | Socialist Party | Switzerland | Sol | Solidarity |
| Ireland | WUA | Workers and Unemployed Action | Ukraine | KPU | Communist Party of Ukraine |
| | | | Ukraine | SPU | Socialist Party of Ukraine |

Electoral data derived from www.parties-and-elections.eu; previous names refer to the period since 1990
[1] The party transformed into a Green party by the early 2000s
[2] Previously participated in elections as Left Option (1992), Justice (1995), Estonian United People's Party (1999-2003)

[3] Previously participated in elections as Left Front (2012)
[4] Previously participated in elections as Party of Democratic Socialism (1990-2002)
[5] Previously participated in elections as Coalition of the Left and Progress (1989-2000)
[6] Previously participated in elections as People Before Profit (2007-2011), and Anti-Austerity Alliance – People Before Profit (2016)
[7] Previously participated in elections as Rainbow Left (2008) and Civil Revolution (2013)
[8] Previously participated in elections as Red Election Alliance (1993-2005)
[9] Participates in elections as Unitary Democratic Coalition
[10] Previously participated in elections as Sammarinese Communist Refoundation (1993-2001) and United Left (2006-2012)
[11] Previously participated in elections as Plural Left (2011), Popular Unity (2015), and United We Can (2016)
[10] Previously participated in elections as United We Can (2016)

**Table 1.4. Average electoral performances and electoral geographies of relevant Green, radical right and radical left parties in Europe, 1990-2017**

|  | 1990-1999 | | 2000-2009 | | 2010-2017 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Average performance | Average territorial balance | Average performance | Average territorial balance | Average performance | Average territorial balance |
| **Green** | 4.5% | 0.75 | 5.1% | 0.76 | 5.5% | 0.77 |
| **Radical right** | 7.6% | 0.70 | 9.1% | 0.79 | 9.8% | 0.79 |
| **Radical left** | 7.5% | 0.69 | 8.3% | 0.74 | 9.1% | 0.75 |

Electoral data derived from www.parties-and-elections.eu; Data on the territorial balance derived from author's own calculation using data mainly from the national electoral offices of the respective countries and Bochsler's excel spreadsheet for calculating standardised and weighted Party Nationalisation Score (PNS), available at www.bochsler.eu. The table considers all cases of parties that entered their national parliament at least once since 1990. Participation as a minor partner of an electoral coalition of more than two parties has not been included.

The electoral geography of a party refers to the spatial distribution of electoral performance across electoral units in a single election. A useful measurement is the standardised and weighted Party Nationalisation Score (PNS) that reflects 'the territorial homogeneity of party support' (Bochsler, 2010b, p. 2), where 'vote shares do not differ from one province to the next' (Jones and Mainwaring, 2003, p. 140), used widely in the literature on party and party system nationalisation. In other words, PNS measures the extent to which the support for a party is similar between electoral units. Hence, the score ranges between 0, indicating the concentration of electoral support within a single electoral unit i.e. imbalanced electoral geography, and 1, representing the complete equality of electoral performance across electoral units i.e. balanced electoral geography. As the standardised and weighted PNS holds any differences in the number of electoral districts and district magnitude between countries (Bochsler, 2010a, pp. 161–162), it is a suitable measure for cross-national comparison.

Table 1.4 compares the electoral geographies of all Green, radical right and radical left parties in Europe that entered their national parliaments at least once between 1990 and 2017. It shows that in the past three decades all three party families not only improved their average levels of electoral support but also have increasingly balanced electoral geographies. Yet, a closer look at the latter trend reveals noticeable differences. In particular, the distribution of the individual cases of the three party families suggests that whereas Green and radical right parties lean towards a particular territorial pattern of electoral support, European RLPs are much more diverse in their electoral geographies. While almost half of the electoral geographies of Green and radical right parties are, respectively, mid-level or balanced, in the case of European RLPs there is no specific pattern that has a noticeable majority (Table 1.5).

**Table 1.5. Distribution of cases according to party family and electoral geography**

| | Balanced (0.85+) | | Mid-level (0.70-0.85) | | Imbalanced (>0.69) | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N |
| **Green** | 54 | 32.2% | 77 | 45.8% | 37 | 22.0% | 168 |
| **Radical right** | 88 | 49.2% | 50 | 27.9% | 41 | 22.9% | 179 |
| **Radical left** | 87 | 37.6% | 77 | 33.3% | 67 | 29.0% | 231 |

Data on the territorial balance derived from author's own calculation using data mainly from the national electoral offices of the respective countries and Bochsler's excel spreadsheet for calculating standardised and weighted Party Nationalisation Score (PNS), available at www.bochsler.eu. The table considers all cases of parties that entered their national parliament at least once since 1990. Participation as a minor partner of an electoral coalition of more two parties has not been included.

This diversity is puzzling for three main reasons. First, the electoral geography of a party provides an important context for its electoral performance, as the latter is aggregated from the electoral support across electoral units. From that perspective, the diversity of electoral geographies of European RLPs may not only indicate an untapped electoral potential but may also highlight the circumstances under which these parties may punch above their weight electorally. This is particularly important in light of the development of European RLPs since the end of the Cold War. The fall of the Soviet Union and the authoritarian communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s/early 1990s led to a major crisis of faith among these parties and prompted a substantial ideological and organisational change in the majority of them (Bell, 1993; Bozóki and Ishiyama, 2002; March and Mudde, 2005). While these changes ensured their electoral survival and persistence, the diversity of electoral geographies suggests that this occurred through different spatial trajectories, including the broadening of their electoral outreach or the deepening of their support in particular regions of a country. Understanding the sources of this diversity, therefore, sheds light on the different spatial patterns of electoral mobilisation that underpin the electoral performances of European RLPs.

Second, the diversity of electoral geographies of European RLPs seems to go against the contemporary political trends across the continent. The end of the Cold War brought and coincided with major socio-economic changes in the European societies (Therborn, 1995; Immerfall and Therborn, 2010), marked politically by growing voters' de- and re-alignment with political parties (Dalton and Flanagan, 1985; Dalton and Wattenberg, 2002). Furthermore, the relevance

of valence issues in influencing voting behaviour increased at the expense of structural factors (Stokes, 1963; Franklin, Mackie and Valen, 1992; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2007). European RLPs are not exempt from these developments. For example, recent studies of West European radical left supporters (Visser *et al.*, 2014) and voters (Gomez, Morales and Ramiro, 2016) highlighted a growing diversity of their social profiles, signalling that European RLPs have a broad social base. Yet, the diversity of their electoral geographies seems to question this assumption, as it suggests that the diverse socio-economic environments within countries continue to shape differently the electoral potential of these parties across electoral units. Hence, understanding the sources of the electoral geographies of European RLPs reveals the socio-economic circumstances within which voters are inclined to support them electorally.

Third, the diverse territorial distributions of electoral support for European RLPs also question the effects of the significant institutional changes that occurred in Europe in the past three decades. Since the end of the Cold War countries across Europe experienced a significant shift of political power away from national authorities towards sub- and supra-national levels of governance (Hooghe and Marks, 2001, p. xi; Enderlein, Wälti and Zürn, 2010, p. 5). The latter is exemplified by the growing importance of the EU particularly since the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. The former can be observed across the continent through notable examples, such as devolution in the UK (Bogdanor, 2001; Hough and Jeffery, 2006; Mitchell, 2013) or the major administrative reforms of the young democracies in Central and Eastern Europe that introduced regional and local self-governance (Elander, 1997; Campbell and Coulson, 2006). Such shifts of power have had a significant influence on European party systems. The sub- and supra-national levels of governance provided political parties with new political arenas to pursue their programs and build up electoral support, as seen in the examples of European Green and radical right parties from the 1980s and 1990s (Richardson and Rootes, 1995; Kitschelt and McGann, 1996). In this context, the diversity of electoral geographies of European RLPs suggests that these institutional changes have a diverse impact on their electoral prospects across a country. Hence, understanding the sources of their electoral geographies reveals the limits of these institutional changes on party and voter behaviour.

Overall, knowing the sources for the electoral geographies of European RLPs makes two important contributions to the existing literature. First, in terms of the study on European RLPs, a focus on their electoral geographies moves away from the current discussion on the extent to which the ideological and programmatic profiles of these parties supply the existing demand for radical left policies and attitudes (Bell, 1993; Botella and Ramiro, 2003; March, 2011). Particularly, the focus on electoral geography takes a more practical perspective, as it emphasises how parties rely on and use their resources to mobilise electoral support. In so doing, a study of the electoral geographies of European RLPs provides an understanding of how these parties campaign across a territory, how they respond to and make use of the existing socio-economic environment, as well as how the existing environment limits or enables them in their efforts to build up and mobilise electoral support. Such knowledge is particularly informative not only for scholars of political parties but also for the parties themselves, as it provides them with a detailed analysis on their practices and highlights potential areas for improvement.

Second, from a broad comparative perspective, the study on the electoral geographies of political parties addresses the major scholarly debate on whether the structural conditions or the actors' actions shape a particular outcome. By knowing the extent to which social and institutional changes across Europe vis-à-vis the ideological and organisational change among European RLPs shaped their electoral geographies, this thesis contributes to the existing study on the role of the party organisations of anti-political establishment parties for their social and political development (Carter, 2005; Heinisch and Mazzoleni, 2016). Furthermore, the focus on the electoral geography of particular parties is particularly informative for the study on the spatial influences on voting behaviour. While the existing literature on electoral geography focuses, as it will be seen in this chapter, mainly on party systems, a focus on individual parties provides a more comprehensive understanding of the ways actors make use of territory to build up and mobilise support. This is important for the comparative study on political parties, as it recognises the role of place in understanding political dynamics.

This chapter outlines the scholarly rationale of this study, as well as its research methodology. A brief literature review on the study of European RLPs

and on the research on electoral geography, party and party system nationalisation, and territorial politics reveals several research gaps. While existing works on European RLPs recognise the importance of their electoral geographies in understanding, among others, their overall electoral performances, or their increasing government experience, little work has been done on the sources of these electoral geographies. This poses the main research question of this study: which factors best explain the electoral geographies of European radical left parties at national elections since 1990? The answer to this question is also important for the literature on the spatial distribution of electoral performance. While these works highlight potential explanations, they remained rather focused on the party system level, thus offering little insights from a party-level perspective. Furthermore, even when such studies focused on the party level, they based their conclusions on evidence from major political parties, thus leaving smaller ones out.

By addressing these gaps, this thesis serves two important purposes. First, it contributes to the literature on the spatial distribution of electoral performance by testing the existing major competing theories on the emergence of electoral geography in the case of individual, small political parties. Second, it enhances the growing knowledge of European RLPs by looking into the sources of their electoral geographies. In doing so, the insights of this thesis represent a meso-level analysis that can complement the existing works on individual (micro) or national/cross-national (macro) levels (Backes and Moreau, 2008; March, 2011; Visser *et al.*, 2014; Gomez, Morales and Ramiro, 2016; March and Keith, 2016a).

This chapter is structured as follows: the following section discusses the concept of a European radical left party and its place within the broader groups of left-wing, small and anti-political establishment parties. Then it moves onto a literature review which highlights the gaps described above. This theoretical engagement leads to the research question and a discussion on the research methodology employed to find a valid response to it. The chapter concludes by exploring briefly the main findings and implications of this thesis and presenting an overview of the following chapters.

## 2. Radical left parties since 1990

### 2.1. Definition of a radical left party

This section provides a definition of a radical left party by highlighting its distinctive characteristics and placing it in the European political landscape. Before 1990 the family of parties of and to the left of social democracy (March, 2011, p. 1) was known as 'communist', reflecting the dominant party group within this milieu (McInness, 1975; Tannahill, 1978). Yet, by the early 1990s scholars began to increasingly use the term 'radical left', as they noted the growing heterogeneity among these parties (Bell, 1993; Bull and Heywood, 1994). This thesis uses Luke March's definition for RLPs for its conceptual clarity and widespread scholarly acceptance (March and Mudde, 2005; Olsen, Koß and Hough, 2010; Ramiro, 2016). Radical left parties (RLPs) are radical in opposing the prevailing capitalist socio-economic conditions and advocating their fundamental transformation in favour of increased equality of resource redistribution and social inclusion (March, 2011, p. 8). They are left due to their focus on the existing economic inequalities as the basis for the challenges within the contemporary political and economic system, thus opposing its capitalist fundament (March, 2011, p. 9). These parties are also internationalist for their invocation of solidarity actions and mutual support for cross- and pan-continental causes (March, 2011, p. 9).

The heterogeneity of the radical left party family in Europe is an outcome of a process of ideological and organisational transformation. While this process certainly has roots in the period prior to the collapse of the Soviet bloc, as reflected in the rich amount of works on Eurocommunism (Aspaturian, Valenta and Burke, 1980; Boggs and Plotke, 1980; Childs, 1980; Kindersley, 1981; Timmermann, 1987; Waller, 1989; Balampanidis, 2019), the events of 1989 serve as a catalyser for these parties to pursue further, more fundamental change. Existing works describe the process since the late 1980s as a 'mutation' (Lazar, 1988; Waller and Fennema, 1988; March and Mudde, 2005; Backes and Moreau, 2008), defined as 'the emergence of a New Radical Left, employing "new" ideological approaches […] and modern forms of trans-national cooperation' (March and Mudde, 2005, p. 24). Having diverse ideological origins, the mutation essentially represents a re-evaluation of the core left-wing ideology and its

adaptation to specific country conditions (March, 2011, p. 46), taking at least six different forms (March, 2008, p. 5). Most often RLPs provided a de-radicalised redefinition and/or reaffirmation of the existing core ideology and often incorporated new causes, such as environmentalism, anti-racism, or feminism. The particular outcomes of this process will be explored in the following section.

The heterogeneity of European RLPs has considerable implications on their place within the party systems across the continent. Generally, scholars agree that European RLPs are small parties (Abedi, 2004; Adams *et al.*, 2006; Meguid, 2008; Spoon, 2011; Bolleyer, 2013; Grittersová *et al.*, 2016; Blings, 2018). Small parties are those '[…] in terms of ideology (that is, must focus on a limited set of issues) or […] in terms of vote and seat share (that is, not among the major players in a party system)' (Spoon, 2011, p. 5). On the basis of this definition, RLPs are small parties because of their restricted electoral support. While existing studies may consider them as 'niche' for their allegedly restricted ideological and policy scope (Meguid, 2008, p. 4) or non-mainstream positions (Adams *et al.*, 2006, p. 513; Grittersová *et al.*, 2016, p. 277), this thesis takes an alternative perspective. European RLPs rarely focus on single-issue politics, as their views rather represent a radicalised version of widespread public attitudes and values, such as egalitarianism and internationalism (Mudde, 2010; March, 2011, p. 205). In such a context, their emphasis on economic matters provided them with a solid basis to develop a clear, comprehensive and coherent long-term vision for the future social, economic, and political relations within and between countries. From this perspective, while RLPs offer a distinctive policy agenda in comparison to major and/or mainstream parties, they share a similar ideological scope with these parties. Therefore, European RLPs should not be considered as niche, but rather solely as small parties.

Another important implication of the heterogeneity of the European radical left party family is its belonging to the landscape of anti-political establishment parties (APE). Generally, European RLPs fulfil Abedi's widely accepted criteria of APE (2004, p. 12) through their core identity. Their radicalism poses a firm challenge to the existing socio-economic and political conditions; in doing so, RLPs also perceive themselves as challengers to the parties, defending the status quo; they also recognise a fundamental division between political establishment and the people, visible in their discourse

(Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014; Iglesias, 2015; Errejón and Mouffe, 2016). Yet, the relations between European RLPs and populism remain rather complicated. A maximalist understanding of populism defines it as a thin-centred ideology that offers distinctive concepts of 'the people', 'the elite' and the nature of their relationship[1]. From this perspective, European RLPs can indeed be populist, given that parties, such as Podemos and Syriza, among others, implicitly or explicitly define 'the people' in economic terms as 'the plebs' and challenge loosely-defined elites (Kaltwasser, 2014, p. 479; van Kessel, 2015, p. 12).

Yet, populism is not a core element of the ideology of European RLPs, as it merely represents a variety of radical left ideology or discourse (March, 2007; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014; Agustín and Briziarelli, 2017; Katsambekis, 2017; Font, Graziano and Tsakatika, 2019). As March highlights, the main distinction between populist and non-populist RLPs is the extent an RLP remains ideologically coherent (March, 2011, p. 118). Yet, RLPs have the tendency to split over minor ideological disagreements, as the infamous scene from the 1979 comedy, Monty Python's Life of Brian, points out. From this perspective, it seems that while RLPs may be APE, they are not necessarily populist, as they may pay more careful attention to ideological coherence. This is further confirmed if populism is understood in minimalist terms as a discourse (Aslanidis, 2016; Stavrakakis, Andreadis and Katsambekis, 2017), political style (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Moffitt and Tormey, 2014) or strategy (Weyland, 2001; Betz, 2002; Norris and Inglehart, 2018). While indeed RLPs rely to some extent on it to present an understandable political message, it is difficult to distinguish the discourse from its actual demands (March, 2011, pp. 19-20).

## 2.2. A categorisation of radical left parties

The heterogeneity of the European radical left party family poses also a significant challenge in categorising these parties. One approach would be to take Minkenberg's perspective (2003) and treat the European radical left as a

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[1] A widely-accepted definition of populism as an ideology is the one, offered by Cas Mudde: 'populism is an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonte generale (general will) of the people' (Mudde, 2004, p. 543)

collective actor that includes not only parties but also non-party organisations, such as social movements and mass organisations. Císař (2005) provided such categorisation. While such a perspective addresses the rising importance of non-party organisations within the wider European radical left milieu, this thesis focuses solely on political parties. The main reason for this is the fact that radical left non-party organisations rarely participate in elections, which makes it challenging to explore their electoral geographies.

Existing categorisations solely on radical left parties (RLPs), however, do not provide sufficient support to distinguish them clearly. The majority of existing attempts (Gallagher, Laver and Mair, 2005; Escalona and Vieira, 2013) remain rather static, as they lack the robustness in addressing the continuous ideological and organisational changes within the party family. The most comprehensive attempt to address this issue comes from March (March, 2011, 2012) that found wide-spread applicability in the contemporary literature (Olsen, Koß and Hough, 2010; Gomez, Morales and Ramiro, 2016; Ramiro, 2016). He distinguishes between 'conservative communists', 'reform communists', 'democratic socialists', 'populist socialist', and 'social populists' according to their ideological profile. Such a categorisation makes a convincing case for analytical differentiation that recognises the evolving nature of the radical left, as these categories are 'dynamic and overlapping' (March, 2011, p. 19). Yet, while this categorisation distinguishes the parties according to their radicalism, it remains unclear how the other two main ideological components of European RLPs (leftism and internationalism) are reflected by the different categories. Hence, a more suitable and robust perspective would be Mudde's minimal and maximal definition approach (Mudde, 2007). Here a minimum definition contains the bare core of the ideologies of the parties from a party family (Eatwell, 1996) and a maximum one expands the definition in order to delineate relevant cases (Mudde, 2002). Fagerholm (2018) offered such a categorisation for the radical left. His list of 11 attributes, however, is too extensive and contains components that are not necessary present in radical left cases. For example, liberal ethics are hardly present among the more orthodox communist parties of the European radical left. Therefore, there is need for a more fine-tuned distinction of the members of the radical left party family.

This thesis uses Mudde's minimal and maximal definition approach to categorise European RLPs. A minimum definition of all parties that can be considered to and of the left of social democracy considers all parties that emphasise egalitarianism as their core ideological value. This definition, however, allows to include also historical cases, such as the European social democratic parties before their re-evaluation of Marxism shortly after the end of the Second World War (Eley, 2002; Lindemann, 2009; Sassoon, 2010) or the Green parties prior to their de-radicalisation from the early 1990s (van Haute, 2016). In this respect, the maximum definition provided by March and highlighted in the previous section that distinguishes RLPs as those that are left, radical, and internationalist is very helpful. These three ideological components allow a robust categorisation based on scales instead of categories in order to accommodate the potential ideological, programmatic, and policy changes among European RLPs that occurred during and following the mutation process.

Figures 1.1 to 1.3 present the three scales with some examples based on a qualitative assessment of current party programs and verified by the existing secondary literature. These examples include The Left (Linke, Germany), the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP, Portugal), the Socialist Party (SP, the Netherlands), the Socialist Left Party (SV, Norway) – four parties from four different regions of Europe and representative for the broad variety of ideological profiles among European RLPs, as evidenced in their different categorisation in the existing literature (March, 2011, 2012).

### Figure 1.1. Materialist/post-materialist pole

Materialism ⟵————————————⟶ Post-Materialism

PCP     SP     SV     Linke

First, the left-wing ideological component situates European RLPs between two main poles. On the one side is the materialist left pole, where leftism is understood in its original and traditional meaning as an ideology concerned with class struggle and extending the democratic principles beyond politics into the economy, social affairs, etc. (Bobbio, 1996). In close proximity to this pole, one could find those parties that refrained from ideological reform following the collapse of the Soviet bloc, such as the communist parties in

France, Portugal, and Greece; those that focused on reinventing their Marxist roots (e.g. Party of Communist Refoundation, Italy), and those aiming at the return of the post-war consensus of ensuring full employment and expansive welfare state, such as the Socialist Party (the Netherlands) and the Socialist Left Party (Norway). On the other side is the post-materialist left, reflecting the entanglement of the left-wing core ideology with new causes, such as anti-racism, environmentalism, feminism, direct democracy, etc. (Hudson, 2000; March and Mudde, 2005; Escalona and Vieira, 2013; Gomez, Morales and Ramiro, 2016). Near this pole are the majority of the Scandinavian Green-Left parties, as well as the Left (Germany) or Podemos (Spain) that extend the understanding of class struggle towards empowering suppressed groups, defined by their race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, gender, etc.

### Figure 1.2. Reformist/transformative pole

**Reform** ←——————————————————————→ **Transformation**

Linke       SP       SV       PCP

Second, the radicalism of the European radical left can range between two main forms. On the one side, there are parties that follow a rather reformist agenda, aimed mainly at the termination of the contemporary policies of austerity, dominant across Europe, while refraining from open demands for overthrowing the capitalist system. Parties, close to this pole, such as the Socialist Party (the Netherlands) and the Left (Germany) can be more often found in national parliaments across the continent, thus, representing one of the most dynamic parts of the radical left (March, 2012, p. 329). Towards the other end of this scale, one can find an increasing number of parties with transformative aims, such as the Socialist Left Party (Norway) or the Portuguese Communist Party. Rather than temporarily accepting capitalism, these parties openly demand its overthrow. While they are a rarity in parliaments across Europe[2], their transformative perspective is an important reminder for the long-term goals of the radical left.

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[2] Notable exceptions are the communist parties in Greece, Portugal, Spain, the Czech Republic and until 2014 in Ukraine.

## Figure 1.3. Universalist/particularist pole

**Universalism** ←————————————————→ **Particularism**

Linke    SV    SP    PCP

Third, the internationalism of the radical left also stretches between two poles. From this perspective, RLPs may lean towards a universalist perspective, where the existing socio-economic challenges are perceived as universal, global issues, relevant across national contexts, and, thus, requiring cross-national solutions. Near this pole, one can find parties, such as the Left (Germany) and the Socialist Left Party (Norway) that emphasise the virtues of international cooperation, while also analysing the implications of these universal issues on their respective national contexts. In close proximity to the other pole are parties with particularist positions, such as the communist parties in France, Portugal or Greece or the Socialist Party (the Netherlands) that rather concentrate on the specificities of national capitalism with a limited reference to the broader, international context. More importantly, these parties prioritise national solutions towards challenging the capitalist conditions, while welcoming, but not necessarily seeking, international support.

As it can be drawn from Figures 1.1 to 1.3, the three poles provide scholars with an improved grasp on the diversity of the European radical left party family than existing categorisations. This can be seen in a brief comparison between the Socialist Left Party (SV) in Norway and the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP). According to March, these parties belong to two rather opposing sides within the European radical left: whereas the PCP is a case of an orthodox communist party, the SV is representative for a democratic socialist one (March, 2011, p. 17). This categorisation suggests that while these parties are both on the radical left, there is a limited ideological commonality between them. The scales in the above-presented discussion not only highlighted the fundamental ideological differences between the two parties but also reveal their ideological commonalities. Whereas the PCP and SV differ in their interpretation of leftism and internationalism, they share a common transformative agenda aimed at overcoming the capitalist systems of their respective countries (PCP, 2012; SV, 2017). Such a robust categorisation improves the possibilities for comparing radical left cases. In particular, this will be of benefit to future studies that

explore the transnational cooperation of European RLPs or the patterns of cooperation between RLPs and non-party organisations at a national level.

## 3. Literature review

### 3.1. The electoral geographies of European radical left parties

The electoral geographies of European RLPs remains an important perspective to understand the outcomes of the mutation process. This is particularly evident from the literature on these parties. The comparative study of European RLPs gained growing scholarly interest, particularly since the 2000s. Prior to that, there was a very limited amount of comparative research on them, as the overwhelming majority of it offered rather detailed, highly informative case studies (Urban, 1986; Bell and Criddle, 1994; Kertzer, 1998; Payne, 2004; Raymond, 2005). The few cross-national works had a rather limited geographical scope, focusing often their analyses on a single region (e.g. Oberndörfer, 1978; Rühle and Veen, 1979). Despite these limitations, such works recognised the important role of geography in understanding European RLPs. Historical accounts of the rise of communism in Europe highlighted the central role of the party engagement in the workplace and on the street (Weitz, 1997). This indicates implicitly that the party presence and activity across a territory explains the spread of communism across the continent.

A similar argument comes from a number of ethnographic studies of the role of the local communist party organisation. They recognised that the party organisation in a given place facilitates the development of a distinctive local community and political culture that maintains a geographically restricted, yet substantial support for communism and communist parties (e.g. Guiat, 2003). Historic legacies of such developments were seen as an important explanation for the electoral and organisational resilience of communist parties during the 1970s and 1980s. Scholars noted that despite the significant decline of their electoral performance, communist parties still enjoyed significant support in industrialised places (Caramani, 2004, p. 160). More importantly, this was not without noticeable changes in the spatial distribution of their electoral performance. For example, Ranger (1986) noted the gradual concentration of support for these parties in urban areas in the context of the ideological and

organisational Eurocommunist reform. Overall, this suggests that to understand the European RLPs, there is a need to explore the places where they are organisationally present.

The study of their government experiences before 1990, however, seemed to question the importance of organisational presence. Before the collapse of the Soviet bloc, there were numerous works on the participation of communist parties in government. Beyond studies of the authoritarian communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe, where those parties have central roles due to the fusion of party and state institutions, such studies also explored communist governance at regional and local levels in Western Europe. Similarly to the works, discussed above, this literature focused mainly either on the local and regional experiences in a single country (Schain, 1985; Szajkowski, 1985), if not in individual places, predominantly in Southern Europe (Lacorne, 1975; Stern, 1975; Travis, 1985; Reid, 1993; Bellanger and Mischi, 2013; Pinto, 2013). These works generally recognised that the involvement in regional and local politics serves the ideological aims of the national party organisations of communist parties due to the organisational principle of democratic centralism (Lange, 1975; Milch, 1975). Yet, an important finding was also that despite the tight organisational control, there were some policy differences between communist local and regional governments (e.g. Schain, 1985, chap. 3). This suggests that geography, specifically the particularities of a place, provide an important context to understand the governmental experiences of communist parties.

The literature on the government experiences of communist parties before 1990 also revealed that the participation in local and regional government does not explain well the electoral performance of these parties in national elections. The main reason for this is that communist parties face significant difficulties in mobilising the same level of electoral support in electoral units on national elections as they do in local elections (Schain, 1985, pp. 47–50; Bell and Szajkowski, 1986). This insight reveals the particular importance of the electoral geographies of European RLPs at national elections. Specifically, it suggests that beyond the importance of their organisational presence and place-based particularities, there are other factors that influence the territorial distribution of the electoral performance of these parties. As revealed in later paragraphs, such factors come mainly from the political and

party system of a country. Given the importance of geography in understanding European RLPs, the literature on them before 1990 highlighted the need to explore the sources of their electoral geographies at national elections. That way it will be possible to understand how these parties build up and mobilise their support and the implications of their involvement in regional and local politics in the rather unfavourable Cold War circumstances.

The literature on European RLPs since 1990 provides limited insights on the sources of their electoral geographies, although it still recognises the importance of geography for studying these parties. Works, reflecting on the outcomes of the mutation process, expanded the scholarly scope on the subject. While the research on the electoral performance of European RLPs (March, 2011; March and Keith, 2016a; Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis, 2019), or of the common lessons from their government experiences (Olsen, Koß and Hough, 2010; Bale and Dunphy, 2011) remained major topics, contemporary studies increasingly focus on conceptualising the ideological and organisational diversity of European RLPs (March and Mudde, 2005; Escalona and Vieira, 2013; Fagerholm, 2018), explored their policy positions in more detail (Dunphy, 2004), and move forward the study of their relations with non-party organisations (Wennerhag, Fröhlich and Piotrowski, 2016). This constitutes a new wave of research on European RLPs which uses the diversity of the radical left party family as a central conceptual perspective. It stands in noticeable contrast to the pre-1990 studies that focused exclusively on communist parties as homogeneous and somewhat foreign entities of the European democratic systems. Despite this change of perspective studies on European RLPs continued to highlight the importance of geography in understanding those parties, even if this is not explicitly stated. Particularly relevant in highlighting the lasting relevance of geography are the literatures on the electoral performance of European RLPs and on their government experiences since 1990.

Current studies of the electoral performance of European RLPs went through several phases in exploring the topic since the mutation. During the 1990s the literature saw the electoral results of RLPs as a surprise, given their survival in rather unfavourable circumstances of a firmly-established liberal democratic and capitalist order (Anderson and Camiller, 1994; Bozóki and Ishiyama, 2002; Grzymala-Busse, 2002b). By the turn of the century, this

perspective changed, as an increasing amount of works perceived the rising activity of the radical left subculture as a significant electoral, policy, and organisational potential of RLPs to improve its results (Hudson, 2000; Botella and Ramiro, 2003; Brie and Hildebrandt, 2005). Finally, more recent works, especially those since the Great Recession, viewed the electoral performance of European RLPs rather as an electoral stagnation, stemming from the general failure of their ideological, programmatic, and policy choices (March and Keith, 2016a), or due to their mixed government record (Olsen, Hough and Koß, 2010). These changing perspectives on the electoral performance of the European radical left, however, have not diminished the relevance of geography in understanding these parties.

Studies exploring their electoral performance as a case of electoral survival or as having strong upward potential revealed that the electoral geographies of European RLPs provide an important context for understanding these electoral fortunes. For example, the electoral resilience of European RLPs throughout the 1990s is a product of the lasting support coming from their electoral strongholds, among others. This was particularly illuminative for those parties that refrained from altering their Marxist-Leninist ideology and the organisational principle of democratic centralism. For example, studies of the high levels of electoral support for the communist parties from the countries of the former Soviet Union highlighted the role of their historic 'red belts'. Specifically, scholars noted the overwhelming dominance of the communists in areas characterised by significant industrialisation (Kolosov and Turovskiy, 1996; Grishin, 2009) and/or cultural distinction, as seen particularly in the majority Russian-speaking areas in Eastern Ukraine, for example (Wilson, 1997, 2002). In doing so, such studies revealed that the electoral geographies of European RLPs represent important contextual factors, providing a better understanding of the electoral performances of these parties.

Such a contextual role of the electoral geographies of European RLPs is evident even when scholars are rather less optimistic about their electoral prospects. By the late 1990s, the so-called 'vacuum thesis' became an important contextual perspective. It emphasised the ideological rightwards shift of centre-left and Green parties that provided the European RLPs with an open ideological and electoral space to expand their social appeal (Hudson, 2000, 2012). While

the vacuum thesis became pivotal to stress the strong electoral potential of European RLPs, the realities suggested that these parties were facing an uphill battle. Their electoral geographies were a key contextual factor in this, as studies highlighted that the core support of European RLPs remains situated in 'historically-doomed parts' (Bell, 1993, p. 8) i.e. constituencies, subjected to significant downsizing economic and industrial reforms, and experiencing a major erosion of class solidarity. In this respect, works on the radical right particularly revealed the electoral vulnerability of European RLPs. The main insight was that working-class voters moved away from voting for communist and centre-left parties towards supporting radical right ones (Kitschelt and McGann, 1996; Kriesi *et al.*, 2006, p. 292; Rydgren, 2007, p. 253). An exemplary case of this change in voting behaviour was 'gauche-lepenisme' in France. Whereas studies of the voter profile of Front National saw an increasing contribution of working-class, former communist supporters for its electoral rise (Perrineau, 1995; Evans, 2000; Mayer, 2002), it was the concentration of that support in former communist strongholds that provided further empirical evidence for it (Knapp, 1998). In doing so, such studies reveal that the electoral geographies of European RLPs provide context not only for their electoral and organisational resilience, but also for their weakness.

More contemporary studies on European RLPs pay very limited attention to their electoral geographies. The main argument in this respect is that the geographical perspective lost its contextual relevance for the electoral fortunes of these parties. Yet, the electoral geographies still matter in order to understand these parties, as indicated implicitly from more recent studies. For example, Ramiro in his study of the profile of West European radical left voters found that the 'wide' RLP electorate, meaning peripheral, swing voters, tend to live in urban areas (Ramiro, 2016, p. 18). Similarly, Gomez, Morales and Ramiro (2016, p. 366) reveal that both, traditional and left-libertarian RLP voters are more predominantly urban. Even more illuminating is the recent literature on government participation of European RLPs. While major studies included mainly cases of participation in the national government, they nevertheless also used side by side examples of governmental involvement at regional and local levels (Hough and Verge, 2009; Daiber, 2010; Olsen, Koß and Hough, 2010). While such a combination of national and regional experiences was a methodological

solution for the limited number of cases of radical left participation in national government until very recently, it highlights implicitly the importance of geography for understanding the European radical left party family. Particularly, it suggests that its government experiences remain geographically restricted to specific places.

Overall, the discussion revealed that the electoral geographies of European RLPs provide a relevant perspective to understand the party family in general and their electoral and governmental experiences in particular. These geographies at national elections have a particularly important role in this respect. On the one hand, the literature on European RLPs before 1990 emphasised the importance of their party organisations and the place-based particularities for their mobilisation potential. On the other hand, as works on the government experiences of communist parties before 1990 revealed, their electoral geographies on national elections are a product of other influences as well, given the difficulties for these parties to replicate their electoral successes on national elections. In doing so, these studies highlighted the need to understand the sources of the electoral geographies of European RLPs at national elections. This need has barely been reflected in the literature on these parties since 1990. Yet, contemporary studies still indicated the continuous importance of their electoral geographies. The literature on their electoral performance since 1990 states this explicitly when exploring the particular context for their electoral survival and weakness, whereas studies of their government experiences indicate this rather implicitly. The main research gap in this context is the absence of comparative research of the electoral geographies of European RLPs at national elections in their own right. This is particularly important for the period since 1990 given the significant impact of the mutation process. In circumstances of fundamental ideological and organisational change among these parties, there is need to explore the sources of their electoral geographies, as they may differ from the ones highlighted by the literature on European RLPs before 1990.

## 3.2. The literatures on the spatial distribution of electoral performance

Comparative research of the electoral geographies of European RLPs at national elections is important also for the general study of the spatial

distribution of electoral performance. Particularly, the literatures on electoral geography, on party and party system nationalisation, and on territorial politics provide few insights regarding individual parties or party families. Generally, since the second half of the 20th century, the geographical perspective remains rather marginal in political science, given the increased focus on compositional approaches of studying voting behaviour, such as sociological or responsive voter models (Johnston and Pattie, 2006, p. 40). In this context research on electoral geographies has a rather complementary role, as it provides a contextual explanation for the subject of study (Johnston and Pattie, 2006, p. 40). A contextual explanation is often crucial for understanding a particular phenomenon. For example, whereas the link between unemployment and voting for the Nazi Party during the period of the Weimar Republic could not be supported at the individual level (Falter, 1991), a study of its electoral geography revealed that its support is significantly correlated with areas of higher levels of unemployment (O'Loughlin, Flint and Anselin, 1994; Welzel and Inglehart, 2007). In doing so, this contextual explanation suggested that it is not the person, but rather the surrounding socio-economic circumstances that have contributed to their electoral performance.

The literature on electoral geography is particularly relevant for providing such contextual explanations. In his pivotal theoretical study, Place and Politics, Agnew (1987) makes the compelling argument that places are not passive arenas of electoral competition, but rather an active factor that shapes the electoral performance of political parties. Particularly, he argues that places filter the influences of international and nationwide socio-economic and political developments through their local particularities, resulting into distinctive place-based conditions that vary across a territory (Agnew, 1987, 2002). It is this variety that explains the territorial variation of electoral support for a party and the different configurations of the national party system across a territory. From a broader perspective, this variety of place-based conditions is key to understanding the experiences of political parties at national elections (van Hamme, Vandermotten and Lockhart, 2018; Agnew and Shin, 2019) or the particularities of national party systems (Agnew, 1987, 2002; de Voogd, 2011).

Existing studies on electoral geography, however, contain two major gaps. First, they focused almost exclusively on party systems with very few exceptions

that explore party families or individual parties (Husbands, 1983; Laer, 1984; Vandermotten and Vandeburie, 2011; Pink, 2012; de Voogd, 2014; Vandermotten and Lockhart, 2015). Such a focus omits the isolated effects of the variety of place-based conditions on individual parties. Existing studies of Green and radical right parties reveal the importance of understanding these effects. For example, their electoral rise can be attributed to the voter's urban character for the former (Dolezal, 2010), and the combination of private ownership and economic inequality impacting support for the latter (Bowyer, 2008). Therefore, there is a need to explore the extent place-based conditions influence the electoral geography of individual parties. Second, the focus solely on the variety of place-based conditions across a territory offers a rather restricted perspective to understand the electoral geography of a party at national elections. Given the struggles of European RLPs to mobilise similar levels of support in electoral units at national elections compared to local ones, there is a need to explore other factors beyond the diversity of place-based conditions.

The literature on party and party system nationalisation has gaps similar to the one on electoral geography. Focused on the institutional influences on the territorial distribution of electoral performance, this strand of research provided an understanding of the effects of the shifts of power from national towards sub- and supra-national institutions. A broad consensus in that literature was that these changes in authority foster a distinctive party system that varies between national, regional, and local levels (Jones and Mainwaring, 2003; Caramani, 2004; Harbers, 2010; Lago-Peñas and Lago-Peñas, 2011; Rodden and Wibbels, 2011; Tiemann, 2012). In this context, the institutional framework of a country provides parties with new grounds to reach out to potential voters across a country. The main vehicle to do so is participation in regional and local politics. For example, in their study on federalism, Chhibber and Kollman (2004) argue that the success of this participation, represented by a government record or policy input at regional and/or local levels, shapes the extent the institutional framework of a country influences the party system. In doing so, the literature on party and party system nationalisation reveals that instead of the variety of place-based conditions, institutional factors influence the electoral geography of a party. Yet, as in the case of the literature on electoral geography, the studies on party and party system nationalisation remain mainly focused on the party

system dimension and pay little attention to the party level. Such a focus does not account for the recent progress in that literature, indicating the potential importance of party size in order to understand the effects of institutional factors (Morgenstern, Polga-Hecimovich and Siavelis, 2014). Furthermore, the literature on party and party system nationalisation remains rather restrictive in its perspective by not including any factors of the socio-economic conditions across a country that may further account for the particular electoral geography of a party at national elections.

In contrast to the above-discussed literatures in this section, works on territorial politics pay noticeably more attention to individual parties and party families. Using the institutional shift of power to the sub- and supra-national levels across Europe, these studies emphasise the role of agency for the territorial distribution of electoral performance. In particular, research on territorial politics expanded the insights from the party and party system nationalisation literature by highlighting the rising detachment of elections at sub- and supra-national levels from national politics (Swenden and Maddens, 2009a; Dandoy and Schakel, 2013). This suggests that sub- and supra-national elections become an increasingly independent political and electoral arena for parties and voters, resistant and separated from the influences of national politics. An important explanation for this development is the organisational adaptation of political parties to these institutional changes. According to Detterbeck in his recent study of multi-level party politics (Detterbeck, 2012), parties not only tend to adapt their organisational structures according to the administrative division of a country but also often shift internal power accordingly. This suggests that the electoral geography of a party may be a product of the organisational abilities of a party to find their place in local communities across a country. While the literature on territorial politics pays more attention to the party level in order to support its theoretical argument, it also lacks a broader empirical scope. Such works relied mainly on the insights from cases of major political parties, while omitting the experiences of smaller ones, including European RLPs. This seems rather odd, given that small parties are an integral part of any European party system (Müller-Rommel and Pridham, 1991; Schulze, 2004) and receive increasing academic attention in recent years (Meguid, 2008; Spoon, 2009; Bolleyer, 2013). Hence, the study of the effects of

small parties' organisational adaptation to the institutional changes across Europe on their electoral geographies represents a noticeable gap in the literature of territorial politics.

### 4. Research question and hypotheses

In response to the gaps in the literatures on European RLPs, electoral geography, party and party system nationalisation, and territorial politics identified above, the main research question of this thesis is the following:

Which factors best explain the electoral geographies of European radical left parties at national elections since 1990?

The open-ended formulation of this question enables the thesis to test a number of alternative explanations rather than focusing on a single hypothesis. The question uses the term 'electoral geography' rather than the more accurate 'territorial pattern of the balance of electoral performance across electoral units' not only for the sake of simplicity but also to highlight the need to separate the study of the electoral geography from the one on electoral performance. While there is some theoretical overlap between these two strands of literature, their objects of study are different. Whereas the study on electoral performance focuses on the overall level of electoral support, the research on electoral geography concerns the territorial balance of the electoral results across electoral units. In other words, if the study of the electoral performance of a party explores the general question of why party X achieves result M, the research on electoral geography is concerned with the question why result M for party X is underpinned by a similar level of support across electoral units, whereas a similar result M for party Y stems from very different levels of electoral support across electoral units. This thesis focuses exclusively on the latter i.e. the territorial distribution of electoral performance rather than the overall level of electoral performance.

This research starts from the premise that the electoral performance of a party is not necessarily related to its electoral geography. It involves a comparison among three cases of RLPs that achieve similar levels of electoral performance but have different electoral geographies. The three different types

of electoral geography emerge from the analysis of the standardised and weighted Party Nationalisation Score (PNS) of all European RLPs that entered their national parliament at least once between 1990 and 2017 (Table 1.6). Such a measurement focuses exclusively on the so-called 'static nationalisation' (Morgenstern, Swindle and Castagnola, 2009)[3] that maps the territorial distribution of electoral support at a given time. The main electoral unit used for calculating these scores is the electoral constituency that each national MP represents. Despite the fact that often electoral constituencies may not reflect the historical, cultural or administrative divisions of a country, they nevertheless are the decisive territorial scale where the link between territorial and functional representation (Caramani, 2004, p. 31) is best expressed. The assessment on the standardised and weighted PNS identifies patterns ranging between balanced and imbalanced, highlighting, respectively, minimal and maximal differences in electoral performance across electoral units (Table 1.6). A more detailed justification for the choice of this dependent variable is offered in the following chapter.

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[3] The alternative approach would be to use 'dynamic nationalisation' (Morgenstern, Swindle and Castagnola, 2009) focusing on the changes of sub-national vote share from one election to other. Outlined by Stokes (1967) and Brady (1985), this perspective implies that the national-level swing should be replicated on sub-national level as well. A deviation from this pattern implies a significant local impact on the support levels for a party. This thesis does not use this perspective, as the data on these swings regarding the radical left rather followed the overall, national-level trend of either electoral increase or decrease. While this may question the territorial character of electoral support for European RLPs, it does not deny the presence of a rich diversity of electoral geographies, which is the main research context of this study.

## Table 1.6. The electoral geographies of relevant European radical left parties, 1990-2017

| Balanced electoral geographies (0.85+) | Mid-level electoral geographies (0.85-0.70) | Imbalanced electoral geographies (>0.69) |
|---|---|---|
| AKEL (Cyprus, 1991-2016)<br>KSČM (the Czech Republic, 1990-2017)<br>PCF (France, 1997; 2012)<br>FI (France, 2016)<br>DIKKI (Greece, 1996-2004)<br>SYRIZA (Greece, 2009-2015)<br>KKE (Greece, 2012-2015)<br>AB (Iceland, 1995)<br>VGF (Iceland, 2009)<br>PRC (Italy, 1992-2013)<br>PdCI (Italy, 2001-2006)<br>PRCM (Moldova, 2005-2010)<br>SP (the Netherlands, 1998-2017)<br>SV (Norway, 1993-2017)<br>BE (Portugal, 2009-2015)<br>KPRF (Russia, 1993-2016)<br>SSD (San Marino, 1998-2016)<br>IU (Spain, 2011)<br>Podemos (Spain, 2015)<br>Unidos Podemos (Spain, 2016)<br>V (Sweden, 1994-2014) | PVDA/PTB (Belgium, 1991-1999; 2010-2014)<br>HL (Croatia, 2011)<br>EL (Denmark, 1994-2005; 2011-2015)<br>EÜVP (Estonia, 1995; 2007)<br>VAS (Finland, 1991-2015)<br>PCF (France, 1993; 2002-2007; 2017)<br>Die Linke (Germany, 2017)<br>SYRIZA (Greece, 1990-2007)<br>KKE (Greece, 1993-2009)<br>AB (Iceland, 1991)<br>VGF (Iceland, 2003-2007; 2013-2017)<br>PRC (Italy, 1994)<br>Déi Lénk (Luxembourg, 2004-2013)<br>PCRM (Moldova, 1998-2001; 2014)<br>SP (the Netherlands, 1994)<br>SV (Norway, 2013)<br>Rødt (Norway, 2017)<br>BE (Portugal, 2002-2005)<br>PCP (Portugal, 2015)<br>KSS (Slovakia, 1994-1998; 2010-2016)<br>IU (Spain, 1993-2008; 2015)<br>V (Sweden, 1991)<br>KPU (Ukraine, 1998-2012)<br>SPU (Ukraine, 2006-2012) | PVDA/PTB (Belgium, 2003-2007)<br>HL (Croatia, 2016)<br>ADIK (Cyprus, 2001)<br>EL (Denmark, 1990; 2007)<br>EÜVP (Estonia, 1999-2003; 2015)<br>Die Linke (Germany, 1990-2013)<br>VGF (Iceland, 1999)<br>DL (Ireland, 1993-1997)<br>SP (Ireland, 1997-2011)<br>S-PBP (Ireland, 2007-2016)<br>WUAG (Ireland, 2011)<br>LSP (Latvia, 1993-1995)<br>KPL (Luxembour; 1994-2013)<br>Rød (Norway, 1993-2013)<br>BE (Portugal, 1999)<br>PCP (Portugal, 1991-2011)<br>Pda (Switzerland, 1991-2015)<br>Sol (Switzerland, 1995-2015)<br>KPU (Ukraine, 1994; 2014)<br>SPU (Ukraine, 1994-2002) |

Data on the territorial balance derived from author's own calculation using data mainly from the national electoral offices of the respective countries and Bochsler's excel spreadsheet for calculating standardised and weighted Party Nationalisation Score (PNS), available at www.bochsler.eu. A detailed table on the individual cases is available in the appendix.

The main theoretical insights from the literatures on electoral geography, on party and party system nationalisation, and on territorial politics allow the formulation of three alternative explanations for the electoral geographies of European RLPs. As the following chapter will present in more detail, the territorial distribution of electoral performance may be a product of either the differences in the social contexts between electoral units, understood as the differences in their socio-economic and socio-cultural environments (H1), the effects of the political structures, represented by the political institutions and party system competition of a country (H2), or due to the organisational capabilities (i.e. the organisational resources and opportunities) of these parties to build-up and mobilise support across a country (H3). A more detailed review of the literatures on electoral geography, on party and party system nationalisation, and on territorial politics in the following chapter presents specific factors that may account for the potential impact of each of these three alternative explanations.

## 5. Research strategy and methodology

In order to find an answer to the research question and to test the briefly presented hypotheses, this thesis requires an appropriate research strategy, design and methodology. Starting from the research strategy, one of the most fundamental issues is the general approach in examining the question. Current studies on European RLPs, especially since 1990, rely on the theoretical insights from the plethora of works on radical right, Green, or social democratic parties (Hough, Koß and Olsen, 2007; March, 2011; March and Rommerskirchen, 2015). While conceptually such an approach tones down the distinctiveness of European RLPs vis-à-vis these parties, methodologically it is helpful. Given that the RLPs, radical right and Green parties make similar electoral, organisational, and governmental experiences, the transfer of the insights and methods is possible (March and Rommerskirchen, 2015, p. 42). In the context of the focus on the electoral geography, using methodological approaches related to other party families is more than relevant for two main reasons. First, as highlighted, there is a limited number of studies that touched upon the electoral geographies of single party families. From that perspective, the study of the electoral geographies of European RLPs lacks a sufficient and independent theoretical and

methodological basis. This requires the use of the insights of the existing literature. Second, the focus on three different strands of the literature on the spatial distribution of electoral performance as a basis for the alternative explanations of this thesis rather eliminates any conceptual concerns related to the ideological differences of these party families. Given their shared small-party status at national level, this thesis can apply these insights and approaches in the research strategy, design, and methodology.

## 5.1. Research strategy

Previous research of the electoral geographies of political parties remains predominantly quantitative and explores a low number of variables and a high number of test cases (Kestilä and Söderlund, 2007b, 2007a; Rydgren and Ruth, 2013), facilitated by a geographic scaling down, where the unit of analysis remains constant while situated in different circumstances (Snyder, 2001). As highlighted in a previous section, however, the different strands of literature on the spatial distribution of electoral performance fail to incorporate their insights into a single theoretical framework. More importantly, such quantitative studies aimed at answering the general question of 'how much' a given variable contributes to the electoral performance of a party rather than exploring 'whether' that variable influences electoral support. Given that the research question of this thesis is more relevant for the latter perspective, an appropriate research design is the qualitative one. That way this thesis will be able to rather test the existing insights from the literatures within a single theoretical framework.

A qualitative research strategy, however, contains a significant disadvantage. The rather recent rise in academic interest in European RLPs has not yet provided overarching theories explaining their electoral, organisational, and governmental experiences that cut across specific contexts. These provide a solid basis for the study on European radical right parties, for example, as seen in the research of the impact of immigration and economic anxiety (Husbands, 1983), or authoritarian personality traits (Lubbers, Gijsberts and Scheepers, 2002) to name a few. While different elements of such theories begin to crystallise for European RLPs (De Vries and Edwards, 2009; March, 2011; Ramiro, 2016), this thesis rather focuses on general theories of the territorial distribution

of electoral support for political parties. That way the qualitative tests of the three alternative explanations highlight the conceptual particularities of European RLPs and flag potential methodological dead-ends for future works.

## 5.2. Research design

Previous qualitative studies of the electoral geographies of political parties relied predominantly on two main research designs. First, scholars that explored the spatial distribution of electoral performance from a multi-dimensional perspective, which links to the national (macro) and individual (micro) levels, relied on research designs that are generally uncommon for political science. For example, Holmes (2000) employed multi-sited ethnography in his research of the urban support for RRPs. Such research remains rather impressionistic, relying predominantly on thick descriptions of observations and offers little insights that can address the qualitative criteria of credibility, transferability, and confirmability in political science (Ryan and Bernard, 2000). Particularly, it would be challenging to make more general assumptions on the factors that shape the electoral geographies of European RLPs based on the experiences of a few regional and/or local party organisations. Coupled with the significantly time-intensive nature of this research design, the ethnographic approach remains rather unsuitable for this thesis.

Second, a more conventional qualitative approach is the comparative case study design. As such a design represents an 'an intensive study of [...] a small number of units (the cases), for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units (a population of cases)' (Gerring, 2007, p. 37), its fulfilment of the research criteria indicated above depends to a large extent on the transparent justification of the research choices. In this respect, the case selection is particularly important. This thesis chooses to study three cases that reflect the diversity of electoral geographies of European RLPs. In particular, it focuses on representative cases for the two extremes (balanced and imbalanced electoral geography) and one case of a mid-level territorial balance of electoral support. This follows the principles of a diverse case study design that embraces the complete range of variation (Gerring, 2007, p. 89) and, thus, allows credible transferability of the established results (Gerring, 2007, p. 100).

## 5.3.   Case selection and timeframe

This study focuses on the cases of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM, the Czech Republic), the Left (Die Linke, Germany), and the Socialist Party (SP, the Netherlands) based on the method of difference. Such an approach looks into cases that resemble each other in its defining characteristics, but vary in their final outcomes (Johnson, Reynolds and Mycoff, 2016, p. 200). In such circumstances, the explanation for the variation of outcomes stems from factors that differ within similar circumstances (Pennings, Keman and Kleinnijenhuis, 2006, p. 37). Such an approach is suitable for researching the sources of the electoral geographies of European RLPs for two main reasons. First, it recognises the diversity of territorial patterns that characterises the electoral geographies of these parties, as highlighted in the introduction of this chapter. By choosing broadly similar cases that differ in their patterns of territorial distribution of electoral support, this study can establish with reasonable confidence these factors that contributed to this diversity. Second, this method allows for more generalisable conclusions. By choosing cases that are broadly similar in their context, but differ in their final outcome, this approach allows highlighting those factors from the social contexts of the electoral units, the political structures of a country, and organisational capabilities of the parties that influence the electoral geographies of European RLPs regardless of the particular national context. The main challenge in this respect is to choose such cases that are representative of the broad experiences of the European RLPs. In this respect, the three above-mentioned cases are particularly suitable for three main reasons. A more detailed overview of the background of the three parties is presented in Chapter 3.

First, the three cases are representative of the diversity of electoral geographies of European RLPs (Table 1.6). While Die Linke consistently achieved a parliamentary representation through imbalanced electoral geographies, KSČM did the same aided by a significantly balanced territorial distribution of electoral support. In between these two cases stands the SP that achieved its initial entry to the Dutch parliament through a mid-level pattern, while more recent years saw it maintain a generally balanced electoral geography. This variation of electoral geographies, however, occurs in broadly similar circumstances, as seen in the following two points.

Second, all three parties are the major RLPs in their national party systems. They entered their respective parliaments in the early 1990s and have maintained relatively similar levels of electoral performance since then. Holding the level of electoral performance constant allows this study to highlight the relevance of the three alternative explanations solely for their electoral geographies. In this respect, one may object that while the three parties may be in a similar place, given their similar levels of electoral results, they differ ideologically in the context of the broad ideological and organisational heterogeneity of the RLP family in Europe. For example, Die Linke is a party that maintained a post-materialist and universalist profile through the years, while shifting from reformist towards transformative stances since the merger of its founding organisations, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and the Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG), in 2007. In contrast, KSČM remained a materialist RLP despite its slight move towards reformism and universalism since the early 2000s. Midst these two cases is the SP that since the early 1990s replaced its transformative aims with reformist ones, while recent years saw it move incrementally from a materialist and particularist towards post-materialist and universalist positions. While these are indeed significant ideological differences, they rather reflect the ideological profiles that brought those parties to their similar positions in their respective countries. From that perspective, for example, a communist profile may have not been a successful one for the German context, as seen in the marginality of the German Communist Party (Hirscher and Pfahl-Traughber, 2008). This comes to show that the heterogeneity of ideological profiles of the three parties underpins their common positions in their national party systems.

Third, the three parties shared a relatively similar trajectory of adaptation to the post-Cold War environment. In this respect, Die Linke and KSČM began as delegitimised successors of the parties that governed authoritarian states, whereas the SP was a fringe political party in a democratic system in the early 1990s. What these three parties share in common is that all three of them faced the significant challenge of electoral and organisational survival in an environment of a major voters' mistrust and broad social rejection of left-wing ideals. Certainly, it may be objected that these similar circumstances should acknowledge the existing historical, social, and political

differences between Eastern and Western Europe. In such a context, comparing Die Linke and SP with KSČM may not seem like a proper choice. While these differences indeed matter, they become increasingly irrelevant. As recent studies reveal a growing homogenisation of the political circumstances across Europe (Marks *et al.*, 2006; Caramani, 2015), a comparison between cases of RLPs from Western and Eastern Europe is suitable in order to acknowledge this homogenisation rather than emphasising any differences that seem to lose their significance. Therefore, the context of the analysis of the electoral geographies of European RLPs should rather focus the similar circumstances they face despite these broad contextual differences that this thesis acknowledges.

The timeframe of this study is between 1990 and 2017. Engaging with the electoral geographies of the three cases in the past three decades allows the analysis of a rich amount of data, as these parties participated in a total of 25 elections in that period. That way this research can trace the development of these parties since they passed the threshold of representation (Pedersen, 1982) i.e. since emerging as relevant political parties in the party systems of their respective countries. In doing so, the analysis is able to reflect on the common sources of their electoral geographies not only at the time of their electoral breakthrough but also in the subsequent period of electoral persistence. An alternative approach, which focuses on a more limited timeframe, is more useful for future studies, once the main sources of the electoral geographies of European RLPs are known. For example, future studies may focus on the territorial patterns of electoral support for European RLPs since the Great Recession. Yet, this focus may still need to address the preceding sources of their electoral geographies prior to the chosen timeframe in order to place its insights into a relevant context. The analysis, however, does not include, the most recent national elections for the three parties, held in 2017. The main reason for this is that data gathering for two of the cases (Die Linke and KSČM) occurred prior to those elections, while the remaining data on the third case (SP) was obtained following the national vote. In order to avoid the methodological challenges related to the point when data was gathered, this thesis rather excludes these elections. Hence, the latest elections, included in this analysis were those in 2012 (the Netherlands) and 2013 (Germany and the Czech Republic). The theoretical and empirical insights from this study can be

applied to the three cases and their electoral geographies of the 2017 parliamentary elections in future research.

## 5.4. Research methodology

The research examines the cases through the comparative method. This enables a systematic hypothesis testing despite the limited number of cases. The comparative method, however, asks for the extraction of specific data that has broader relevance. One approach for data gathering would be to rely solely on external observers of these parties. In this respect, previous academic studies on radical right parties revealed the importance of expert surveys in exploring a particular case (Mudde, 2002, 2007). While such an approach gives an appropriate distance from the subject of study and avoids bias, these characteristics are a disadvantage for this thesis, as they provide limited direct insight into the internal party life. That is why this study relies mainly on data that comes directly from the parties in question. This allows identifying the main factors that shape their electoral geographies in their own view and based on their own experiences. Such data, however, is difficult to obtain, as parties remain largely secretive towards external examination (Mudde, 2007, p. 267). More importantly, the data can be significantly favourable on the case in question, which requires its triangulation with independent sources. Despite these disadvantages, the own experiences and evaluations of political parties put emphasis on the actual relevance of various potential factors of influence on their territorial distribution of electoral support. In other words, the experiences of political parties may be biased, but they are the most immediate perspective to use on the extent potential factors play an active role for the development of their electoral geographies.

This thesis, therefore, relies on data from 29 semi-structured qualitative interviews[4], held throughout 2017, with party officials of the three parties and with independent researchers that follow closely the party activities. These officials were chosen for their official party role. Particularly relevant for their choice was their immediate experience with the electoral campaigns of one of the three studied parties or with daily party work in their communities. The

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[4] Of those interviews 12 were related to the case of Die Linke, 9 concerned the case of KSČM, and 8 focused on SP.

majority of them are members of the party leadership on national, regional, or local level, thus having rich direct experiences and insights on the relevant aspects that influence the electoral potential of their party across their country or in their regional community. The independent researchers were identified through their previous academic or journalistic work related to the respective party. These persons were not affiliated with any of the three parties, thus allowing an independent and informed perspective on the factors that shape the electoral geography of the respective party that may have not been revealed from the conversations with party officials.

A further criterion for the choice of interview participants was the locality, where they work. In this respect, the search for potential interviewees sought to include party officials from constituencies of high, mid-level, and low level of electoral support in order to examine the alternative explanations within a broad scope of socio-economic, political, and organisational circumstances. The constituencies are often referred to in the following chapters as an electoral stronghold, a place of mid-level support, and a weak place/a place of weak electoral support. The distinction between these categories is based on the vote share of a European RLP in the particular electoral unit at a given national election: a weak place is a constituency where the party achieves one of its lowest vote shares in an election or generally mobilises electoral support below its nationwide performance; a place of mid-level support is a constituency where the party achieves approximately similar result to its national one; an electoral stronghold is a place where the party achieves a result above its national vote share or is among the places with highest vote shares of the party in a given election. Those criteria allowed for interviewing party officials from the states of Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, and Bavaria in the case of Die Linke; the provinces of Groningen, Overijssel, Gelderland, and Utrecht for the case of SP, and the regions of Ústí nad Labem and Capital City Prague in the case of KSČM. All participants were contacted through their official emails or telephones, available at the respective party websites or their place of work. Informed consent was sought prior to each interview. Given that some of the participants declined to be named in this work, the thesis avoids naming all of them or their official position, while it

mentions the locality of their work, in order to provide relevant context for the analysed data.

Interview topics focused on a discussion of what factors of the social context (socio-economic and socio-cultural circumstances) enabled or prevented a strong or weak party performance in their constituency; the impact of the institutional framework on the electoral geography of their party on national elections; an assessment on the organisational strengths and weaknesses in mobilising electoral support across a country or in their regional or local community. The data gathered from the interviews were analysed through qualitative thematic analysis. This approach aimed to identify common themes from the interviews that address the three alternative explanations and the potential factors that may shape the electoral geographies of the three cases. Where data from the interviews were absent on a given factor, this thesis used relevant quantitative data for an assessment.

Further support for the insights from the interviews comes from a qualitative analysis of party programmes. These sources represent externally-oriented party literature that is 'considered to represent and express the policy collectively adopted by the party' (Borg, 1966, p. 97). While there may be concerns that such documents rather conceal the true nature of political parties (Sainsbury, 1980), they are, nevertheless, very informative for the tactical and strategic choices of the parties. This is particularly important for this study, as these documents can enhance the understanding of how European RLPs view the role of the three explanations for their electoral geographies and also highlight potential reasons of why these parties were able or, in fact, chose to campaign in certain areas. The analysis of these documents is similar to the one of the interviews: a qualitative thematic analysis reveals the main ideological features of the three parties at a given moment within the timeframe of the study. This informs the analysis of the interview data by providing the party perspective for their ideological and organisational choices that address the particular differences in social context and influence of the national political structures.

## 6. Conclusion and chapter overview

This chapter argued that the current literature on European RLPs recognises the importance of geography in understanding their electoral, organisational, and governmental fortunes, but it lacks systematic research of the sources of their electoral geographies at national elections. A brief discussion on the literatures on electoral geography, on party and party system nationalisation, and on territorial politics revealed three alternative explanations in this respect, but they remain focused on party systems and major political parties. These theoretical gaps led to the main research question of this thesis: which factors best explain the electoral geographies of European radical left parties at national elections since 1990?

A suitable approach to find an answer to this question is the qualitative analysis of the immediate experiences of party officials and independent researchers, related to the cases of Die Linke in Germany, SP in the Netherlands, and KSČM in the Czech Republic. These insights from people, immersed into daily party work, allow a clarification on the practical importance of a number of potential factors, related to the literature on the spatial distribution of electoral performance. Being examples of the different electoral geographies RLPs develop across Europe, the experiences of the three cases can be extrapolated despite their restricted number.

From here on, this research is structured as follows. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework of this research. Drawing from the literatures on electoral geography, on party and party system nationalisation, and on territorial politics, it presents a framework that focuses on the social context, political structures, and organisational capabilities for explaining the territorial distribution of electoral support for European RLPs. 'Social context' refers to the particular socio-economic and socio-cultural environment of an electoral unit, in which an RLP operates. 'Political structures' embody the institutional framework of a country that together with the party system competition structures the social context politically and prescribes a particular behaviour to political parties. 'Organisational capabilities' relate to the internal party life, particularly the material and non-material organisational resources and opportunities at the parties' disposal to mobilise electoral support.

Chapter 3 then presents in more detail the cases of KSČM, Die Linke, and SP. It outlines the development of their electoral geographies since the 1990s and looks into potential explanations for their territorial patterns of electoral support from major existing studies on these parties. Chapters 4 to 6 explore each of the three alternative explanations for the emergence of the electoral geographies of the three cases. This is done by analysing and comparing the primary interview, documentary, and statistical data, gathered specifically for this study, and triangulating these insights with relevant secondary literature. The main findings in this respect are that there are factors from all three explanations that contribute to the electoral geographies of the three cases but within a particular context.

Chapter 7 then moves onto bringing together the evidence of the previous chapters and presenting its final conclusions in relation to the research question. Given the different contexts, within which the factors from the three alternative explanations influence the electoral geographies of the three parties, this chapter concludes that the organisational capabilities rather filter the influences of the social context and political structures, thus highlighting its important role for the electoral geography of European RLPs. Chapter 8 concludes this study by looking back into the original contribution, broader theoretical implications and the future research agenda based on its main findings. It concludes that the value of this thesis can be found in its contribution to the studies on European RLPs, and the literatures on electoral geography, on party and party system nationalisation, and on territorial politics.

# Chapter 2 Literature review and hypotheses

## 1. Introduction

This chapter reviews the existing literatures on electoral geography, party and party system nationalisation, and territorial politics. In doing so, it maps out a wide range of factors that influence the electoral geography of a political party. As stated in the introduction, for the sake of simplicity this thesis uses the term 'electoral geography' to denote the pattern of territorial distribution of electoral performance, derived from the level of balance of that performance across electoral units. The factors, outlined in this chapter, provide a pool of hypotheses, from which the thesis bases its response to the main research question ('Which factors best explain the electoral geographies of European radical left parties at national elections since 1990?').

The outline of this chapter contains four major sections. Following this introduction, the second section presents the dependent variable of this study: the territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party (RLP). This represents an assessment on the level of territorial balance of the electoral support for a party across electoral units at a single national election. The third section discusses the three main hypotheses; the potential factors that may shape the electoral geographies of European RLPs, and the theoretical rationale for their relevance.

The first hypothesis focuses on the social context. Based on the discussion on the literature on electoral geography, this thesis argues that the differences in the place-based socio-economic environment (i.e. social context) across electoral units may account for the particular territorial distribution of electoral support for a European RLP. In particular, the extent of difference in the historical legacies of mass mobilisation, in the socio-economic conditions between places at the time of national elections, and in the salience of electoral topics across a territory may contribute to the electoral geography of a European RLP.

The second hypothesis concerns the effects of the political structures of a country. The literature on party and party system nationalisation allows this

chapter to argue that these structures, understood as the political institutions and party system competition of a country, may shape the electoral geography of a European RLP through the effects of the electoral system, of the system of regional governance and, as well as of the intensity of party competition. The third hypothesis relates to the impact of the party organisation. This thesis argues that the party organisation is also able to influence the territorial distribution of electoral performance of European RLPs through the geographic distribution of its organisational network and members, its candidate selections procedures, and its relations with the radical left subculture. The fourth, concluding section of this chapter discusses the need to highlight the particularities of the three chosen cases before engaging with an analysis on the hypotheses.

## 2. Dependent variable: territorial pattern of electoral support

The dependent variable of this study is the territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party. This pattern represents the categorisation of the standardised and weighted Party Nationalisation Score (PNS) that measures the extent of similarity between the vote shares of a party across electoral units (Bochsler, 2010a, p. 155). PNS is an important measure, used widely in the literature on party and party system nationalisation (Jones and Mainwaring, 2003; Chhibber and Kollman, 2004; Bochsler, 2010b, 2010a). This literature explores the territorial outreach of party systems and political parties and its institutional sources and influences. The main concern in this respect is the extent to which the politics of a country moved away from a localised character, where different places of a country may have different political agendas, towards the formation of a common, national politics, independent of the particular place-based context (Caramani, 2004).

There are, however, challenges in categorising this variable. The literature on party and party system nationalisation uses it to evaluate the extent to which the electoral performance of a party is nationalised (i.e. independent of territorial influences) or territorialised (i.e. having a specific territorial character) (Caramani, 2004, 2015). In this context, the closer PNS is to 1, the more nationalised is the electoral performance of a party, while the closer PNS is to 0, the more territorialised it is (Jones and Mainwaring, 2003, p.

142). A variation of this categorisation refers to homogeneous electoral support when PNS is closer to 1, or heterogeneous electoral support, when PNS is closer to 0 (Morgenstern, Swindle and Castagnola, 2009, pp. 1323–1324). Both category scales, however, are not useful for the current study, as they emphasise the nature of the electoral performance of a party rather than its particular territorial pattern of distribution. In other words, such a categorisation omits the particularities of the territorial distribution of electoral support, which is of central interest of this thesis. Therefore, this requires a different categorisation from the existing ones.

The current literature on electoral geography does not provide much support to resolve this challenge. When exploring the territorial distribution of electoral support for a party, such studies more often than not use categories related to the concepts of 'spatial dependence' and 'spatial heterogeneity' (e.g. Shin and Agnew, 2011). These, however, are not useful for this thesis, as they focus on territorial patterns between geographical scales, rather than patterns at a single geographical dimension. As this thesis focuses on the latter, invoking the territorial distribution of electoral support across electoral units, such categorisation could not be properly employed without major changes in the research design. Given that studies, employing categories related to 'spatial dependence' or 'spatial heterogeneity', are predominantly quantitative in nature, their research design would rather omit the actual experiences of European RLPs. This, therefore, removes the possibility to test the existing theories on the emergence of electoral geography from a different perspective. More importantly, it confirms the need for a new categorisation that highlights the nature of the territorial distribution of electoral support for a party and is focused on a single geographical level.

This thesis, therefore, categorises the territorial patterns of electoral performance through the level of territorial balance of electoral support across electoral units. In this context, it distinguishes between imbalanced and balanced electoral geographies i.e. balanced and imbalanced territorial distribution of electoral performance. The closer to 0 the PNS of a party is, the more imbalanced is its electoral geography; the closer PNS is to 1, the more balanced is the electoral geography. Figures 2.1 to 2.3 offer a visualisation of such territorial patterns of electoral performance with major differences in their

PNS. Such a categorisation provides a reliable depiction of the actual territorial patterns of electoral support and allows a proper understanding of their causal relations with the independent variables, discussed below.

**Figure 2.1. Balanced electoral geography: KSČM at the 2013 parliamentary elections**



**Figure 2.2. Electoral geography of a mid-level balance: SP at the 2012 parliamentary elections**



**Figure 2.3. Imbalanced electoral geography: Die Linke at the 2013 federal elections**



Black = electoral stronghold; Grey = mid-level support; White = weak support

(All maps throughout the thesis were created using QGIS 2.18 LTR. The shapefiles for each country were supplied by GADM under a license for academic use and other non-commercial use)

An alternative approach for conceptualising the dependent variable will be to avoid categorising the electoral geographies of the cases altogether but to rather focus on places, where the parties achieve a particular level of electoral performance. That way, instead of studying balanced or imbalanced territorial patterns, a categorisation may focus exclusively on the presence of the party electoral strongholds, places of mid-level support, or weak places. In doing so, the research may look for the common factors from the three chosen cases that contribute to their electoral performances in their strongholds, for example. Such an approach, however, fails to account for the fact that the extent of electoral support for a party in one electoral unit may depend on the characteristics of its neighbouring units. Known as the 'halo effect', existing studies on European radical right parties, for example, revealed that their electoral support is higher not in places of high levels of immigration, but in the constituencies that border those places (Bowyer, 2008; Rydgren and Ruth, 2013). From that perspective, it is more useful to study the sources of the overall territorial balance of electoral performance in order to capture the potential presence of a 'halo effect' on the electoral geography of a party. In other words, comparing the sources of the electoral performance of political parties in their strongholds, for example, is a less comprehensive approach than exploring the sources of their electoral geographies.

### 3. Hypotheses and independent variables

The theoretical framework for studying the sources for the electoral geographies of European RLPs draws on the general insights for the emergence of a particular territorial pattern of electoral performance from the main literature on the spatial distribution of electoral performance. Those focus on the literatures on electoral geography, party and party system nationalisation, and territorial politics. These three strands provide three alternative explanations, adapted to the particularities of European RLPs. In particular, these explanations highlight the potential impact of factors from the social context, political structures, and organisational capabilities. The following three

sub-sections clarify the main hypotheses of this study based on a review on these pieces of literature.

## 3.1. Social context

The first alternative explanation relates to the differences across electoral constituencies in terms of social context. The term 'social context' will here refer to the particular socio-economic and socio-cultural circumstances of a place that influence the level of electoral support for a party. Central for understanding its role on the territorial distribution of electoral performance is the literature on electoral geography.

Electoral geography remains one of the most established subjects in political science. Dating back at least to the 19th century, these studies explored predominantly the sources of the particular voting behaviour within a territory and the geographical influences on voting. Early works focus on the presence of ideological strongholds in France (Siegfried, 1913, 1949; Lacoste, 1986), the electoral base of the national socialists in Weimar Germany (Heberle, 1943a, 1943b; O'Loughlin, Flint and Anselin, 1994), the strong support for the Democratic Party in the Solid South in the first half of the 20th century (Key, 1949), or the territorially-defined differences in electoral behaviour among Italian regions (Putnam, 1993; Shin and Agnew, 2008). What these works have in common is their emphasis on the particular socio-economic and socio-cultural characteristics of a particular place. Notably, they view the social context of a place as the main source for the continued dominance of a particular ideology despite noticeable shifts in party support at the national level. Building upon these works, Johnston (1979) highlighted the causal process, through which the social context influences the electoral support for a party. Rather than compositional factors, such as class, religion, education, his study of the UK general elections in the 1950s and 1960s emphasised the 'neighbourhood effect'. Based on the principle that 'people that talk together, vote together' (Pattie and Johnston, 2000), an important point in this respect is that the local environment of social capital and local communication explains the electoral support for particular parties in a particular place. The different manifestations of this effect across a territory, thus, account for the differences in the electoral support for a party across electoral units.

Yet, the neighbourhood effect does not offer a convincing theoretical basis to outline hypotheses for the electoral geographies of European RLPs since 1990 for two main reasons. First, the effect itself seems to have a rather marginal influence on voting behaviour. As Curtice (1995, p. 207) highlights quantitatively, the neighbourhood effect has limited explanatory power for the variation of electoral support for a party. Therefore, it seems to be a marginal explanation for the ways a social context shapes the electoral geography of a party. Second, given the increase of party de-alignment since the Silent Revolution of the late 1970s (Franklin, Mackie and Valen, 1992; Dalton and Wattenberg, 1993; Norris, 2002), it seems that the general rule that 'people that talk together, vote together' is not valid as much as for the elections, which Johnston explored. Therefore, there is a need to identify a potential new process, through which social context shapes the electoral geography of a party.

More recent studies on electoral geography offer such a perspective. Particularly, John Agnew's works on the electoral geographies of Scotland (1987) and Italy (2002; Shin and Agnew, 2008) provide convincing arguments for the relevance of the social context on the spatial distribution of electoral performance. He points out that, on the one hand, a place is subject to the influence of other geographical scales (Agnew, 1987, chap. 3, 2002, chap. 2). For example, nationwide or even international economic trends may have a particular impact on the local economic outlook of a place. On the other hand, these external influences are filtered by a place in a distinct manner depending on its existing historic legacies of local development and its contemporary socio-economic state (Agnew, 1987, chap. 3). In doing so, Agnew concludes that the electoral behaviour within a place stems from the interplay between the local political culture, the individual association with local institutions, and individual preferences (Agnew, 2002, pp. 27-31). This interaction results either in a 'collective socialisation', when these factors create a synergy leading to place-based voting behaviour, or in a 'conjunctural socialisation', when these factors are rather unrelated, leading to a rather place-independent voting behaviour (Agnew, 2002, pp. 34–35). Therefore, the social context of a place shapes the electoral geography of a party through the different modes of interaction between political culture, local institutions, and individual preferences.

It is, however, not the purpose of this study to establish whether the electoral geography of the European radical left is a product of collective or conjunctural socialisation, especially given their anti-political establishment (APE) status. The latter (conjunctural socialisation) may be embedded in the voter's personal disillusionment with income inequality regardless of the surrounding circumstances, as argued in the growing literature on positional deprivation (e.g. Burgoon *et al.*, 2019). Otherwise, the former (collective socialisation) is also relevant for APE parties given that the particular social context may influence a voter's choice between a radical left or a radical right party (e.g. Rooduijn and Burgoon, 2018). Instead, this thesis takes a step back from such a discussion as it seeks to clarify whether social context matters for the territorial distribution of electoral support for European RLPs in the first place. In this respect, rather than discussing the interplay of these factors, it makes more sense to investigate each factor's separate impact on the electoral geography of the European RLPs. In other words, given that the main interest is on whether social context explains the electoral geographies of European RLPs, it is sufficient to observe whether the specific place-based political culture, local institutions, and individual preferences have an impact rather than observing how these factors interact with each other. Hence the main hypothesis with regard to social context states simply that:

(H1) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 depends on the differences in social context between electoral units.

### 3.1.1. Historic legacies

Political culture in Agnew's framework refers to those lasting traditions of the political behaviour in a place that manifest themselves electorally and, potentially, influence voting behaviour (Agnew, 2002, pp. 30–31). The literature on electoral geography emphasises in this respect traditions, such as predominant electoral support for a particular ideological current (Key, 1949), an intense competition between or within ideological currents (Lacoste, 1986), as well as voting preferences for certain political positions on salient electoral topics or cleavages (Agnew, 1987; De Winter and Türsan, 1998). The differences

in such traditions between places, thus, should lead to different electoral results for political parties across a territory.

The literature on European RLPs highlights historic legacies as the main component of a political culture that shapes their electoral performance. This involves three particular elements. First, a majority of works emphasise the role of industrialisation and urbanisation. The emergence of mass production and the need for manpower facilitated the creation of the modern working class and its concentration in particular places (Scase, 1977). Given that RLPs claim and aim to represent the interests of the working class (Moschonas, 2002, p. 50; March, 2011, p. 35) and the fact that the working class remains to this day an important voter base for these parties (Ramiro, 2016), it is expected that their electoral geographies will reflect the impact of industrialisation and urbanisation across a country.

The existing evidence, however, calls for a more nuanced perspective. Industrialisation is not a universal mark-up for the electoral strongholds of RLPs across Europe. While centres of mass production and heavy industry are also places of overwhelming electoral support for RLPs in Western and Northern Europe (Scase, 1977; Obendörfer, 1979), in Southern and Eastern Europe these parties perform better in predominantly agricultural, underdeveloped regions (Oberndörfer, 1978; Köhler, 1995). Similarly, urbanisation also does not offer a reliable pan-European perspective on the electoral potential of European RLPs. Industrialised places in Western Europe are mainly situated in large urban areas (Reulecke, 1985), in rural and small-town regions in Northern Europe (Furuhagen, 1993), whereas agricultural activities across the continent are predominantly the domain of rural areas. As existing works (Oberndörfer, 1978; Obendörfer, 1979) reveal, the electoral support for European RLPs varies significantly in this respect. Furthermore, the link between industrialisation, urbanisation and electoral support for RLPs becomes increasingly distorted. The main reason for this is the rise of RLP support by people without a working-class background (Visser *et al.*, 2014; Gomez, Morales and Ramiro, 2016; Ramiro, 2016). Additionally, the economic decline in former industrialised or underdeveloped areas often benefits parties other than European RLPs (Bell, 1993; Patton, 2006; Lavelle, 2008). Therefore, while industrialisation and urbanisation have a rather ambivalent pan-European impact, they highlight the

importance of economic differences for the electoral geographies of European RLPs.

Secondly, the differences in the particular place-based experiences of European RLPs form another important historical legacy influencing their territorial distribution of electoral support. This strand of the literature highlights two main elements. The first one comes from studies with longer timeframes. Those works link the electoral performance of European RLPs to the extent they were integrated within the working class at the time of the latter's enfranchisement. As Bartolini (2002, chap. 5) demonstrates, European RLPs achieved a rapid electoral rise by building up their base prior to the extension of voting rights at the turn of the 20th century. From a territorial perspective, such entanglement with the working class, thus, reflects the extent to which these parties addressed the existing economic differences across their countries and their abilities to adapt to the changing circumstances. The second one relates the electoral geographies of European RLPs to their experiences of regional and local governance. As historical accounts on the European left highlight, centre-left and radical left parties built and maintained their social base to a large extent among the supporters and beneficiaries of their regional and local work in establishing and providing a wide range of public services (e.g. Szajkowski, 1985; Maimann, 1988; Judd, 1989; March, 2008). Such a perspective is valuable, as it highlights the importance of direct party involvement in local communities for the establishment of lasting electoral linkages across a country. However, given that the days of enfranchisement and continuous regional and local governance by European RLPs are long gone, these legacies should not be overemphasised. For example, the historic continuity of electoral support for political parties in the Czech Republic between the inter-war and post-socialist periods is very limited (Balík, 2006).

Thirdly, instead of broad social developments or dated historic experiences, historic legacies of mass mobilisation offer a more convincing basis to understand the potential impact on the electoral geographies of European RLPs since the 1990s. For example, Bartolini in his seminal study of the emergence of the political representation of the working class in Europe reveals that legacies of social mobilisation create lasting local traditions that can be perpetuated or re-introduced by political parties (Bartolini, 2002, chap. 6). This

has the advantage of focusing on the actual outcomes of the broad social developments and their potential continuity, rather than a loose or potentially non-existent link between these processes and electoral support. Therefore, if the historic legacies matter for the electoral geographies of European RLPs since 1990, it will be the differences in the history of mass mobilisation across places, be that electoral (i.e. in the form of a mass and concentrated mobilisation to support a party electorally) or social (i.e. mass protests, strikes, etc.), that particularly shape the territorial patterns.

This perspective, however, fails to distinguish between cases where such a mobilisation matters for European RLPs and cases where it does not. There are two important elements in this respect. First, clear cases of mass mobilisation for right-wing or nationalist causes, such as nationalist protests, pogroms, etc. have limited links to the contemporary support for European left-wing parties (Husbands, 1983). Even if such events caused a counter-mobilisation by the left, the event rather highlights the presence of strong right-wing potential in a given place, thus making these legacies rather peripheral for the electoral geographies of European RLPs. Second, more indistinguishable are cases where a mass mobilisation has regional overtones. Major examples in this respect are rural or regionalist protests against central authorities (De Winter and Türsan, 1998; Strijker, Voerman and Terluin, 2015) that can have social demands against economic inequality. While indeed these legacies may have contributed to the electoral support for European RLPs nowadays, their premise is more related to centre-periphery issues, while economic inequalities are to some extent driving, but are not the main source of these grievances. Therefore, while this thesis focuses on the role of the historic legacies of mass mobilisation, such a mobilisation should clearly stem from the existing economic inequalities between places. In light of this discussion, the first hypothesis related to this explanation states that:

(H1a) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the differences between electoral units in their historic legacies of mass mobilisation are limited.

### 3.1.2. Contemporary socio-economic and socio-cultural differences

Agnew's second factor is the political association. According to his framework, local institutions, such as the church, community groups, family, create a sense of association and belonging to a place, thus, influencing voting behaviour in favour of their political demands (Agnew, 2002, pp. 28-29). While the roles of regional political institutions for the electoral geography of the European radical left will be touched upon further in this chapter, this factor is particularly important to understand the ways RLPs create an association and, thus, mobilise support. Given that political parties have an ideology, reflected through a political program and policy proposals that address socio-economic issues, a voter may associate herself with that program based on her assessment of the contemporary local socio-economic conditions. This is not to say that the local socio-economic conditions are the sole factor that influences voting behaviour, given the major contribution of the voter's personal and professional development in this respect (Miller and Shanks, 1996, chap. 9). Yet, even when a voter makes a rational decision in favour of a particular policy offer, this decision does not emerge in a vacuum (Franklin, 2004, p. 202). In the light of the burgeoning literature on economic voting (e.g. Powell and Whitten, 1993; Lewis-Beck and Paldam, 2000; Tucker, 2006; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2007), it seems that one of the factors that may influence such a decision may be the contemporary socio-economic conditions of a place. Therefore, the electoral geographies of European RLPs may reflect the differences of the socio-economic conditions between places at the time of national elections.

There are two major factors of the socio-economic circumstances of a place that may influence the electoral geographies of European RLPs. First, it is expected that the level of economic inequality between places will impact their electoral geographies, given the overwhelming focus on these inequalities in their electoral programs, policy proposals, and overall ideology. Previous studies of the electoral geographies of individual RLPs across Europe highlighted, for example, that the levels of unemployment and concentration of persons reliant on welfare provisions (Vail and Bowyer, 2012) have a significant effect on the levels of their electoral support. This reveals that economically-deprived places seem more inclined to support European RLPs than places of a higher economic standard. In this context, the territorial distribution of economic inequality i.e.

the economic differences between regions can influence the electoral geographies of European RLPs.

Second, recent research by Van Hamme, Vandermotten and Lockhart (2018) on the overall support for centre-left, Green, and radical left parties adds that the particular configuration of economic structures, especially when a place is dependent on a particular industrial branch, influences the territorial distribution of electoral support for these parties. More importantly, this research also reveals that the electoral geography of the European RLPs is also a product of centre-periphery dynamics, as they mobilise support in places that combine economic, cultural and geographic distance from the centre (van Hamme, Vandermotten and Lockhart, 2018). Therefore, it seems that in addition to the significance of economic differences, non-economic factors of social context can also shape the electoral geographies of European RLPs. In this context, the hypothesis related to this factor states that:

(H1b) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the differences between electoral units in their socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions are limited.

### 3.1.3. The salience of electoral topics

Finally, Agnew points out the importance of voters' individual preferences. This stems from the individual, rational assessment of a voter, made independently of the influences of the specific place-based political culture and association with local institutions and circumstances. Previous studies of the support for European RLPs revealed in this respect that preferences for policies of increased state intervention in the economy, or mistrust of democracy are among the most characteristic for radical left voters (Visser *et al.*, 2014; Gomez, Morales and Ramiro, 2016; Ramiro, 2016). Given that this study engages in a meso-level analysis, there is a need to adapt these insights accordingly. Talking about places with high levels of democratic mistrust is rather challenging to operationalise. The main reason for this is that surveys, which may shed light on the territorial differences of these voter preferences, rarely include a representative sample for each place of a country. However,

what such surveys may reveal is the overall salience of electoral topics in a given place. A divergence in the salience of electoral topics across a territory suggests the presence of a different electoral agenda that may be accommodated by different political parties. Therefore, if individual preferences shape the electoral geographies of European RLPs, these should be evident in the different salience of electoral topics, corresponding to the particular territorial pattern of electoral support for RLPs.

(H1c) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the differences in the salience of electoral topics between electoral units are limited.

## 3.2. Political structures

The second alternative explanation concerns political structures. Understood as the system of political institutions of a country, this explanation focuses on the institutional influence on the electoral geography of political parties. The main interest in these influences comes from the literature on party and party system nationalisation. This explanation has a completely different theoretical basis compared to the study of electoral geography in relation to social context. While social context stresses the primacy of local, place-based particularities, party system nationalisation emphasises the nationalised character of politics. From that perspective, the study on party nationalisation explores those factors that contribute to or prevent the nationalisation of party systems (Morgenstern, Swindle and Castagnola, 2009; Morgenstern, Polga-Hecimovich and Siavelis, 2014) and the effects of the level of party system nationalisation on the strategic and policy choices of political parties (Cox, 1997; Weingast, 2009), branches of government (Chhibber and Kollman, 2004), or on the institutional framework of a country (Bochsler, 2010b). In general terms, the literature on party and party system nationalisation is moving away from the study of its sources towards that of its effects.

This trend suggests a general consensus on the sources of the electoral geography of political parties. This allows a qualitative test for the relevance of this consensus. Overwhelmingly quantitative in its nature, the literature on party

system nationalisation assumes that the level of party system nationalisation represents the aggregated nationalisation of single political parties (Morgenstern, Polga-Hecimovich and Siavelis, 2014, p. 137). Even if this may be the case, studies on party and party system nationalisation rarely explored the sources of the nationalisation of single parties or party families. The few exceptions focused mainly on South America (Jones and Mainwaring, 2003; Morgenstern, Swindle and Castagnola, 2009). While these studies made a significant breakthrough in understanding the influence of political structures on the electoral geography of a party, this thesis is not aware of any qualitative tests on the extent this influence matters for voters and/or parties.

Studying the actual influence of political structures on voters' or parties' choices is important, given the institutional and social role of political parties within a political system (Key, 1942). In terms of party system nationalisation, institutions generally have an integrative role, as they structure the various regional contexts in order to accommodate them within the realms of the nation-state (Caramani, 2004; Bochsler, 2010b), if not within higher geographical scales (Caramani, 2015). From that perspective, parties act as agents for that integration by supplying diverse social contexts with a common political and electoral agenda (Cox, 1997). Looking into the case of European RLPs, their small-party status is particularly helpful to understand the potential influence of political structures on their electoral geographies. Existing studies on small parties highlight the uneven nature of competition with major parties (Meguid, 2008). In particular, small parties often face institutional disadvantages compared to their major opponents, such as differences in their access to media during electoral campaigns, in campaign funding etc. In such a context, it seems that the particular institutional framework of a country may have a negative impact on their electoral geographies. Yet, the literature on the electoral performance of small parties reveals that they can also use the institutional framework in their favour. For example, Bolleyer (2013) points out that new parties are capable of making strategic trade-offs by using the institutional framework of a country to enter the national parliament. Therefore, the impact of the political structures on the electoral geography may not be necessarily negative. In this context, the main hypothesis for this explanation states that:

(H2) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 depends on the effects of political structures.

To assess the potential influence of the political structures of a country, the literature on party and party system nationalisation and on territorial politics highlight three main factors: the electoral system, the system of regional governance, and party system competition.

### 3.2.1. Electoral system

The electoral system shapes the electoral geography of a party through its mechanical and psychological effects. The former derives from the rules for electing representatives of and to a legislative or executive body, as well as from the procedures of translating votes into seats. From a geographical perspective, these rules ensure the linkage between a territorial and functional representation (Caramani, 2004, p. 31), as the legitimacy of an elected representative stems mainly from the electoral support for her or her party within a particular territory.

More importantly, these rules have psychological effects on parties and voters. Depending on the particularities of the electoral system parties may have different electoral strategies to mobilise support. The literature on party and party system nationalisation suggests in this respect that political parties competing under proportional representation (PR) are more incentivised to spread their electoral resources across a country in order to achieve parliamentary entry, and, thus, develop a more balanced electoral geography (Morgenstern, Swindle and Castagnola, 2009, p. 1327). In contrast, majoritarian electoral systems require the development of an electoral majority or plurality in a particular place. This prompts parties to concentrate their electoral efforts into deepening their electoral support across electoral units that results often into imbalanced electoral geography (Morgenstern, Swindle and Castagnola, 2009, p. 1327). Voters, simultaneously, also obtain different impulses from the mechanical effects of an electoral system. Interested in casting a meaningful vote, they may tend to vote for their party of choice under PR systems (Morgenstern, Swindle and Castagnola, 2009, p. 1327). This allows small parties

to maximise their electoral potential across constituencies. In contrast, major parties benefit more from majoritarian systems. Under majoritarian rules voters may assess the chances of small parties as marginal, and, therefore, they may cast a vote for another competitor that may not be fully representative of their views, but has a realistic possibility of winning seats to them (Morgenstern, Swindle and Castagnola, 2009, p. 1327).

The literature on party and party system nationalisation takes two main approaches to study the effects of the electoral system on electoral geography. A considerable amount of studies have focused predominantly on the type of electoral system (e.g. Chhibber and Kollman, 2004; Golosov, 2018). This approach is useful for comparing cases that have major differences between their electoral systems. Given the focus on Europe in this thesis, the type of electoral system is rather irrelevant, as the majority of countries on the continent use varieties of PR systems. That is why this study relies on the second approach that explores the particularities of an electoral system. This approach is helpful as it includes the main features of an electoral system and, simultaneously, reveals the nuances, which can make significant differences for the electoral geographies of political parties. The literature on party and party system nationalisation highlights four important variables in this respect: the number of electoral constituencies, the district magnitude, malapportionment and the electoral threshold.

### 3.2.1.1. Number of electoral constituencies and district magnitude

The first two (number of electoral constituencies and district magnitude) are to a large extent related to each other. Several studies reveal that the higher the number of electoral constituencies and the lower the district magnitude, the more likely it is for a party to have imbalanced electoral geography (Taagepera and Shugart, 1989; Moenius and Kasuya, 2004). This is because the increase in the number of constituencies increases also the number of electoral arenas of party competition, which calls for strategic use of party resources. Respectively, the lower the district magnitude is the more likely is for a party to concentrate its efforts on those places, where it has a realistic chance of gaining seats. Therefore, the electoral geographies of European RLPs may be

a product of similar dynamics. In this context, the hypothesis for these two variables states that:

(H2a) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the number of electoral units is lower, and the district magnitude is higher.

### 3.2.1.2. Malapportionment

Malapportionment is another important variable of the electoral system that may influence the electoral geography of a party. Generally, the number of constituencies and district magnitude aim to reflect the proportion of eligible voters in a particular constituency to the national total. As Caramani (2000) and Johnston and Pattie (2006) reveal in their research of the role of territory for the electoral support of political parties, electoral geographies can be shaped not as much by the amount of districts or mandates for distribution, but by the particular delimitation of electoral boundaries or by the change in the district magnitude of existing electoral units. This is because these factors can distort the proportionality between units and offer electoral advantages for particular political parties or social constituencies (Caramani, 2000, p. 24). Such distortions can, potentially, direct parties to prioritise certain electoral units, should the particular delimitation or a disproportionate district magnitude outline a territory with an advantageous social context. Furthermore, as the experience from countries with single-member constituencies (Niemi, Written and Franklin, 1992) suggests, voters are very conscious regarding the boundary limits of their constituency and its respective social context, fostering the particularity of tactical voting. Therefore, the electoral geographies of European RLPs may be a product of such distortions. In this context, the hypothesis for this factor states that:

(H2b) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the level of malapportionment is low.

### 3.2.1.3. Electoral threshold

Finally, the electoral threshold is an important variable influencing the electoral geography of a party. A high electoral threshold may prevent a small party to enter parliament, thus influencing the voter's choice across electoral units. Generally, electoral systems place an electoral threshold at two particular levels. An overwhelming majority rely on a nationwide threshold i.e. the requirement for any political party or electoral alliance to obtain a certain vote share at the national level, regardless of how this support is distributed across a territory[5]. Another approach is to set an electoral threshold at a constituency level: either by passing a certain threshold to gain a seat from a given constituency[6] or by winning the plurality or even majority in a single-member constituency. This second approach has a significant influence on the electoral geographies of political parties, as its mechanic and psychological effects may guide parties and voters in their strategic efforts who to target and who to vote for. Particularly relevant in this respect is the so-called effective threshold (Lijphart, 1994, p. 29), placing a natural barrier for political parties to gain seats in a given constituency due to its district magnitude[7]. In such circumstances, similarly to malapportionment, political parties may prioritise certain constituencies, where they assess to have a better chance of passing the particular electoral threshold. Therefore, the electoral geographies of European RLPs may be a product of the differences in the effective threshold across electoral units at national elections.

(H2c) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the differences of the effective thresholds between electoral units are limited.

### 3.2.2. Regional governance

Another important institutional factor is regional governance. The presence of sub-national levels of executive and legislative power is important

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[5] This can be seen in the majority of PR systems in Europe, where electoral constituencies are used for administrative purposes and for determining which candidates from party lists will enter parliament.
[6] For example, in Spain a party is eligible for a seat in the Congress of Deputies if it passes a 3% threshold at constituency level.
[7] For example a district that assigns 5 mandates (m) has an effective threshold of 16.67% for any party to obtain a seat from it, given that $T_E = 1/(m+1)$ according to Lijphart (1994).

for political parties, as it allows them to develop and enhance a variety of capabilities, including governing and policy expertise and electoral campaigning. For example, Grzymala-Busse (2002b) reveals that the electoral fortunes of the Central and East European communist successor parties depend on their non-material resources. Those include the professionalization of their mid-rank officials, which involves a local and/or regional work. She, thus, seems to make the implicit assumption that the experiences of participation in regional and local politics can be used to mobilise support at national elections. For example, parties may refer to their government or policy record in a particular place to show their policy expertise or their reliability as a political partner. Using the involvement in regional and local politics is a particularly important pathway for small parties, as participation in regional and local politics ensures their social anchoring and electoral persistence (Brancati, 2008; Thorlakson, 2009). Green and radical right parties are good examples in this respect. Their initial involvement in sub-national politics allowed them to build up significant electoral support and, thus, to break into their national parliaments (Poguntke, 1993; Richardson and Rootes, 1995; Minich, 2003; Mudde, 2007; van Haute, 2016). As already indicated in the discussion on historic legacies, the electoral history of the European left contains numerous examples of using the involvement in regional and/or local politics for electoral purposes, given their rich legacies of 'municipal socialism' (Szajkowski, 1985; Maimann, 1988; Judd, 1989; Eley, 2002). Therefore, it can be expected that the electoral geographies of European RLPs is shaped by the different levels of involvement in regional and local politics.

### 3.2.2.1. Regional authority

There are three important variables to consider in this respect. Firstly, the level of regional authority highlights the extent a party may be interested in building up support through regional governance. Studies on multi-level governance highlight an increasing transfer of political authority from national level towards sub- and supranational institutions in the past three decades (Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Enderlein, Wälti and Zürn, 2010). This reveals the growing relevance of regional governance during the timeframe of this research. According to the literature on party and party system nationalisation, an increase of powers of regional and local authorities reduces the level of party

system nationalisation (Chhibber and Kollman, 2004). This suggests that the electoral geography of a party may become increasingly imbalanced with the increase of decentralisation. Chhibber and Kollman (2004) reveal that an important reason for such a development is that the level of regional authority offers an incentive for parties to use it in order to reveal their governing credentials and offer a reference of the policies they intend to introduce. Therefore, when discussing the importance of regional governance, an analysis should take into consideration the extent the level of regional authority incentivises European RLPs to use regional governance as an electoral springboard.

(H2d) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the level of regional authority is lower.

### 3.2.2.2.  Regional presence

Secondly, given that the system of regional governance may influence the electoral geographies of European RLPs through their involvement in regional and local politics, an analysis should include the territorial distribution of the party presence in regional and local politics. In contrast to historic legacies, this variable concerns the party presence at the time of the election, as the presumption is that the more recent the presence the more flawless and immediate would be the transfer of these experiences to the electoral campaign at the national level. As existing studies reveal, this factor has a mid-term influence on voting behaviour (Miller and Shanks, 1996, p. 192), as voters have fresher memory on the more recent party record in regional governance.

(H2e) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the party presence in regional politics is more similar between electoral units.

### 3.2.2.3.  Regional performance

Thirdly and related to the previous point, the electoral performances of a party on regional and local elections can be a further indicator of its electoral geography. The literature on elections categorises sub- and supra-national

elections as second-order, given the lower turnout and higher electoral support for opposition parties compared to national elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). While recent studies of Eastern Europe reveal a continuous link between national and sub-national support (Schakel, 2017), existing research of Western Europe highlights a growing divergence between the outcomes on national and sub-national elections (Dandoy and Schakel, 2013). In this context, it can be expected that the electoral geographies for European RLPs at national elections may depend on their electoral geographies at sub-national elections.

(H2f) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when a European radical left party obtains similar levels of electoral performance between electoral units on a sub-national election.

### 3.2.3. Intensity of party competition

The third variable that could affect the electoral geographies of European RLPs is the intensity of party competition. This is reflected in the current research on party and party system nationalisation. According to it, one of the main sources of the particular level of party system nationalisation is the variations of party competition across different places (Caramani, 2004, 2015; Bochsler, 2010b), understood as the different configurations of the national party system across given electoral units. For example, whereas in one electoral unit the competition may be between two major parties, in another one it may be a multi-party electoral competition. This is confirmed in the party competition literature already since the 1980s. For example, Barrilleaux (1986) reveals that party competition across places is not static, but it can vary and deviate from the general nationwide party competition. As Patterson and Caldeira (1983) highlight, this variation is due to the different socio-demographic contexts of places, their levels of urbanisation, social diversity, and strength of local party organisations. Hence, given that in different places parties may have different abilities to compete in different circumstances, it seems that the party competition itself will vary across a territory.

A central role to understand the impact of party competition on the electoral geographies of RLPs has its level of intensity. This is due to two main

reasons. Firstly, party size matters for the particular territorial distribution of electoral support. Numerous studies identified that major parties tend to have a broad territorial outreach with major differences in the levels of their electoral support across electoral units, while small parties have a more restricted territorial scope and often emerge with more balanced territorial patterns (Caramani, 2000; Morgenstern, Polga-Hecimovich and Siavelis, 2014). This suggests that even in circumstances of a nationwide electoral competition, parties may face a variety of competition depending on the territorial outreach of their competitors in terms of their electoral campaigning and electoral participation. From that perspective, the intensity of competition provides an accurate understanding for the territorial dynamics of the party system that may explain the different electoral geographies of political parties at national elections, where parties generally face, generally, a common, nationwide competition from the same opponents.

Secondly, small parties, which includes the majority of European RLPs, are particularly susceptible to any deviations of the intensity of party competition given that parties competing for similar voters eventually 'squeeze out' (Cox, 1987), leading to the elimination of one or some of these competitors. In such circumstances, the electoral support for European RLPs may depend on the presence or absence of strong direct competitors across places. From that perspective, the spatial theory of party competition provides a reliable theoretical basis to understand the particular electoral geography of a European RLP, given its emphasis on the competition with direct ideological competitors for similar groups of voters (Downs, 1957; Stokes, 1963). In particular, the intensity of competition with three particular competitors may affect the electoral geography of a European RLP: on an ideological level, this concerns the competition with major centre-left and small progressive parties, while on an anti-establishment level it is expected that the presence of radical right and/or populist parties could influence their electoral geographies.

### 3.2.3.1. Major centre-left opponent

A significant competition comes from major left-wing competitors. Often sharing common party origins (Childs, 2000; Eley, 2002), these parties represents a major challenge for European RLPs due to their electoral and, often,

organisational size. Centre-left opponents represent the social democratic, socialist or a moderate strand of the left-wing spectrum in a country, allowing them to broaden their electoral appeal for left-wing causes without being seen as challenging the fundamentals of the existing socio-economic and political status-quo (Przeworski and Sprague, 1988). In this context, centre-left competitors pose both a challenge to and an opportunity for RLPs, given that voters rather switch support for parties within a particular ideological spectrum instead of between parties of different ideologies (Bartolini and Mair, 1990; Mair, 1993). From that perspective, the intensity of competition with centre-left parties may take two specific forms, which may have different effects on the electoral geographies of European RLPs. On the one hand, centre-left parties can be a direct electoral threat for European RLPs when the former aims to deepen its support among left-wing voters at the expense of its peripheral, centrist electorate. The main reason for this is that this strategy often motivates left-wing voters to prefer voting for the centre-left given its higher chances of entering in government. On the other hand, centre-left parties can also provide an opportunity for RLPs when the former neglects their left-wing base in favour of ideologically less-convinced voters. This lowers the intensity of competition between the two parties and provides room for RLPs to attract those centre-left voters, disillusioned from this strategy, as presented in the vacuum thesis during the 1990s (Hudson, 2000, 2012). Overall, given that often European RLPs are small parties, the growing intensity of competition between radical left and centre-left parties may be of disadvantage for the former, as it prevents them from making significant electoral advances across a country. In this context, the hypothesis states that:

(H2g) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the intensity of competition with a major centre-left opponent is higher.

### 3.2.3.2. Small progressive opponent

At least since the late 1970s, other progressive parties also pose significant competition to European RLPs. This challenge can take two distinctive forms. Firstly, there can be a new challenger that emerges from the wider progressive subculture. Examples of such challengers are Green parties

that grew out of environmentalist, pacifist, feminist, and anti-racist movements and attracted significant electoral support among left-wing voters especially in its early days (Richardson and Rootes, 1995; van Haute, 2016). The plethora of parties deriving from wider progressive circles grew since the 1990s. Currently, such parties have organisational roots in, among others, social movements campaigning on single-issue agenda, such as anti-corruption (Furlan, Slukan and Hergouth, 2018), opposition to house evictions (Buble, Kikaš and Prug, 2018), civil (Mazur, 2017), animal (Otjes and Krouwel, 2015), and digital rights (Erlingsson and Persson, 2011), feminism (for example, Feminist Initiative! in Sweden; the Women's Equality Party in the UK), etc. Second, often such a competition can come from secessionists from the major centre-left competitor. Emerging often as the personal project of a former member of the centre-left elite (Rybář and Deegan-Krause, 2008; Stanley and Czesnik, 2016), these parties may pose a competition to European RLPs, as they can criticise the record of the major centre-left competitor and, thus, attract disillusioned left-wing voters.

The dynamics of this competition, therefore, depend rather on the timing of its emergence. Generally, an older political entity has the advantage to dampen the effects of the competition with a younger competitor on its electoral support across a country through its organisational capabilities. Yet, this older party has the disadvantage of being seen as part of the political establishment, whereas the younger competitor enjoys an electoral bonus of its newness (Sikk, 2005; Hanley and Sikk, 2016). In this respect the analysis should consider party age as an important factor for understand the actual impact of the intensity of competition from small progressive parties. This thesis, therefore, formulates a hypothesis based on the assumption that high intensity of competition from small progressive parties will be of disadvantage for European RLPs, given the ideological closeness of the two. This is also in line with the analysis above on the competition with another ideologically-similar competitor – the major centre-left opponent. Any potential deviations, however, could be accounted with party age. Hence, the hypothesis for this factor states that:

(H2h) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the intensity of competition with small progressive opponent/s is higher.

### 3.2.3.3.  Anti-political establishment opponent

Similarly, the electoral geographies of European RLPs may be affected by the intensity of competition from other anti-political establishment parties. The existing literature on both, radical left and radical right parties, offers important theoretical points in this respect, as it reveals that RLPs are particularly susceptible to electoral losses from the radical right (Faye, 1980; Azmanova, 2004). Similarly to the dynamics between radical left and small progressive parties, such a susceptibility relates to party age, as former radical left voters need to be disillusioned from an already existing party in order to switch in favour of an ideologically new entity (van der Brug, Fennema and Tillie, 2005). However, a reversed susceptibility of former radical right voters supporting an RLP electorally seems not to be reflected in the academic literature. Therefore, this is not expected to be seen in the current analysis. In this context, if competition with anti-political establishment parties affects the electoral geographies of European RLPs, this can be seen only by the loss of support for the latter, and, thus, an overall change in the territorial distribution of its electoral performance. This changes the potential effects of this factor for the electoral geography of European RLPs. While the high intensity of competition will certainly be of electoral disadvantage for European RLPs, the low intensity does not necessarily mean that it provides them with an advantage. This, therefore, requires a slight reformulation of the hypothesis below in order to reflect this different dynamic, compared to the ones of the previous two factors. Hence, in contrast to the previous two hypotheses, this one states that:

(H2i) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the intensity of competition with anti-political establishment opponent/s is lower.

## 3.3.  Organisational capabilities

The third alternative explanation focuses on the organisational capabilities of European RLPs. While the previous hypotheses saw the formation of electoral geography as the product of external influences, parties can actively use the external circumstances depending on their electoral efforts. In this

respect, a central role has the particular party goals. While according to Müller and Strøm (1999) parties may pursue vote-, policy- or office-oriented goals that, generally, focus on the relations between a party and society, other, inner-looking possibilities exist as well. For example, according to Panebianco (1988, p. 8) the most important goal of political parties are their organisational survival that may not always relate to their electoral performance. This is particularly relevant for European RLPs, given the emphasis on organisational existence especially among the plethora of marginal RLPs (e.g. Hirscher and Pfahl-Traughber, 2008).

Despite the central role of party goals, this thesis will not focus on them for two main reasons. First, the organisational survival of a European RLP is not relevant for this study, given that this research focuses on parties that entered into the stage of political relevance in their lifespan (Pedersen, 1982). In this respect, while such parties may have brushed with challenges for their survival during the chosen timeframe (1990-2017), they are currently are not facing such an immediate threat. Second, regardless of the external-oriented goals of votes, policy or office that a party may pursue, their achievement depends on the organisational capabilities of a party. Under 'organisational capabilities' this thesis refers to the organisational resources and opportunities that a party has at its disposal to follow and achieve its goals. The contemporary party politics literature engages predominantly with the ideological and organisational changes of a party that accommodate the change of party goals (Harmel and Janda, 1994; Grzymala-Busse, 2002a). From that perspective, the electoral geography of an RLP may be a product of the extent these changes had led to the successful achievement of the new party goal. While the ideological change of a party is a major part of it, it is not the only one. The experiences of communist successor parties in Central and Eastern Europe suggest that the success of their different trajectories of change has more to do with their non-material organisational capabilities, such as usable pasts and official expertise (Bozóki and Ishiyama, 2002). Therefore, the electoral geographies of European RLPs may depend on their organisational capabilities to engage in the electoral competition across a country.

The literature on European RLPs confirms the importance of these capabilities. The history of these parties provides rich evidence for the reliance

on their own organisational strength to mobilise electoral support, particularly through their extensive organisational networks in the past (Guiat, 2003) or high levels of party membership (Bartolini, 2002). Furthermore, these parties may also rely on external support, given the maintenance of close relations with mass organisations, interest groups, and social movements within the broad radical left subculture (Tsakatika and Lisi, 2013a). In general, as recent studies on small parties reveal (Spoon, 2011; Tsakatika and Lisi, 2013a; Gherghina, 2014), the organisational capabilities provide them with tools to establish comprehensive links with society and, thus, ensure their electoral persistence. Hence, rather than their ideological and programmatic offer, the electoral geographies of European RLPs emerge from the territorial differences in their organisational capabilities. In this respect, the main hypothesis states:

(H3) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 depends on the differences of its organisational capabilities between electoral units.

In particular, the territorial politics literature highlights four variables that have the potential to shape the territorial pattern of electoral support for European RLPs: the territorial outreach of the party network of regional and local organisations and the concentration of party members across a territory, commonly known as party complexity; the candidate selection procedures of a party, as well as the linkages to the radical left subculture.

### 3.3.1. Party complexity

Party complexity contains two main variables: the territorial outreach of the party organisational structure and the concentration of its members in communities across electoral units. Any political party has a network of regional and local party organisations, which provide a direct linkage between the party and the local communities. In this respect, the emerging literature on territorial politics focuses on the ways parties adapt organisationally to the transfer of political authority to regional and local levels (Swenden and Maddens, 2009b; Detterbeck, 2012). From that perspective, the party complexity enables the party to compete at different geographic scales in order to use the executive

and legislative authority at these different levels for its party goals (Thorlakson, 2009).

In regard to electoral geography, the party complexity matters for parties both during and between elections. Between elections parties engage with the electorate in what Johnston and Pattie (2006, p. 54) call 'socialisation', where the long-term direct contact between party members and wider society fosters an electoral potential that can be realised during the campaign period. Furthermore, the literature on electoral campaigning further confirms the importance of direct contacts, as parties generally perform better in places where they campaign than in places where they do not (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992). Such direct engagement depends on two party factors. The first one is its organisational presence, as having a party organisation in a particular place means that the party has representatives in that community. The presence of party members allows the party to grasp and reflect on the socio-economic and political issues, relevant for that place. In other words, being present allows parties to engage with communities in the long and short term. According to Harmel and Janda (1982, p. 43) a wide network of relatively small local and regional party branches is, among others, an important electoral prerequisite for political parties, as it facilitates a widespread electoral outreach. This is particularly relevant for small parties, such as European RLPs, as a broad territorial presence provides them with electoral advantages. For example, while the Liberal Democrats in the United Kingdom are significantly outnumbered by Conservative and Labour, the party remains a significant electoral actor by virtue of its comprehensive organisational network (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2004, p. 195). The hypothesis for this variable states that:

(H3a) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the territorial outreach of its network of regional and local organisations is wider.

The second factor enabling the direct engagement of a party with local communities is the geographic spread of party membership. While having party structures is important, a party also requires members to do the actual engagement with the electorate in order to spread the political and electoral messages of a party (Seyd and Whiteley, 2002). Left-wing parties are particularly

inclined in using their often vast memberships for electoral purposes to the extent that political scientists view them as embodying the classic mass party type (Panebianco, 1988; Katz and Mair, 1995). This implies that the more party members are in a certain place, the higher are its chances to maximise its electoral potential in it. In this respect, this thesis expects that:

(H3b) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when a European radical left party has a more balanced concentration of party members across electoral units.

### 3.3.2. Candidate selection process

The internal party dynamics can also shape the electoral geography of a party. A central role in this respect has the level of party centralisation, understood as the extent of a concentration of party authority. Existing studies highlight that both a centralised party authority around the party leader and/or the party executive (Grzymala-Busse, 2002a; Keith, 2011), as well as a decentralised party structure that restricts the authority of its leadership and gives significant powers to other party organs (Harmel and Janda, 1982; Gherghina, 2014) can influence the extent parties mobilise support at national elections. While concentrated power allows parties to focus their efforts on its electoral and political goals, a distributed power provides parties with the flexibility to respond to emerging changes in the socio-economic and political circumstances of a country. Existing studies on European RLPs revealed the importance of this point, as the so-called participatory linkage of RLPs re-ignited party dynamism and allowed them to reach out to new voters (Tsakatika and Lisi, 2013a). From a geographical perspective, therefore, the particular distribution of internal party authority may influence electoral geographies of these parties.

The literature on territorial politics outlines the causal mechanism for this influence. Existing studies revealed that an important factor for the organisational adaptation of political parties to the transfer of political powers towards sub- and supra-national levels is the internal (re-)distribution of executive party authority (Swenden and Maddens, 2009b; Detterbeck, 2012). The

central element in this respect is the regional autonomy of regional and local party organisations to follow their own political agenda that may deviate from the one of the national party organisation. Current works on territorial politics emphasised such autonomy in terms of the choices to enter government coalitions at regional and local levels and/or their campaign and electoral strategy on regional and local elections (Swenden and Maddens, 2009b, p. 254; Detterbeck, 2012, chap. 7). Yet, little work has been done on the abilities of sub-national party organisations to influence the central headquarters in their electoral and programmatic choices in regard to national elections. This concerns particularly the process of candidate selection, where a regional and/or local party organisation may have a direct impact on the electoral campaign. In this respect, it is expected that a decentralised candidate selection enables parties to reflect the particularities of the social contexts of electoral units. This is because a regional and/or local party organisation should be more inclined to select candidates that come from the community, in which they live, and are more aware of and immersed in addressing the particular issues of their constituency than candidates that have limited personal relations to their constituency. Therefore, in matters of electoral geography, it is expected that:

(H3c) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when a European radical left party has a more decentralised candidate selection procedure.

### 3.3.3. Radical left subculture

Party linkages with the wider radical left subculture can further influence its electoral potential across a territory. Political parties are neither the only, nor isolated actors of a country's political life. As recently as the 1970s there is a growing body of evidence that other forms of political organisation, such as social movements, associations, collectives, informal groups, etc. can take up parties' roles to advocate for the introduction or implementation of specific policies or to influence significantly the public debate on particular matters (Lawson and Merkl, 1988). The electoral relevance of non-party organisations is particularly noticeable, as revealed by numerous studies of their contribution for the electoral rise of Green (Müller-Rommel, 1993), radical right (Kitschelt and McGann, 1996), and radical left parties (Tsakatika and Lisi, 2013a). In such a

context, parties are often part of a much larger social milieu, in which they serve a particular function (Mouffe and Laclau, 1985; Minkenberg, 2003; Dean, 2016). This perspective suggests a significant role for the dynamics between parties and other participants within their particular subculture, as these dynamics shape the extent parties are integrated within the subculture and can, thus, rely on its support and capabilities during elections. For RLPs relevant relations concern those with traditional mass organisations, such as trade unions, anti-war, or women's organisations, as well as with the growing diversity of social movements, campaigning for causes such as feminism, anti-racism, or environmentalism (March, 2011, chap. 8). Therefore, an expectation is that the intensity of these relations across a territory may shape the electoral geographies of European RLPs.

The analysis, therefore, requires an evaluation of two important variables. Firstly, the overall nature of party relations with its subculture influences the extent this variable may contribute to its electoral geography. While an RLP may benefit electorally from these relations due to a close entanglement, the lack of good relations may hamper the role of this variable or, alternatively, be counterproductive for the RLP electoral potential in a particular place. The existing literature on the relations of RLPs with its subculture identifies broadly two particular types of dynamics from a party perspective. On the one hand, RLPs can maintain a vanguardist type of relations (Tsakatika and Lisi, 2013a, p. 11), characterised by the presence of a network of nominally independent front organisations and/or officially-affiliated structures (March, 2011, p. 167). From a territorial perspective, this type of relations suggests that the party, in fact, relies extensively on its own organisational capabilities by spilling over into other organisational forms in order to broaden its social outreach. In such a context, a vanguardist type of relations indicates a rather limited role of party linkages with the wider radical left subculture either due to a dominance of these front organisations or due to rather negative relations with independent organisations.

On the other hand, more recent years saw the rise of reciprocal relations between RLPs and the wider subculture. These linkages represent the exact opposite of vanguardist relations. Rather than dominating the relations, the party favours standing on par with the radical left non-party milieu and, thus, it

integrates its capabilities within a wider network of genuinely independent organisations for the pursuit of common goals. In such circumstances, the party presents itself not as much as the guiding force of the wider movement, but as its political voice, benefiting from the strength of institutional relations established on equal footing (Tsakatika and Lisi, 2013a, pp. 13–14). From a geographical perspective, therefore, the reciprocal relations signal a potentially high impact of the linkages with the wider subculture on the electoral geographies of European RLPs.

Secondly, it is important to identify where those relations manifest themselves. The existing literature on territoriality of social movements made significant progress in highlighting the different ways social movements spread their activities across space (e.g. della Porta *et al.*, 2006), while there is a growing amount of research of the specific relations between RLPs and radical left social movements at national and sub-national levels (Wennerhag, Fröhlich and Piotrowski, 2016; Roca, Martín-Díaz and Díaz-Parra, 2017). While these works focused predominantly on the collective action of non-party organisations, this thesis takes rather the reversed perspective by placing political parties in the centre of social movement activity. This is because the collaboration between a party and non-party organisation may enable the latter to spread their messages through the organisational capabilities of the former. Furthermore, the joint activities between the party and non-party organisation in a particular place may transfer the public standing of the latter to an electoral standing of the former. From a geographical perspective, these relations across a territory should be reflected in the electoral geography of a party. In this respect, it is expected that in places where an RLP cooperates with the subculture, it will perform better than in places where it does not, leading to a specific electoral geography.

(H3d) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the relations between European radical left parties and radical left subcultures have a wider territorial scope.

## 4. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed a wide range of literature, including the one on electoral geography, party and party system nationalisation, and territorial politics. The review highlighted three main factors with the potential of shaping the electoral geography of the European radical left: the social context, the institutional framework, and organisational capabilities. By investigating what variables of these three factors contribute to the electoral geography of RLPs this thesis identified three alternative explanations. Building upon this theoretical background, the following chapter presents the electoral geographies of the three cases, the imbalanced pattern of the Left (Die Linke, Germany), the balanced pattern of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM, the Czech Republic), and the mid-level pattern of the Socialist Party (SP, the Netherlands) in more detail and relate these to their ideological and organisational development post-1990. In doing so, it offers a clear background for the analysis in Chapters 4 to 6.

# Chapter 3 The electoral geographies of Die Linke, the Socialist Party, and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, 1990-2013

## 1. Introduction

This chapter presents in detail the dependent variable of this thesis, the patterns of territorial distribution of electoral support for the three cases of this study, The Left (Die Linke, Germany), the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM, the Czech Republic) and the Socialist Party (SP, the Netherlands) since 1990. As discussed in the previous two chapters these patterns represent a categorisation of the territorial balance of the electoral performance of a party across electoral units. The more similar the vote shares of a party between electoral units, the more balanced its territorial pattern of electoral support. For the ease of understanding, this thesis uses the term 'electoral geography' to denote the patterns of territorial distribution of the electoral performance across electoral units. From that perspective, the main research question of this chapter is 'What are the main particularities of the electoral geographies of Die Linke, SP, and KSČM at national elections since 1990?'

An answer to this question requires tracing the electoral history, and the ideological and programmatic development of these cases. This is important for understanding the country-specific context for the emergence of these patterns. This chapter reveals that the study of the electoral geographies of the three cases is embedded in the literature on their electoral performance. Yet, although the three parties share relatively similar overall electoral results at national elections since 1990, these are underpinned by different electoral geographies. This chapter points out that while the three main explanations – the social context (i.e. the socio-economic particularities of a place), political structures (i.e. the political institutions and party system of a country), and party organisational capabilities (i.e. its organisational resources and opportunities) – are present in the study of the electoral performance of Die Linke, SP, and KSČM, the majority of their insights do not explain the recent developments of their electoral geographies. This, therefore, highlights the significance of this research for the study of these cases, as it addresses a theoretical gap related to explanations of their territorial patterns of electoral support.

Therefore, the structure of this chapter looks into three main aspects of Die Linke, KSČM, and SP: their electoral history and ideological and programmatic development, their underlying electoral geography, as well as a discussion of the main explanations for their electoral geographies. The three cases are chosen as they are exemplary for a balanced (KSČM), mid-range (SP) and imbalanced (Die Linke) electoral geography, thus, capturing to a large extent the complete range of possible territorial distributions of electoral support for European radical left parties (RLPs) since 1990. A conclusion summarises the ways the alternative explanations can explain the electoral geographies of the three cases and contribute to the existing literature on these parties.

## 2. Die Linke

### 2.1. Ideological and organisational development and electoral history

The history of Die Linke can be traced back to the collapse of the authoritarian communist regime in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Delegitimised and discredited, the ruling Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) evaded complete organisational disintegration through the energetic and rapid reaction of its reform-oriented members, led by Gregor Gysi (Gerner, 1994; Behrend, 2006, chap. 1). In an extraordinary party congress in January 1990 the party decided to rename itself as SED-Party of Democratic Socialism (SED-PDS) in order to keep its loyal base and to be able to access its remaining organisational and material resources (Gerner, 1994; Behrend, 2006). In February 1990, the party dropped the SED prefix from its name, participating in the first and only democratic elections in GDR under its new name, Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS)[8].

Following the rapid dissolution of GDR in October 1990, the party had to promptly establish an electoral basis in order to sustain its political presence in the federal elections in December the same year. This has been done mainly

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[8] These elections are significant to understand the PDS prior to its transformation as a regionalist radical left party in Reunified Germany. The party mobilised 16.4% of the vote (Andersen and Woyke, 1990, p. 26), presenting itself as a supporter of the continuity of GDR as an independent state, opposing Reunification (Neugebauer and Stöss, 1996). Yet the rapid development of events in early 1990 quickly directed the work of the Volkskammer towards Reunification, leading to a very short-lived period of democratic existence for the independent GDR.

through a highly incoherent party program, passed in February 1990. While the PDS set itself on a reformist pathway by clearly rejecting dogmatic Marxism-Leninism and the blatant authoritarian aspects associated with the SED, it offered a rather conflicting vision, according to which market economy was a generally efficient economic system (PDS, 1990, p. 8), while also in need of democratisation in order to be efficient (PDS, 1990, p. 10). Similarly, while the party emphasised rather post-materialist aims, such as 'free space for the development of everyone' (PDS, 1990, p. 7), in its discussion of how these aims could be reached, it offered a number of measures related to improving the material circumstances of German society (PDS, 1990, pp. 8–17). Also, beneath the universalist position in favour of a 'demilitarised united Europe' (PDS, 1990, p. 23), the party also stressed the importance of 'the peaceful and democratic unity of the German people in a union of free and emancipated peoples and nations in Europe' (PDS, 1990, p. 23), highlighting a rather particular understanding of its policies. Most importantly, PDS remained very ambiguous in its assessment of its legacy from the authoritarian communist regime, advocating for a 'third way' that both rejected the authoritarianism of the past, but also shied away from Western social democracy (Hough, Koß and Olsen, 2007, pp. 17–21). Despite these ambiguities, the program served the initial party goals, as it offered a convincing reform-oriented profile for the supporters of the former regime and the ruling SED following the collapse of GDR.

Organisationally, PDS aimed to maintain its organisational network in the East, having experienced major losses of members and assets in the early 1990s (Neugebauer and Stöss, 1996). An initial attempt to forge links with left-wing groups in Western Germany was abandoned, following the decision of the German Constitutional Court to grant a special rule for the 1990 federal elections that any party that passed the 5% threshold either in Western or in Eastern Germany would receive parliamentary seats (Meuche-Mäker, 2005, pp. 15–16). In such circumstances, the party could safely concentrate its campaign efforts solely in the East in order to enter the Bundestag. As a result, PDS saw no problem passing the electoral threshold by mobilising 11.1% in the East[9] and winning one direct mandate (Berlin-Marzahn – Hellersdorf). This result, however, indicated the significant ideological and legitimacy crisis of the party despite its

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[9] In the West its vote share was more than marginal: 0.3% (Berger *et al.*, 1994, p. 616)

rejection of authoritarianism, as it lost more than 5% compared to the March 1990 elections in GDR.

The period between 1990 and 1998 marked a slow and somewhat rocky recovery. The PDS reform-oriented leadership around Gregor Gysi and Lothar Bisky grappled with a significant internal opposition against its reform efforts. On the one hand, informal groups of party members with significant governmental experience aimed towards a pragmatic social-democratisation of the party and its transformation into a reliable coalition partner (Koß, 2007, pp. 128–129). These groups were mainly embedded in the East German party elite that made its governmental return at the regional level in the mid-1990s[10]. On the other hand, more radical internal groups, such as the Marxist Forum and the Communist Platform, demanded the termination of the party reform, if not the reversal of early decisions that criticised the SED authoritarian legacy (Koß, 2007, pp. 120–121). As a result of these conflicting views, in 1993, the party passed a new party program and new party statute that accommodated the often-conflicting views of both sides rather than resolving their disagreements.

Ideologically, PDS continued to present itself as a democratic socialist party, underpinned by reformist and universalist positions of staunch advocacy for social justice and anti-militarism (PDS, 1993). What made the party stand out in contrast to its previous profile, and within the party system of Reunified Germany, was it emphasis on territorially-distinctive issues, as it intertwined socialism with championing an East German interest, directed towards overcoming the political, social, and economic challenges of the German Reunification through a socially just integration of the former GDR (Hough, 2001). This change indicates a much firmer identification with post-materialist matters of personal and collective identity, emphasising the importance of regional identity as the basis for specific socio-economic demands. Such a shift allowed the party to restore somewhat its public credibility after the collapse of the authoritarian regime in GDR in 1989, establish a distinctive and firm electoral base, and position itself within the German political system as a regionalist radical left party (Segert, 2002).

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[10] Between 1994 and 2002 PDS tolerated the centre-left government in Saxony-Anhalt, while between 1998 and 2006 it governed as a minor coalition partner with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

These efforts proved successful for the party during the 1990s. In the 1994 federal elections PDS again failed to pass the 5% threshold, as it mobilised a 4.4% vote share (Emmert, Jung and Roth, 1998, p. 46). Yet it won parliamentary representation as it gained four direct mandates in East Berlin constituencies[11], allowing it to establish a parliamentary faction in the Bundestag. The party further improved its performance in 1998, reaching 5.1% vote share and succeeding in the same four East Berlin constituencies (Emmert, Jung and Roth, 2001, p. 19). Yet, despite the electoral success brought by its regionalist profile, the considerable support from the East German states would have not ensured parliamentary representation if PDS had not received more than 450,000 votes from Western Germany (Neugebauer and Stöss, 2003, p. 129). In fact, PDS struggled to arrive in the West. Generally, the party faced a significant image problem, being clearly perceived as an East German phenomenon (Hough and Koß, 2009a). This image was further amplified through the party presence in Western Germany, mainly based on close cooperation with fringe, often extreme left groups (Meuche-Mäker, 2005, p. 81). The party leadership saw this as a significant problem, prompting a major internal debate on whether PDS should maintain its East German profile or transform into an all-German party (Patton, 2011, pp. 89–118). The resolution of this task was going to be done without Gysi or Bisky, as the two stepped down in favour of a younger leadership by the turn of the century.

The new leadership, however, failed to resolve the ideological and organisational divides within the party. While Bisky's successor, Gabriele Zimmer, actively sought to bridge the divide, a series of weak performances in regional elections in the early 2000s saw the party falling into internal disarray (Hough, Koß and Olsen, 2007, pp. 38–41). The culmination of these internal battles came at the 2002 federal elections. The party lost all but two seats, following a rather chaotic campaign of unclear messages, and was outmanoeuvred by its mainstream left-wing competitor, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), in regards to core ideological tenets, such as anti-militarism and social justice (Neugebauer and Stöss, 2003). Such a result also proved the end of Zimmer's leadership, leaving the post in 2003. Returning from his retirement, Lothar Bisky took the lead again and brought significant stability, both

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[11] These were Berlin-Mitte – Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin-Pankow, Berlin-Lichtenberg, Berlin-Hellersdorf – Marzahn.

organisationally and electorally. The latter stemmed from strong performances in regional and European elections in 2003 and 2004 (Patton, 2011, pp. 119–148), while the former was ensured through a new party program in 2003. It contained rather cosmetic changes to the one of 1993, mainly reflecting the increased influence of the radical internal groups. For example, while the PDS declared itself as striving for government participation, it also defined itself as an anti-system party opposed to the 'neoliberal offensive' (PDS, 2003, p. 5). Furthermore, the section on its evaluation of its historical legacy was removed, indicating the unresolved character of its engagement with its past. What the party kept at its core in this new program was its regionalist profile. Yet its electoral meltdown in 2002 made clear the need to broaden its appeal beyond regionalism.

The resolution of these challenges came from outside PDS. The red-green coalition between SPD and Alliance 90/the Greens, which governed Germany between 1998 and 2005, implemented major social welfare and labour market reform under the so-called Agenda 2010 aimed at balancing the federal budget and improving the productivity and flexibility of the labour market (Blank, 2011, chap. 6). Its pivotal policy reform, Hartz IV, proved most controversial as it reduced the unemployment benefits of a significant number of recipients and forced them to actively look for jobs in order to continue to receive them (Blank, 2011, pp. 158–160). These policies led to the growth of public discontent outside and within SPD and the Greens. In 2004, the Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG) emerged as a reaction to these policies, an anti-austerity protest party mustering diverse West German left-wing circles, such as autonomous radical leftists, left-wing intellectuals, former SPD-affiliated trade unionists and left social democrats (Nachtwey, 2007). Despite an initial hostility between PDS and WASG, the two parties decided to work towards intense cooperation for the upcoming federal elections following their failure to enter the state parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia in 2005 (Neugebauer and Stöss, 2008). More importantly, the decision of the red-green coalition to call an early election accelerated their work towards an electoral alliance, called The Left Party.PDS, aided by the return of Gregor Gysi to politics together with the inclusion of the West German left-wing grandee, Oscar Lafontaine (Lorenz, 2007).

The 2005 elections were a resounding success for the alliance. The Left Party.PDS mobilised 8.7% and won three direct mandates (Hunsicker *et al*., 2009), becoming the best electoral performance of a German RLP following the Reunification. In the following elections of 2009, the party, carrying its current name, Die Linke, improved its result, reaching its all-time best 11.9% and winning 16 single-member constituencies (Hunsicker *et al*., 2013). The 2013 federal elections marked a decline in support back to 2005 levels, attracting 8.7% and winning four direct mandates, but nevertheless, Die Linke by far achieved more substantial electoral results than PDS alone. A central role for this success was its programmatic profile. The electoral success of 2005 accelerated the process of the merger between PDS and WASG, which was completed in 2007. An initial programmatic document called 'Programmatic basic points' revealed a substantial shift of PDS policies towards an outspoken all-German radical left profile while keeping its predominantly post-materialist and universalist basis. Any references to representing East German interests were replaced with an advocacy for the improvement of economically deprived areas (referred as 'structurally weak regions'), while its economic demands moved in a more transformative direction, advocating for a clear reversal of the existing capitalist policies and the preservation of the welfare state (Die Linke, 2007b). These aspects highlighted the strong programmatic influence of WASG despite its smaller party size at the time of the merger (Coffé and Plassa, 2010). In 2011, Die Linke passed a fully-fledged program that built upon the 'Programmatic basic points' and, more importantly, resolved the ambivalent issue of its evaluation of its historical legacy. The party openly condemned the authoritarian practices of the former GDR, while also acknowledging the important lessons of the attempt to establish a socialist state on German territory (Die Linke, 2011, pp. 10–13). In doing so, Die Linke seemed a qualitatively and quantitatively different party from its predecessors, PDS and WASG.

## 2.2.  The electoral geography of Die Linke, 1990-2013

Despite the changing ideological and programmatic character of the party and its shifting electoral fortunes, its electoral geography remains to a large extent stable. As seen in Figure 3.1, between the Bundestag elections in 1990 and 2013, Die Linke maintained an imbalanced territorial pattern of electoral

support. During its existence as PDS, the party established highly imbalanced levels of standardised and weighted Party Nationalisation Score (PNS)[12] ranging from 0.27 in 1990 to 0.36 in 2002, generally improving with each election despite its electoral meltdown by the early 2000s (Figure 3.1). Since the emergence of Die Linke in 2005 as an electoral alliance, the balance of electoral support has improved noticeably, reaching PNS levels ranging between 0.57 (2005) and 0.69 (2009). Yet these levels are still far away from a significant balance of support across all 16 German states. Hence, similarly to the overall trend of European RLPs since 1990, while the overall electoral performance improved, coupled with a growing balance of its territorial outreach across electoral units, its electoral geography remains to a large extent imbalanced.

A closer look into the particularities of the electoral geography of Die Linke highlights potential sources of this stability underneath the noticeable change towards an increasing territorial balance of electoral support. On a broader level, the electoral geography of Die Linke throughout all elections since 1990 is split between high levels of electoral support in Eastern Germany, represented by the so-called 'new states' i.e. those that were part of the GDR (albeit in a significantly different form and borders) and incorporated in Reunified Germany, and low levels of electoral support in the ten West German 'old states'. As seen in Table 3.1, while the party support in Eastern Germany ranged between 11.1% (1990) and 28.5% (2009), in Western Germany it was between 0.3% (1990) and 8.3% (2009), only passing the 5% barrier since 2009. Therefore, the electoral geography of Die Linke may need to be understood in the context of these clear differences in electoral support between Eastern and Western Germany.

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[12] This is a measurement for the level of similarity of vote shares between electoral units, ranging between 1 (limited differences in electoral support across electoral units) and 0 (major differences in electoral support across electoral units).

**Figure 3.1. The electoral performance and territorial balance of Die Linke in national elections, 1990-2013**
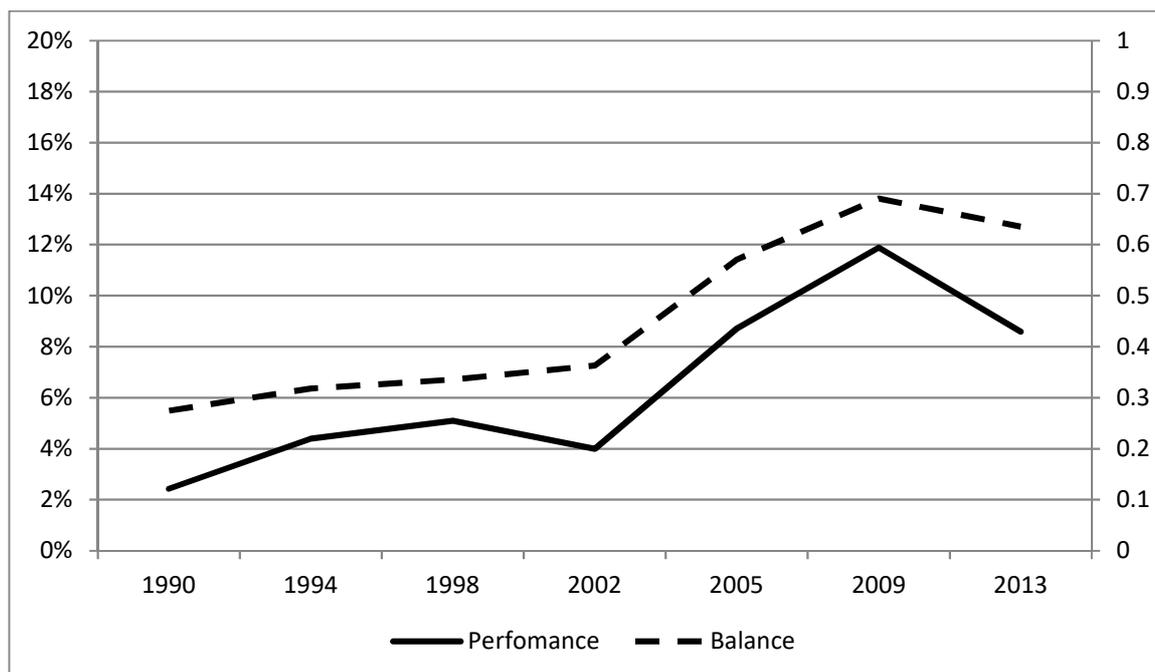


Source: Federal Returning Officer (2018)
Territorial balance is measured through the weighted and standardised Party Nationalisation Score, as calculated by Bochsler (2010a)

**Table 3.1. The electoral performance of PDS and Die Linke in federal elections between West and East Germany by their regional list vote share, 1990-2013**

|  | 1990 | 1994 | 1998 | 2002 | 2005 | 2009 | 2013 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Western states and West Berlin** | 0.33% | 0.95% | 1.16% | 1.13% | 4.88% | 8.32% | 5.56% |
| **Eastern states and East Berlin** | 16.40% | 11.11% | 19.76% | 21.58% | 16.93% | 28.52% | 22.66% |
| **Overall** | **2.43%** | **4.39%** | **5.10%** | **3.99%** | **8.71%** | **11.89%** | **8.59%** |

Source: Federal Returning Officer (2018)

Despite these stable differences of electoral performance between the East and the West of the country, a state-level analysis highlights a bigger dynamism of support (Table 3.2). Looking into the strong support for Die Linke in the East, there are noticeable changes in where the party achieves this. While during the 1990s, the PDS made its strongest performances particularly in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Die Linke established its highest levels of support in Saxony-Anhalt. Further to these swings, the party performs generally well in Brandenburg, while it improved substantially its electoral support in Thuringia since the merger. Places of stable levels of support in this sea of change before and after the merger are the Eastern strongholds of Berlin and Saxony. There Die Linke regularly achieves its lowest electoral results among its East German

strongholds. This suggests that the stable levels of electoral performance of Die Linke throughout the years in Eastern Germany can be understood both as an outcome of the high dynamism of support, evident in four of the new states, as well as through the stable levels of performance in the final two. In other words, it seems that the electoral geography of Die Linke is both a product of significant dynamism across time, but also of noticeable continuity.

**Table 3.2. The electoral performance of PDS and Die Linke on federal elections in German states by their regional list vote share, 1990-2013**

| | 1990 | | 1994 | | 1998 | | 2002 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Overall** | **2.43%** | **Overall** | **4.39%** | **Overall** | **5.10%** | **Overall** | **3.99%** |
| Meckel. W. Pom. | 14.23% | Meckel. W. Pom. | 23.60% | Meckel. W. Pom. | 23.64% | Brandenburg | 17.24% |
| Brandenburg | 11.03% | Brandenburg | 19.28% | Thuringia | 21.23% | Thuringia | 16.95% |
| Berlin | 9.72% | Saxony-Anhalt | 18.00% | Saxony-Anhalt | 20.68% | Meckel. W. Pom. | 16.32% |
| Saxony-Anhalt | 9.37% | Thuringia | 17.15% | Brandenburg | 20.30% | Saxony | 16.17% |
| Saxony | 9.03% | Saxony | 16.69% | Saxony | 19.96% | Saxony-Anhalt | 14.41% |
| Thuringia | 8.26% | Berlin | 14.85% | Berlin | 13.45% | Berlin | 11.36% |
| Bremen | 1.06% | Bremen | 2.73% | Bremen | 2.44% | Bremen | 2.24% |
| Hamburg | 1.06% | Hamburg | 2.24% | Hamburg | 2.32% | Hamburg | 2.10% |
| Hesse | 0.38% | Schl.-Holstein | 1.12% | Schl.-Holstein | 1.47% | Saarland | 1.40% |
| Schl.-Holstein | 0.34% | Hesse | 1.07% | Hesse | 1.46% | Hesse | 1.34% |
| Lower Saxony | 0.32% | Lower Saxony | 0.98% | NRW | 1.21% | Schl.-Holstein | 1.30% |
| NRW | 0.28% | NRW | 0.97% | Saarland | 1.03% | NRW | 1.20% |
| Baden-Württ. | 0.25% | Baden-Württ. | 0.76% | Lower Saxony | 1.01% | Lower Saxony | 1.04% |
| Bavaria | 0.22% | Saarland | 0.71% | Rhineland Pal. | 1.01% | Rhineland Pal. | 1.00% |
| Rhineland Pal. | 0.18% | Rhineland Pal. | 0.62% | Baden-Württ. | 0.98% | Baden-Württ. | 0.95% |
| Saarland | 0.16% | Bavaria | 0.55% | Bavaria | 0.66% | Bavaria | 0.67% |

| | **2005** | | **2009** | | **2013** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Overall** | **8.71%** | **Overall** | **11.89%** | **Overall** | **8.59%** |
| Saxony-Anhalt | 26.57% | Saxony-Anhalt | 32.38% | Saxony-Anhalt | 25.42% |
| Brandenburg | 26.56% | Meckel. W. Pom. | 29.00% | Thuringia | 24.31% |
| Thuringia | 26.08% | Thuringia | 28.81% | Brandenburg | 23.90% |
| Meckel. W. Pom. | 23.67% | Brandenburg | 28.51% | Meckel. W. Pom. | 23.62% |
| Saxony | 22.80% | Saxony | 24.48% | Saxony | 21.52% |
| Saarland | 18.48% | Saarland | 21.18% | Berlin | 18.66% |
| Berlin | 16.35% | Berlin | 20.23% | Saarland | 8.72% |
| Bremen | 8.45% | Bremen | 14.28% | Bremen | 8.67% |
| Hamburg | 6.30% | Hamburg | 11.18% | Hamburg | 7.53% |
| Rhineland Pal. | 5.56% | Rhineland Pal. | 9.36% | Hesse | 5.32% |
| Hesse | 5.32% | Lower Saxony | 8.58% | NRW | 5.11% |
| NRW | 5.17% | Hesse | 8.54% | Rhineland Pal. | 4.81% |
| Schl.-Holstein | 4.59% | NRW | 8.41% | Lower Saxony | 4.27% |
| Lower Saxony | 4.30% | Schl.-Holstein | 7.90% | Baden-Württem. | 4.20% |
| Baden-Württem. | 3.76% | Baden-Württem. | 7.16% | Schl.-Holstein | 4.07% |
| Bavaria | 3.45% | Bavaria | 6.45% | Bavaria | 3.43% |

Source: Federal Returning Officer (2018)
Territorial balance is measured through the weighted and standardised Party Nationalisation Score, as calculated by Bochsler (2010a)

A situation mirroring the one in Eastern Germany can be observed in the Western states. Here the dynamism is less prevalent as it is in the East. While the party made a stellar rise in its overall level of support in the ten old states before and after the merger (Table 3.1), there is little change in the comparative levels of its performance between these states. The party remains consistently strong (relatively!) in the city-states of Bremen and Hamburg, while remaining almost completely marginal in the Southern states of Bavaria and Baden-Wurttemberg in the past three decades (Table 3.2). In Northern Rhine-Westphalia, Hesse, and Lower Saxony, situated in West-Central Germany Die Linke maintains slightly lower levels of support compared to its nationwide average. In contrast to these stable levels of performance, bigger dynamism can be observed in three states. On the one hand, in the Schleswig-Holstein in the North, the party significantly lost ground in relative terms, as its support in the state dropped from slightly lower than average levels before the merger to electoral marginality following it. In contrast, in Saarland and neighbouring Rhineland-Palatinate in the German South-West, Die Linke moved away from electoral marginality, with those states becoming some of the strongest West German places in relative terms following the 2007 merger. Hence, while the electoral support for Die Linke in the West is characterised by overall stability of its relative levels, these cases point towards a potential dynamism that lies beneath.

## 2.3. Current explanations for the electoral geography of Die Linke

Current explanations of the sources for the electoral geography of the party are embedded in the literature on its electoral performance. In this respect, there are two main explanations for the imbalanced pattern of electoral performance. First, during the 1990s a dominant explanation highlighted the role of socio-economic and historic differences between the Eastern and Western states, suggesting the relevance of social context. According to this explanation, PDS tapped into the growing disillusionment of the East German society with the negative economic and social effects of the Reunification (Neu, 2004; Hough, Koß and Olsen, 2007; Olsen, Koß and Hough, 2010; Patton, 2011). This is particularly highlighted by numerous studies of the voter profile of the party throughout the years emphasising their ideological

conviction, dissatisfaction with, if not mistrust of democracy, and clear East German identity (Klein and Caballero, 1996; Neugebauer and Stöss, 1996; Doerschler and Banaszak, 2007; Vail, 2009; Bowyer and Vail, 2011; Vail and Bowyer, 2012; Doerschler, 2015). Therefore, the electoral geography of PDS seems to depend on a different electoral agenda between these two major parts of the country, facilitated by their different historical legacies of existence as independent states in the preceding four decades. While this explanation seems relevant for the elections prior to the merger, it has limited explanatory power for more recent years. While Die Linke may still have strong electoral support in the East given its voter profile, its 2002 electoral loss signals a decline in the relevance of the different electoral agendas between the East and the West. This suggests a change in the social contexts across the country. Therefore, if this explanation is still relevant, then there should be other factors underpinning it.

Second, an alternative explanation for the differences in social context between the East and the West focuses on the role of the party itself and the influence of political structures for its electoral geography. On the one hand, as noted, the special electoral rules for the 1990 Bundestag election, granting parliamentary entry to any party that passes the 5% threshold in either Eastern or Western Germany, as well as the rules to bypass the threshold seem to explain the strategic choice of PDS to pursue a regionalist profile (e.g. Hough, Koß and Olsen, 2007, pp. 23–24). Furthermore, the party clearly has a major image problem in the West, as its authoritarian legacy as a legal and organisational successor to the SED pushes away an overwhelming majority of West Germans. In contrast, Die Linke still remains organisationally rooted in the East (Behrend, 2006, pp. 169–173), maximising its electoral potential in the new states. From that perspective, its electoral geography seems a product of its use of the political structures and its regionalist ideological profile that focuses its electoral efforts on mobilising support in the East rather than the West. Again, as with the explanation above, while this perspective explains the electoral geography of PDS prior to the merger it sheds little light on the lasting imbalances of support even after Die Linke moved away from regionalism towards an all-German radical left profile, setting firmer roots in the West with the help of WASG.

Overall, the current literature on the electoral performance of Die Linke offers rather dated explanations for its electoral geography. In particular, explaining the territorial distribution of its electoral support as a matter of the socio-cultural differences between the East and West German societies, or as the struggle of the party to find its place in the West, highlights the need to reflect the effects of the fundamental changes to Die Linke since the 2007 merger. In this respect, it seems that the stable imbalance in its electoral geography is rather indicative of the role of its organisational capabilities, rather than the surrounding environment.

## 3. Socialist Party

### 3.1. Ideological and organisational development and electoral history

The Socialist Party (SP) in the Netherlands has a very different organisational, ideological, and electoral trajectory compared with Die Linke. The party emerged in 1971 as a Maoist splinter from the minor Communist Unity Movement of the Netherlands (Marxist-Leninist). In its early years, it engaged predominantly in building up an organisational network of dedicated members. Particularly telling was their nickname, 'the Red Jehovahs', highlighting their dedication in spreading the party message and their visibility and activity across communities (Voerman, 1987). The result of these initial efforts was an extensive network of local party organisations, supported by numerous mass organisations or communal services, including a small trade union (Worker's Power), a tenants' association (Association of Tenants and Housing-seekers), a healthcare organisation (Prevention is Better), and an environmental protection group (Environmental Action Centre Netherlands). Such an engagement paid off electorally, as the party mobilised strong support in local elections during the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in the Southern provinces of North Brabant and Limburg. The small town of Oss had a central role in this respect, where the party managed to enter its first elected representatives and build up a solid organisational base, including a small healthcare centre, Our Medical Centre (Slager, 2001).

Such a strong engagement was enshrined programmatically through the Maoist principle '[to] serve the people'. The first party program reflected to a

large extent its Maoist transformative roots, as SP described itself as a revolutionary party (SP, 1974, p. 9), aiming for the establishment of a socialist state in the Netherlands (SP, 1974, p. 7). The achievement of this aim was subjugated rather to intensive local work. In this context, the party highlighted the importance of non-parliamentary actions, involving wage strikes, environmental actions and demonstrations (SP, 1974, p. 8). Central in this respect was its materialist understanding of its actions, as its program states that 'characteristic for socialism is that the means of production […] are property of the people' (SP, 1974, p. 6), while making very limited references to any broader, cross-country implications of its goals. Overall, this program suggested that the party clearly was less interested in electoral politics than in building lasting linkages with local communities.

By the end of the 1970s, however, SP began to shift from its Maoist image towards a rather communist one for two main reasons. First, the increased party engagement across communities required an expansion of its membership. This, however, was not acceptable for the early generation of party members, led by their first leader, Daan Monjé, who were sceptical of opening the party to members and loosening the party requirements for membership, as they perceived it as a break with fundamental ideological principles (Lingen, 2016). This highlights the second main reason: a significant internal battle between Monjé and the younger generation of ideologically flexible party members around Jan Marijnissen ensued not only around the membership debate but also around questions of party ideology and the general direction of its development. By the mid-1980s this struggle was resolved in favour of Marijnissen's group that abandoned any Maoist references even in the party newspaper (Keith, 2011, pp. 82–85).

The party confirmed these changes with a new program, where it toned down its revolutionary rhetoric by advocating the practical strengths of socialism in terms of ensuring improved productivity and democratisation (SP, 1987, pp. 18–20). The party still emphasised non-parliamentary action, stressing the continued importance of its work in communities, but it also highlighted the significance of electoral politics as means to spread its message across a wide range of social groups (SP, 1987, p. 19). The party maintained its materialist, transformative ideological profile, but in classic communist terms. For example,

it defined itself as a vanguardist party, the 'guardian and promoter of socialist thought', as a mass party that 'moves with the masses like fish in water', and, importantly, as an organisationally democratic centralist party (SP, 1987, pp. 20–21). The latter represents a further remnant of its Maoist period, as SP perpetuated the presence of its highly centralised organisational structures despite opening itself towards new recruits. Such a combination of a significant ideological change, coupled with a limited organisational reform, offered mixed results for the party during the 1980s. While SP expanded its presence in local and regional legislatures (Voerman, 1987, pp. 144–145), it continuously failed to enter the Dutch House of Representatives, as all its attempts between 1977 and 1989 failed to mobilise enough votes to gain a seat.

The end of these misfortunes came in the early 1990s. In 1991, the party further its ideological profile. Having abandoned its Maoist references and embraced communism at a practical level, SP officially renounced Marxism-Leninism in favour of socialism in a new program, 'Charter 2000: A society for people', underpinned by a new party statute. The program clearly moved away from its remaining communist views, taking a rather socialist perspective and addressing a much wider range of issues than previously, including themes such as the environment, law-and-order, and agricultural policy. In doing so, SP shifted ideologically in a reformist and post-materialist direction, while retaining its views of emphasising the importance of community. The party continued to advocate for a socialist economy, describing it as 'economical and efficient' (SP, 1989, p. 18) while refraining from clear declarations on what SP actually is as a party. Given its open declaration against NATO membership of the Netherlands and a critical stance towards the emerging European Union (SP, 1989, pp. 43–48), it seemed that the party implicitly declared itself as a firm anti-political establishment actor. Nevertheless, this program revealed a significant moderation of its ideology and policies.

Such moderation enabled the party to finally enter the national parliament. In 1994, under the provocative slogan 'Vote against!', it mobilised 1.3% vote share (Steen, 1995), granting it two parliamentary places. Its left-wing

opposition to the privatisation policies of the so-called 'Purple coalition'[13] confirmed its status as a significant anti-political establishment party in Dutch politics (van der Brug, 1999). This status further improved the electoral performance of SP in 1998, almost tripling its result to 3.5% and gaining five parliamentary seats (van der Brug, 1999). The much-improved performance of the party also reflected its organisational profile. Having access to the main resources of the Dutch parliamentary system, SP invested significantly in its professionalisation, while maintaining its centralisation through Jan Marijnissen's continuous leadership (de Jong, 2017).

By the turn of the century, the party transformed from a socialist anti-political establishment party into a radical social-democratic one. Its new program, 'All of the people', passed in 1999, toned down its anti-political establishment appeal, further stressing the reformist credentials of SP while re-evaluating its emphasis on community. While it criticised the effects of the Dutch model of a free-market economy (SP, 1999, pp. 4–6), SP simply called for the restoration of community on the basis of, among others, democracy, solidarity, and respect (SP, 1999, pp. 10–11). Such a turn came as a result of its renewed and ambitious goal of gaining governmental responsibility at the national level based on its increasing governing expertise at regional and local ones. In order to achieve this, the party intensified its critique of its mainstream left-wing opponent, the Party of Labour (PvdA), by presenting a more radical social-democratic vision. The critique made major references to the past, accusing PvdA of abandoning its radical visions from the 1970s, which SP aimed to restore and adapt to the contemporary socio-economic conditions of the Netherlands (Voerman and Lucardie, 2007). Electorally, this new aim underpinned by its anti-political establishment basis was not achieved immediately. In the elections of 2002 and the snap vote of 2003, SP improved its performance compared with the 1990s (attracting, respectively, 5.9% and 6.3%, and having 9 MPs on both occasions), yet the lion's share of protest support went to the anti-political establishment Lijst Pim Fortuyn in 2002, and then to PvdA in 2003.

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[13] The coalition consisted of the social democratic Party of Labour (PvdA) and the liberal conservative People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), representing a Grand coalition of the two major poles of Dutch politics, excluding for the first time the centrist confessional Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) from power.

The major breakthrough of SP came in 2006, as the party achieved its historical best of 16.6% and 25 MPs. Such performance enabled the party to be considered as a potential coalition partner in a centre-left coalition. Yet the inconceivable differences, especially between PvdA and SP, prevented such an achievement, leaving the latter in opposition (de Jong, 2017, p. 18). This was a major blow for the party ambitions and Jan Marijnissen, the long-standing leader, particularly. After more than 20 years of leadership, he stepped down in favour of Agnes Kant. Since 2006 SP finds itself in an ideological and organisational crisis. The failure of entering government led to a noticeable exodus of party members (Table 3.3), coupled with continuous internal battles despite its centralised organisation. In recent years numerous recognisable figures have left the party, accusing it of authoritarianism in its internal works[14]. This crisis manifested itself in the elections in 2010 and 2012, as the support rather stagnated despite a further leadership change in 2010 when Emile Roemer became the leader.

**Table 3.3. Membership numbers of the Socialist Party in given years, 1992-2014**

| Year | Total membership |
| --- | --- |
| 1992 | 15,122 |
| 1994 | 15,978 |
| 1998 | 21,975 |
| 2000 | 26,553 |
| 2002 | 27,291 |
| 2004 | 43,389 |
| 2006 | 44,853 |
| 2008 | 50,238 |
| 2010 | 46,507 |
| 2012 | 44,186 |
| 2014 | 44,240 |

Source: DNPP (2018)

## 3.2. The electoral geography of the Socialist Party, 1990-2013

The regular ideological changes of the SP seem to have affected its electoral geography. The party achieved a generally balanced territorial pattern of electoral support over the past three decades. While in 1994 the territorial support for the party was slightly imbalanced (PNS of 0.74), by 2012 it reached

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[14] For example, the SP MPs in the Dutch House of Representatives (2002-2006), Ali Lazrak and Piet de Ruiter left their positions after disagreements with the internal party regulation that any elected representative from SP has to receive a minimal wage and, hence, hand over the difference with their salary to the party budget. Similarly, in a recent book, the former SP MP (2006-2017) Sharon Gesthuizen sharply criticised the internal party life of the party, especially during Jan Marijnissen's and Agnes Kant's reigns.

balanced levels of 0.87 and above[15] (Figure 3.2). Between these two elections, the party reached its highpoint of a territorial balance of performance in the extraordinary election of 2006 (PNS of 0.92). Hence, it seems that the strong electoral performances of the party are underpinned by an increasingly balanced electoral geography. Yet beneath these increasingly balanced patterns, there is a significant dynamism in regard to how the party performs across electoral units, suggesting that this increasing balance has an unstable basis.

**Figure 3.2. The electoral performance and territorial balance of the SP in national elections, 1994-2012**
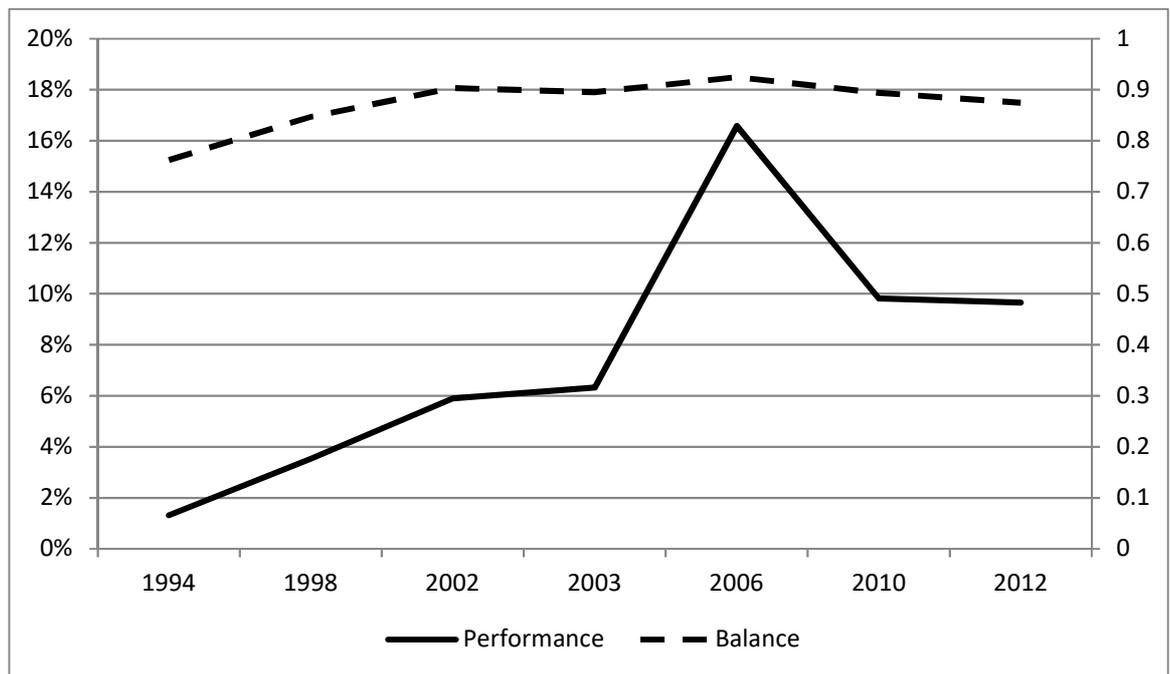


Source: Electoral Council (2018)
Territorial balance is measured through the weighted and standardised Party Nationalisation Score, as calculated by Bochsler (2010a) at constituency level (kieskring). Postal voting is not considered.

Particularly significant in this respect is the growing dynamism of the territorial distribution of electoral support for SP with each geographical scale. At a broader level, it is barely noticeable, as there is a consistent divide of support between lower levels of support in the Eastern and Western provinces of the country and higher electoral performance in the North and especially the South (Table 3.4). At a provincial level, however, the support for the party remains very volatile between elections, making it very difficult to pinpoint

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[15] This, however, is not its most balanced pattern. The extraordinary performance of 2006 was underpinned by their highest electoral balance of support, 0.92, while in the 2010 elections hovered around the 0.90 level of balance, revealing a generally balanced pattern of electoral support.

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places where there are consistent levels of performance. On the one hand, in the provinces of Limburg and North Brabant in the South, and Groningen in the North, the party maintains high levels of support throughout the years (Table 3.5). On the other hand, the remaining nine provinces are places of substantial swings in performance. While in Zeeland and Overijssel the support for SP swung from one of the lowest to a generally mid-range level, in Utrecht and Friesland its results went in the other direction, from mid-range towards low levels of support. Similarly volatile between mid-range and low levels of support are South and North Holland. In contrast, Gelderland, Friesland, and Drenthe in the North remain places where the party generally maintains a level of electoral support that resembles its nationwide average.

**Table 3.4. The electoral performance of the Socialist Party in national elections between NUTS-1 regions, 1994-2012**

|  | 1994 | 1998 | 2002 | 2003 | 2006 | 2010 | 2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **North Netherlands** | 1.07% | 3.49% | 5.86% | 6.18% | 17.45% | 11.06% | 10.14% |
| **East Netherlands** | 0.95% | 2.75% | 5.14% | 5.48% | 15.60% | 9.44% | 9.41% |
| **West Netherlands** | 1.13% | 3.15% | 5.91% | 5.93% | 15.03% | 8.13% | 7.71% |
| **South Netherlands** | 2.23% | 5.18% | 6.66% | 8.06% | 20.44% | 13.27% | 13.96% |
| **Overall** | **1.32%** | **3.53%** | **5.90%** | **6.32%** | **16.58%** | **9.82%** | **9.65%** |

Source: Electoral Council (2018)
The NUTS-1 regions of the Netherlands are used by Eurostat and ae the following NL1 (North Netherlands, including the provinces of Groningen, Friesland, and Drenthe), NL2 (East Netherlands, including Overijssel, Gelderland, Flevoland), NL3 (West Netherlands, including Utrecht, North Holland, South Holland, Zeeland), and NL4 (South Netherlands, including North Brabant, Limburg)

Similar dynamism can also be observed at a constituency-level (Table 3.6). While the majority of electoral units for the elections for the Dutch House of Representatives overlap with the Dutch provinces, some of the constituencies that diverge from this overlap highlight important elements of the dynamic electoral geography of SP. In particular, the party obtains considerably different levels of support in the three urban constituencies of Amsterdam, The Hague ('s-Gravenhage), and Rotterdam: while SP performs reasonably well in Rotterdam, achieving mid-range levels of support, its performance in Amsterdam and The Hague generally declined with each election. Furthermore, the constituency level reveals significant differences in the support in certain provinces. For example, in Gelderland, which contains the constituencies of Nijmegen and

Arnhem, the party performs generally well in the former, whereas its support in the latter ranges between mid-range to weak, compared to other constituencies. Overall, these trends again suggest that beneath the increasingly balanced electoral geography lies noticeable dynamism of support, observed at different geographical scales.

**Table 3.5. The electoral performance of the Socialist Party in parliamentary elections in Dutch provinces (provincie) by their vote share, 1994-2012**

| | 1994 | | 1998 | | 2002 | | 2003 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Overall** | **1.32%** | **Overall** | **3.53%** | **Overall** | **5.90%** | **Overall** | **6.32%** |
| North Brabant | 2.24% | North Brabant | 5.27% | North Holland | 7.34% | North Brabant | 8.20% |
| Limburg | 2.21% | Limburg | 4.98% | North Brabant | 7.08% | Groningen | 7.26% |
| Groningen | 1.70% | Groningen | 4.30% | Groningen | 6.88% | Limburg | 7.24% |
| South Holland | 1.46% | South Holland | 3.44% | Utrecht | 5.96% | North Holland | 6.98% |
| Flevoland | 1.27% | Friesland | 3.23% | Limburg | 5.75% | Friesland | 6.04% |
| Gelderland | 1.01% | North Holland | 3.08% | Friesland | 5.58% | Utrecht | 5.90% |
| Drenthe | 0.97% | Gelderland | 2.87% | Gelderland | 5.44% | Gelderland | 5.79% |
| Utrecht | 0.90% | Drenthe | 2.87% | Drenthe | 5.01% | Flevoland | 5.37% |
| North Holland | 0.86% | Zeeland | 2.77% | South Holland | 4.98% | South Holland | 5.33% |
| Overijssel | 0.78% | Flevoland | 2.65% | Flevoland | 4.78% | Drenthe | 5.07% |
| Zeeland | 0.59% | Overijssel | 2.56% | Overijssel | 4.71% | Zeeland | 5.03% |
| Friesland | 0.57% | Utrecht | 2.55% | Zeeland | 4.52% | Overijssel | 4.93% |

| | 2006 | | 2010 | | 2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Overall** | **16.58%** | **Overall** | **9.82%** | **Overall** | **9.65%** |
| Limburg | 20.56% | North Brabant | 13.43% | Limburg | 14.36% |
| North Brabant | 20.38% | Limburg | 12.92% | North Brabant | 13.79% |
| Groningen | 19.19% | Groningen | 11.66% | Groningen | 11.69% |
| Friesland | 17.07% | Friesland | 11.49% | Gelderland | 9.65% |
| North Holland | 16.76% | Drenthe | 9.80% | Friesland | 9.55% |
| Gelderland | 16.12% | Gelderland | 9.68% | Overijssel | 9.33% |
| Drenthe | 15.89% | Overijssel | 9.29% | Zeeland | 9.15% |
| Zeeland | 15.46% | Zeeland | 9.22% | Drenthe | 9.12% |
| Flevoland | 15.11% | Flevoland | 8.55% | North Holland | 8.35% |
| Overijssel | 14.82% | North Holland | 8.40% | Flevoland | 8.28% |
| South Holland | 14.33% | South Holland | 8.18% | South Holland | 7.48% |
| Utrecht | 13.24% | Utrecht | 7.11% | Utrecht | 6.56% |

Source: Electoral Council (2018)
Territorial balance is measured through the weighted and standardised Party Nationalisation Score, as calculated by Bochsler (2010a)

**Table 3.6. The electoral performance of the Socialist Party in parliamentary elections in Dutch constituencies (kieskring) by their vote share, 1994-2012**

|  | 1994 |  | 1998 |  | 2002 |  | 2003 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Overall** | **1.32%** | **Overall** | **3.53%** | **Overall** | **5.90%** | **Overall** | **6.32%** |
| s-Hertogenbosch | 2.63% | s-Hertogenbosch | 6.12% | Amsterdam | 10.83% | Amsterdam | 9.91% |
| Rotterdam | 2.21% | Rotterdam | 5.98% | 's-Hertogenbosch | 7.74% | 's-Hertogenbosch | 9.24% |
| Maastricht | 2.21% | Maastricht | 4.98% | Nijmegen | 6.95% | Nijmegen | 7.51% |
| Nijmegen | 1.99% | Amsterdam | 4.49% | Groningen | 6.88% | Tilburg | 7.39% |
| Groningen | 1.70% | Groningen | 4.30% | Den Helder | 6.47% | Groningen | 7.26% |
| Tilburg | 1.59% | Nijmegen | 4.13% | Rotterdam | 6.26% | Maastricht | 7.24% |
| Leiden | 1.57% | Tilburg | 4.13% | Tilburg | 6.20% | Rotterdam | 6.85% |
| Amsterdam | 1.54% | s-Gravenhage | 3.88% | Utrecht | 5.96% | Den Helder | 6.23% |
| s-Gravenhage | 1.50% | Leeuwarden | 3.23% | Haarlem | 5.87% | Leeuwarden | 6.04% |
| Lelystad | 1.27% | Dordrecht | 2.96% | Maastricht | 5.75% | Utrecht | 5.90% |
| Dordrecht | 1.02% | Den Helder | 2.95% | Leeuwarden | 5.58% | 's-Gravenhage | 5.83% |
| Assen | 0.97% | Assen | 2.87% | 's-Gravenhage | 5.50% | Haarlem | 5.74% |
| Utrecht | 0.90% | Leiden | 2.83% | Assen | 5.01% | Lelystad | 5.37% |
| Zwolle | 0.78% | Middelburg | 2.77% | Arnhem | 4.91% | Arnhem | 5.20% |
| Den Helder | 0.74% | Lelystad | 2.65% | Lelystad | 4.78% | Assen | 5.07% |
| Arnhem | 0.72% | Zwolle | 2.56% | Zwolle | 4.71% | Middelburg | 5.03% |
| Middelburg | 0.59% | Utrecht | 2.55% | Dordrecht | 4.67% | Zwolle | 4.93% |
| Leeuwarden | 0.57% | Arnhem | 2.43% | Leiden | 4.59% | Dordrecht | 4.93% |
| Haarlem | 0.53% | Haarlem | 2.27% | Middelburg | 4.52% | Leiden | 4.75% |

| | 2006 | | 2010 | | 2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Overall** | **16.58%** | **Overall** | **9.82%** | **Overall** | **9.65%** |
| s-Hertogenbosch | 21.23% | s-Hertogenbosch | 14.86% | s-Hertogenbosch | 15.31% |
| Maastricht | 20.56% | Maastricht | 12.92% | Maastricht | 14.36% |
| Tilburg | 19.28% | Groningen | 11.66% | Tilburg | 11.79% |
| Groningen | 19.19% | Tilburg | 11.54% | Groningen | 11.69% |
| Nijmegen | 18.63% | Leeuwarden | 11.49% | Nijmegen | 11.55% |
| Amsterdam | 18.47% | Nijmegen | 10.89% | Rotterdam | 9.93% |
| Rotterdam | 17.62% | Den Helder | 9.88% | Leeuwarden | 9.55% |
| Den Helder | 17.54% | Assen | 9.80% | Zwolle | 9.33% |
| Leeuwarden | 17.07% | Rotterdam | 9.50% | Amsterdam | 9.22% |
| Assen | 15.89% | Zwolle | 9.29% | Middelburg | 9.15% |
| Middelburg | 15.46% | Arnhem | 9.24% | Assen | 9.12% |
| Arnhem | 15.21% | Middelburg | 9.22% | Den Helder | 9.01% |
| Lelystad | 15.11% | Dordrecht | 8.91% | Arnhem | 8.96% |
| Zwolle | 14.82% | Lelystad | 8.55% | Lelystad | 8.28% |
| Dordrecht | 14.76% | Haarlem | 7.68% | Dordrecht | 7.56% |
| Haarlem | 14.72% | Leiden | 7.43% | Bonaire | 7.52% |
| s-Gravenhage | 13.95% | Amsterdam | 7.24% | s-Gravenhage | 7.52% |
| Utrecht | 13.24% | Utrecht | 7.11% | Haarlem | 7.03% |
| Leiden | 12.63% | s-Gravenhage | 6.81% | Utrecht | 6.56% |
| | | | | Leiden | 6.40% |

Source: Electoral Council (2018)
Territorial balance is measured through the weighted and standardised Party Nationalisation Score, as calculated by Bochsler (2010a)

## 3.3. Current explanations for the electoral geography of the Socialist Party

As in the case of the Die Linke, the electoral geography of SP has been explored mainly as a part of the study of its electoral performance. This literature provides two main explanations for the above-described patterns. First, significant attention has been paid to the role of social change in Dutch society and its overall impact on the party system competition in the country, highlighting the relevance of the social context and the national political structures. This perspective sees the electoral support for SP across places as an outcome of the growing volatility of Dutch voters and the Dutch party system since the 1970s (Voerman, 1987, p. 144). The main source for this volatility is the process of de-pillarisation of Dutch society. While up until the late 1960 each citizen belonged to any of the four major social pillars in the Netherlands (Catholic, Protestant, liberal, socialist), represented by an autonomous closely-knit institutional system engulfing all aspects of daily life and ensuring social control (Post, 1989), the influence of these pillars, including the established parties that benefited from that system, declined with the 'Silent Revolution' (Dekker and Ester, 1996). From that perspective, the electoral geography of SP represents the re-alignment of a part of the Catholic electorate in the South and of socialist voters in the North (Voerman, 1987, p. 144). While this explanation offers an important understanding of the increasing electoral support for the party by the mid-2000, and the stability of its support in certain places, it does not offer a convincing answer for the dynamic character of its electoral geography.

Second, an alternative perspective sees SP as the maker of its own electoral fortunes. The significant emphasis on communal engagement from its early days, and the use of its members to spread the party message, offering communities day-to-day services, was seen as a vital basis to build-up electoral support across the country, particularly in the Southern party strongholds (de Jong, 2017). Furthermore, SP continuously used its anti-political establishment profile to establish local credibility, allowing the party to enter local and regional politics and then to transform this experience into electoral capital for national elections (Voerman, 1987; Voerman and Lucardie, 2007). Pivotal in this

respect was its focus on accommodating public demands. For example, Gerrit Voerman who studied SP since its inception states that

'[…] the party started asking what they should do to attract more votes. 'What stands between us and the people? What are the barriers? Which barriers should we get rid of?' They wrote about it. […] There were certain things standing between them and the people and they were trying to work out how to get rid of them' (Voerman and Katsambekis, 2015)

In such a context, the electoral geography of SP seems like a product of their own ideological and organisational efforts to engage with communities and direct this engagement towards their goals. While this may be the case for the overall performance of SP, this perspective again struggles to account for the dynamism of its electoral geography. This suggests that there may be other organisational capabilities that may account for the dynamic character of its balanced territorial pattern of electoral support since the party entered its current period of electoral stagnation after 2006.

## 4. Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia

### 4.1. Ideological and organisational development and electoral history

The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) emerged in March 1990 as the Czech branch of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) and formally separated from its Slovak counterpart, the Party of the Democratic Left (SDĽ), prior to the 1992 parliamentary elections. In the early years of its existence the party, led by the reformer Jiří Svoboda, attempted to follow a similar, social-democratic trajectory of transformation as the SDĽ that would radically transform the party and put it on its way towards a potential return to power. Its initial program, 'With the people, for the people', passed in 1992, particularly carried this spirit of reformism: while KSČM invoked humanism and the ideas of Marx and Engels as its main programmatic inspirations (KSČM, 1992, p. 2), it declared as a main aim 'the establishment of a modern socialist society, […] free, equal, democratic, self-governing, and pluralist' (KSČM, 1992, p. 2). KSČM acknowledged the importance of the market economy, but clearly rejected the introduction of a free market at the expense of a rollback of state

involvement in the economy (KSČM, 1992, p. 4). In terms of foreign policy, the party called for neutrality (KSČM, 1992, p. 6), while also being in favour of 'European integration of equal nations' (KSČM, 1992, p. 8). More importantly, the party openly declared its condemnation of the authoritarian communist regime and apologised for the unlawful and wasteful activities of its predecessor (Balík, 2005). This suggests that KSČM moved away from its orthodox communist ideology by outlining a materialist, reformist left-wing profile.

While the program existed in this form until the end of the 1990s, its reformist spirit lost much of its relevance with the end of Svoboda's leadership. In the initial democratic elections of 1990 and 1992, KSČM mobilised respectable support, becoming the major opposition party to the centre-right government coalition, led by the Civic Forum and, later, the Civic Democratic Party (Hanley, 2002b, pp. 145–146). Despite these results, the party experienced major internal turmoil. The KSČM rank-and-file strongly opposed Svoboda's attempt at radical transformation in a social-democratic direction, culminating in 1993 with an internal referendum that rejected a proposed removal of communism from the party name and leading to Svoboda's resignation (Fiala *et al.*, 2000). In his place came Miroslav Grebeníček (1993-2005), a leader of the reform communist wing of the party, who expelled the majority of both reformist and Stalinist members (Hanley, 2001, p. 102) and, thus, ensured internal stability.

Programmatically, this wing offered an internal compromise between a recognition of the declining support for KSČM in the initial post-communist years and preservation of the fundamental party values (Hanley, 2002b), thus prioritising ideological continuity instead of electoral regeneration. This was confirmed in a new programmatic document, 'Program renewal', in 1999 (KSČM, 1999), where the party maintained its fundamental opposition to a market economy and the Euro-Atlantic orientation of the Czech Republic, confirmed its belonging to the communist movement, and adopted Eurocommunist and Keynesian policies of increased state interventionism in the economy and workers' self-governance, which it had once renounced (Strmiska, 2002). More importantly, Grebeníček reversed the previous declaration of condemnation of the authoritarian regime: while the party formally rejected democratic centralism, it promoted a rather positive assessment of the party past (Balík, 2005, pp. 144–147), thus placing itself in-between a conservative Stalinist and

progressive radical left profile (Holubec, 2015). All in all, these changes of party ideology seem to maintain the materialist profile of KSČM, while it moved the party in a transformative rather than reformist direction.

Electorally, this trajectory seems to have largely positive effects for KSČM, given its consistently high and improved electoral performance since Grebeníček's rise (Figure 3.3). This development enabled KSČM to become an integral part of the Czech political and party systems with three main effects. First, its rejection of fundamental ideological and organisational reform led to the loss of its position as a leading left-wing force in favour of the resurrected Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) (Kopeček and Pšeja, 2008), thus reducing its chance to enter government. Second, despite this development KSČM enjoys a significant blackmail potential vis-a-vis the social democrats derived from the latter's 1995 Bohumín declaration not to enter into any cooperation with the communists. As a result of this pledge, ČSSD restricted its coalition options, relying on the conditional support of the centre-right to form its government coalitions (Leff, 2010, p. 172). Third, while isolated from governmental access, KSČM's pariah status helped it in the late 1990s and early 2000s to become a major focal point for protest and anti-establishment sentiments (Kopecký and Mudde, 1999; Plecitá-Vlachová and Stegmaier, 2003), resulting in its best electoral performance in 2002 (Figure 3.3). While KSČM was open to government participation, similarly to the case of SP in the Netherlands, the party was passed over by the social democrats in accordance with the Bohumín declaration.

The early 2000s saw a further gradual change in the ideological and leadership profile of the party. In 2004 KSČM passed a new programme, 'Hope for the Czech Republic', that was not differed significantly from 'Program renewal', maintaining its support for state interventionism in the economy. The party de-radicalised its foreign policy positions by abandoning its calls for neutrality and staunch opposition to the EU and NATO and instead advocating for intergovernmental cooperation between independent states and 'cooperation and solidarity with left-wing forces […] active support of anti-globalist movements' (KSČM, 2004, p. 2). In this context, while the party kept its materialist and transformative profile, it moved slightly in an ideologically universalist direction.

**Figure 3.3. The electoral performance and territorial balance of KSČM in national elections, 1990-2013**
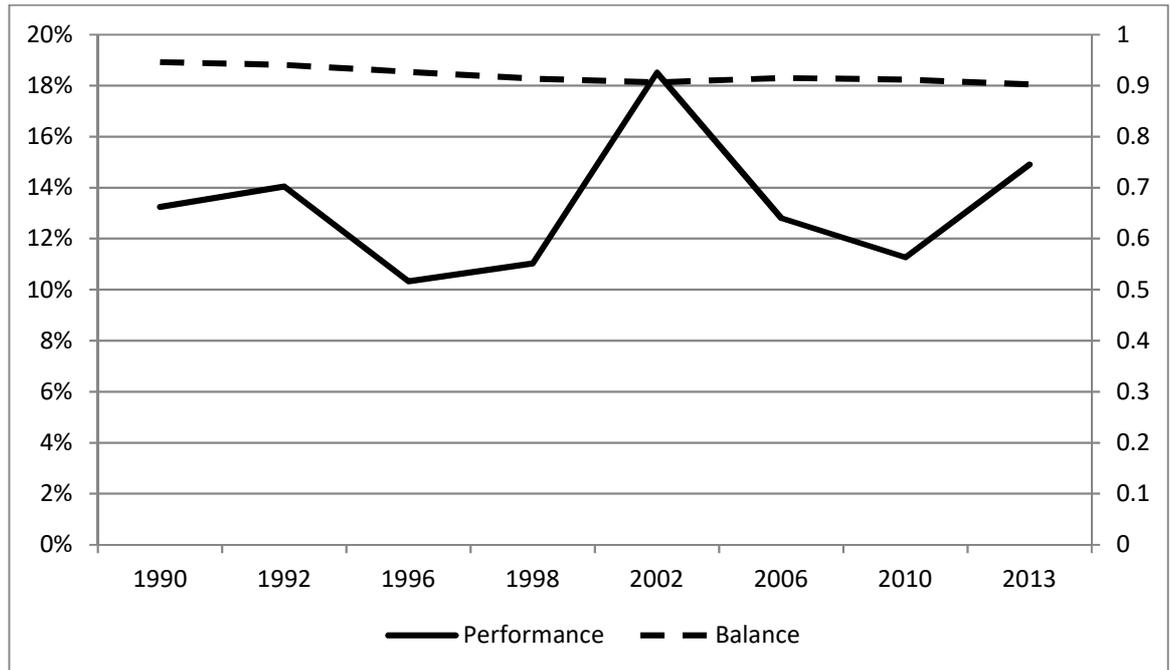


Source: Czech Statistical Office (2018)
Territorial balance is measured through the weighted and standardised Party Nationalisation Score, as calculated by Bochsler (2010a) at constituency level (volebni kraj).

Such an ideological change was further underpinned by a leadership change with Grebeníček stepping down in favour of Vojtěch Filip in 2005. The latter comes from the rather pragmatic tendency of reform communists, seen in the consensus style of communication with other political parties (Handl and Goffin, 2016, p. 214). Filip inherited a party organisation characterized by declining membership and reduced party network (Table 3.7). In such circumstances, he attempted to expand the membership by slightly changing the party image. The main action in this process was the promotion of more pragmatic, outspoken people that could offer an acceptable version of the party's messages (Interview CZ_A, 2017). In this respect, the leadership endorsed the informal radical left tendency within the party that calls for the abandonment of the party ideological dogmatism in favour of a left-libertarian profile. For example, key positions in the party are currently occupied by people affiliated with this tendency including a vice-presidential post (Jiří Dolejš) and the majority of KSČM Members of the European Parliament (Interview CZ_A, 2017). On the other hand, Filip ensures that the more hardline tendency in the party also has an influence, as the party leadership leaves an increasing room for action to the regional and local party organisations on regional and local

matters, dominated by this tendency (Interview CZ_A, 2017). This approach of co-opting diverse ideological streams within the party leadership thus allowed it to gain more authority as a moderator between the different interests of the tendencies within the party elite.

**Table 3.7. Membership numbers of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia in given years, 1992-2006**

| Year | Total membership |
|------|------------------|
| 1992 | 222,000 |
| 1996 | 350,000 |
| 1998 | 160,000 |
| 2002 | 128,346 |
| 2006 | 77,115 |

Source: Gherghina (2014, p. 107)

The ideological and organisational shifts of KSČM in the early 2000s led to mixed results in national and regional elections. At the national level, the party returned to its pre-2002 levels of support, improving slightly in 2013, as it reached its second-best performance in its post-socialist history (Figure 3.3). Yet, generally, its performance remains volatile. Given that these results were achieved in circumstances of growing fragmentation of the Czech party system (Balík and Hloušek, 2016), it seems that the limited change of the party ideology does not provide a convincing understanding of this electoral volatility. At a regional level, KSČM experienced less dynamism, as it entered in 12 out of the 14 regional governments by 2012, largely due to the loosening of the ČSSD refusal to cooperate with KSČM. In doing so, the party seemed to have managed to a certain extent to detoxify its authoritarian legacy and gain again government responsibility. Its de-radicalisation, especially in its foreign policy positions and in its communication with other Czech parties, certainly have played a role in this respect, as it reduced the gap between KSČM and its potential partners.

## 4.2. The electoral geography of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, 1990-2013

The limited ideological change and growing electoral volatility of performance of KSČM remains underpinned by a generally stable electoral geography. The party maintains a highly balanced and stable territorial pattern of electoral support, with PNS ranging between 0.90 (2013) and 0.95 (1990) (Figure 3.3). Yet, beneath this apparent stability, even a broader look at the

electoral geography of KSČM reveals some dynamism. Taking the three historic regions of the Czech Republic – Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia – it seems that the party maintains relatively similar levels of support in those areas. As Table 3.8 reveals, through the comparison of Bohemia and Moravia (until 1998) and of the three major parts of the Czech lands (since 1998), the differences of electoral performance are relatively marginal[16] despite the fact that generally, the party performs slightly better in Moravia-Silesia than in the other two regions. A centre-periphery perspective also highlights the stability and divergence in the levels of support, given that the KSČM maintains clearly high levels of electoral support in the peripheral regions while underperforming in the inlands. This suggests that despite the overall stability and territorial balance of electoral performance, it is the minor differences in support that may shed light on the sources of its electoral geography.

**Table 3.8. The electoral performance of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia in national elections between Czech regions, 1990-2013**

|  | 1990 | 1992 | 1996 | 1998 | 2002 | 2006 | 2010 | 2013 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Bohemia** | 13.68% | 13.82% | 10.23% | 10.53% | 17.59% | 12.22% | 10.70% | 14.91% |
| **Moravia** | 12.52% | 14.42% | 10.51% | 11.83% | 19.38% | 13.60% | 11.97% | 14.34% |
| **Silesia** | - | - | - | - | 21.06% | 13.96% | 12.61% | 17.53% |
| **Overall** | **13.24%** | **14.05%** | **10.33%** | **11.03%** | **18.51%** | **12.81%** | **11.27%** | **14.91%** |

Source: Czech Statistical Office (2018)
Bohemia includes the following regions: Prague, Central, North, South, East, and West Bohemia (before 2002), and Prague, Central Bohemia, South Bohemia, Plzeň, Karlovy Vary, Liberec, Ústí nad Labem, Hradec Králové, and Pardubice
Moravia includes Vysočina, Olomouc, South Moravia, and Zlín
Silesia includes Moravia-Silesia region.

A focus on the regional and constituency levels also highlights some moderate dynamism beneath. First, despite the balanced electoral geography, it is noticeable that KSČM has established firm electoral strongholds in the North Bohemian regions of Ústí nad Labem and Karlovy Vary, and Olomouc in Northern Moravia. In these places its electoral support regularly higher than its nationwide support (Table 3.9). Second, another permanent place of a consistent level of support is the Capital City Prague. There the party consistently achieves by far its weakest electoral results across all Czech regions/electoral constituencies. Third, the party established a wide range of places of mid-level electoral

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[16] It should be emphasised that the borders of the historic regions roughly correspond to the borders of the current administrative regions of the Czech Republic. A more fine-grained calculation may resolve this challenge. However, even with rather approximate calculations, the differences in electoral support for KSČM are noticeable.

support, ranging from the regions of Plzeň, South Moravia and South Bohemia, where KSČM achieves results close to those in its strongholds (Table 3.9), or the relatively weaker support in regions, such as Liberec, Hradec Králové or Zlín. What is noticeable is that in these areas the party results fluctuate significantly between elections, signalling rather unstable relations between KSČM and the specific circumstances of these places. In contrast, in Pardubice, Central Bohemia, Vysočina, and Moravia-Silesia, support for the party regularly remains close to the overall national performance, with more limited fluctuation. Therefore, similarly to the case of SP, it seems that beneath the overall stability of the territorial balance of support there are significant dynamics that underpin the electoral performance of KSČM and its territorial distribution.

**Table 3.9. The electoral performance of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia in parliamentary elections in Czech regions by their vote share, 1990-2013**

| | 1990 | | 1992 | | 1996 | | 1998 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Overall** | **13.24%** | **Overall** | **14.05%** | **Overall** | **10.33%** | **Overall** | **11.03%** |
| Central Bohemia | 15.04% | Central Bohemia | 15.76% | North Bohemia | 11.56% | North Bohemia | 12.59% |
| North Bohemia | 15.02% | North Bohemia | 15.36% | West Bohemia | 11.31% | South Moravia | 12.34% |
| West Bohemia | 14.10% | North Moravia | 14.90% | Central Bohemia | 11.22% | West Bohemia | 11.73% |
| South Bohemia | 13.60% | West Bohemia | 14.44% | South Bohemia | 11.16% | Central Bohemia | 11.52% |
| North Moravia | 12.79% | South Moravia | 13.99% | South Moravia | 11.16% | South Bohemia | 11.50% |
| East Bohemia | 12.76% | South Bohemia | 13.78% | North Moravia | 9.78% | North Moravia | 11.26% |
| South Moravia | 12.28% | East Bohemia | 12.55% | East Bohemia | 9.56% | East Bohemia | 10.00% |
| Prague | 11.83% | Prague | 11.55% | Prague | 7.45% | Prague | 6.99% |

| | 2002 | | 2006 | | 2010 | | 2013 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Overall** | **18.51%** | **Overall** | **12.81%** | **Overall** | **11.27%** | **Overall** | **14.91%** |
| Ústí nad Labem | 25.08% | Ústí nad Labem | 16.05% | Ústí nad Labem | 13.64% | Ústí nad Labem | 20.33% |
| Karlovy Vary | 21.97% | Karlovy Vary | 14.82% | Vysočina | 13.41% | Moravia-Silesia | 17.53% |
| Moravia-Silesia | 21.06% | Olomouc | 14.68% | Olomouc | 13.18% | Olomouc | 17.03% |
| Olomouc | 21.02% | Vysočina | 14.66% | Karlovy Vary | 13.07% | Vysočina | 16.86% |
| South Moravia | 19.75% | Plzeň | 14.03% | Moravia-Silesia | 12.61% | Karlovy Vary | 16.72% |
| Vysočina | 19.69% | Moravia-Silesia | 13.96% | Plzeň | 12.51% | South Bohemia | 16.45% |
| Plzeň | 19.61% | South Moravia | 13.74% | South Bohemia | 12.22% | Plzeň | 15.76% |
| Central Bohemia | 18.67% | South Bohemia | 13.36% | South Moravia | 11.65% | Pardubice | 14.62% |
| South Bohemia | 18.25% | Central Bohemia | 12.89% | Pardubice | 11.21% | Central Bohemia | 14.41% |
| Pardubice | 17.39% | Pardubice | 12.39% | Central Bohemia | 11.00% | Liberec | 14.38% |
| Liberec | 17.17% | Hradec Králové | 11.52% | Hradec Králové | 10.65% | South Moravia | 14.36% |
| Zlín | 16.64% | Liberec | 11.51% | Liberec | 10.32% | Hradec Králové | 14.08% |
| Hradec Králové | 16.05% | Zlín | 11.25% | Zlín | 10.04% | Zlín | 12.90% |
| Prague | 11.10% | Prague | 7.90% | Prague | 6.53% | Prague | 8.52% |

Source: Czech Statistical Office (2018)
Territorial balance is measured through the weighted and standardised Party Nationalisation Score, as calculated by Bochsler (2010a).

## 4.3. Current explanations for the electoral geography of Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia

In contrast to the previous two cases, there are notable works that focus specifically on the electoral geography of KSČM, framed as contextual explanations for its electoral performance. These works focus on factors of social context and of organisational capabilities. Recent studies on the topic highlight the increasing significance of economic voting for the electoral support for KSČM (Stegmaier and Vlachová, 2009; Lach *et al.*, 2010) and, hence, the importance of the socio-economic characteristics across Czech places (Kyloušek and Pink, 2007; Pink, 2012; Voda and Pink, 2015). In such a context, given that since the early 2000s the party became a focal point for voters disillusioned with mainstream politics, and with the socio-economic effects of the transition of the Czech Republic to democracy (Kopecký and Mudde, 1999; Plecitá-Vlachová and Stegmaier, 2003), it seems that the electoral geography of KSČM reflects the territorial spread of these sentiments across the country. Yet, despite this convincing argument, there is also evidence for the limited explanatory power of the socio-economic conditions across the Czech Republic (Jehlička and Sýkora, 1991; Kostelecký, 1994, 1995), and of the historic legacies of Czech places (Balík, 2006; Maškarinec, 2011). Therefore, while social context may account for the electoral geography of the party, it remains unclear to what extent.

Another explanation focuses on the role of the ideological profile of KSČM. From that perspective, its pragmatic choice to refrain from ideological and organisational reform that maintained its integrity in the eyes of its members and supporters (Hanley, 2001; Handl, 2005, p. 126) secured the party a solid voter base with the strong party identification and electoral discipline (Mareš, 2002), stimulated by cohort effects (Linek, 2008). In such a context the limited ideological change tapped into the lasting historic legacies within its strongholds, particularly in the border regions of the former ethnically German Sudetenland (Holubec, 2011, pp. 187–188) and allowed the party to maintain high levels of performance, even in circumstances of overall public support for rapid political and economic reforms towards democracy (Evans and Whitefield, 1995). Hence, the electoral geography of KSČM stems from its organisational abilities to mobilise electoral support. While this explanation provides an important understanding of the stability of the territorial pattern of electoral

support for the party, its emphasis on organisational capabilities in light of the noticeable swings in party support between elections seems slightly optimistic.

## 5. Conclusion

This chapter presented the electoral geographies of Die Linke, SP, and KSČM in detail, highlighting the three varieties of territorial patterns of electoral support for European RLPs. While the electoral geography of Die Linke experienced significant change since the merger of PDS and WASG, it remains noticeably imbalanced, underpinned by lasting major differences of electoral performance between East and West Germany. In contrast, the patterns of KSČM and SP remained relatively stable throughout the years, although in the case of the latter it moved from being slightly imbalanced towards balanced electoral geography, whereas the former remains balanced but in an incrementally downward direction. A brief review of the existing explanations for this development revealed that these were part of the broader analysis of the overall electoral performances of the three cases. Yet, as in this chapter, existing research does not provide a convincing understanding of these developments, especially in more recent years.

In the case of Die Linke, current explanations do not provide a convincing understanding of the lasting imbalanced nature of its territorial pattern, despite the indication that the German electorate became increasingly homogenised, and despite the all-German ideological profile of the party since the merger between PDS and WASG. This suggests that the sources for its electoral geography may lay in either socio-economic and socio-cultural differences across Germany underneath the generally homogenised German electorate, or it may be explained as a product of the influences of the stable political structures of Germany i.e. its political institutions and party system competition, or with the effects of the organisational merger between PDS and WASG that formed Die Linke.

In the case of SP, contemporary studies do not provide a reliable explanation for the noticeable dynamism of support for the party across electoral units. While current studies emphasise the effects of the re-alignment process of the Dutch electorate since the de-pillarisation from the late 1960s, or

the successful organisational work of SP to build up support across communities, they fail to account for the stable levels of electoral support for the party, particularly in its strongholds, and the stable electoral geography since the mid-2000s. These trends, similarly to the case of Die Linke, can be either a product of socio-economic and socio-cultural differences that are not captured at the individual level or may be a result of the institutional influences of the Dutch political system. Alternatively, looking at these trends from an internal party perspective, it may be the different organisational capabilities of SP across the Netherlands that explain this dynamism.

Lastly, the case of the stable electoral geography of KSČM could not be well-captured by the existing literature. On the one hand, while Czech society still experiences significant changes since the transition towards democracy and market economy that may explain the electoral swings of the party, it fails to account for the generally stable territorial distribution of electoral support for the party. On the other hand, while the limited ideological change of KSČM may account for its stable electoral geography, it does not provide a convincing explanation of the changing electoral fortunes of the party across electoral units with each election. Hence, a potential explanation of the stable electoral geography and changing electoral fortunes of KSČM may lie in either the specific social context across Czech electoral units that remain stable despite the overall change of Czech society since the fall of the authoritarian communist regime, or by the generally stable institutional framework of the Czech Republic, or due to the changing organisational capabilities of the party to mobilise support.

# Chapter 4 Social context

## 1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the impact of social context on the territorial distribution of electoral support for European radical left parties since 1990. As discussed in Chapter 2, social context represents the socio-economic and socio-cultural environment of a place. Existing works on the electoral geography of European radical left parties (RLPs) highlighted the significance of social context, particularly in terms of the different historical experiences (Bartolini, 2002), and socio-economic conditions (Pink, 2012; Vail and Bowyer, 2012; Burgoon *et al.*, 2019) across places. In this respect the social context matters, given that the surrounding environment may influence a voter's choice (Miller and Shanks, 1996, chap. 9). Such an influence depends on the extent to which the specific political culture of a place, its local institutions, and the voters' individual preferences converge to foster a distinctive, place-based voting behaviour (Agnew, 1987, 2002; Putnam, 1993; Shin and Agnew, 2008). As the outcomes of this convergence may vary between places due to differences in its components, this chapter tests the hypothesis that the territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 depends on the differences of social context between electoral units (H1). As stated in Chapter 1, the territorial pattern of electoral support represents an assessment on the level of territorial balance of electoral support across electoral units. This balance reflects the extent to which the vote shares of a party is similar between electoral units. Hence, a balanced territorial pattern represents limited differences of electoral performance between electoral units, whereas an imbalanced pattern contains major differences in support across a country. For the ease of understanding, this chapter uses the term 'electoral geography' to denote the pattern of territorial distribution of electoral support.

The test of this main hypothesis involves an analysis of the potential effects of three main factors. According to the literature on electoral geography the differences in the historical legacies of mass mobilisation across places (H1a), the levels of economic inequality between places at the time of elections (H1b), and the differences in the salience of electoral topics across constituencies (H1c) can be important sources of a particular territorial pattern

of electoral support for European RLPs. To test their eventual influence, this chapter compares the data, gathered from series of semi-structured interviews with party officials from national, regional, and local organisations of The Left (Die Linke, Germany), the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM, the Czech Republic), and the Socialist Party (SP, the Netherlands), and with independent researchers. Their experience and expertise in party work allow this chapter to highlight whether these factors influence their electoral geographies, and, thus, to complement the insights from the largely quantitative literature on the topic. The data from the interviews is triangulated with relevant statistical data, where needed.

The main finding of this chapter is that the social context matters for the territorial pattern of electoral support for European RLPs, but only for the period between elections. In other words, the differences in the socio-economic and socio-cultural environment rather outline potential electoral geography but do not influence its direct emergence. According to the experiences of the three cases, the territorial pattern of electoral support is a matter of their organisational efforts to manage the effects of the environment according to their party goals. Hence, while some of the hypotheses are confirmed, the context, in which the respective factors are relevant, rather questions the importance of social context for the electoral geography of RLPs since 1990.

In particular, historic legacies of mass mobilisation are relevant for the territorial distribution of electoral support for the three cases, but mainly for the development of a supporter base across a country, not for its electoral mobilisation. Even in the case of KSČM which used its historic continuity with the authoritarian party-state to mobilise its core voters, the party had to link these legacies with the contemporary socio-economic conditions of a place to do so. In contrast, the differences of the contemporary socio-economic circumstances across a country influence directly the territorial pattern of electoral support for the three cases, but only in combination with the particular electoral attitudes on salient electoral topics. As the experience of the three cases highlights, the particular socio-economic inequalities influence the extent the programmatic and policy offer of European RLPs finds potential support among the electorate but does not necessarily mobilise them to vote for these parties. The reason for this is that local issues and conditions are rarely salient topics on national

elections. In this context, this chapter does not find any major differences in the salience of electoral topics across electoral units, but rather differences in the attitudes on the common electoral agenda at national polls. This evidence rather questions the social context explanations for the electoral geography of the three cases, presented in Chapter 3 and highlights the need to look into factors of the political structures and organisational capabilities as possible explanations for the electoral geographies of the three European RLPs since 1990.

## 2. Historic legacies

Existing studies of the spatial influences on voting behaviour revealed that the differences in the social contexts across places can be important sources of the different electoral appeal of a party. Fundamental work in this respect has been done by John Agnew. In his study of the electoral geographies of Scotland and Italy he reveals that the impact of international and nationwide socio-economic and political developments varies across places, filtered through the particularities of the latter (Agnew, 1987, chap. 3, 2002, chap. 2). The result is a distinctive voting behaviour shaped by the level of interaction between the local political culture, the association with local institutions and individual preferences (Agnew, 2002, pp. 34-35). While the dynamics between these factors reveal how social context shapes the electoral geography of a party, the following paragraphs look into the extent these factors independently influence the territorial distribution of electoral support for European RLPs in order to assess the relevance of social context on the first place. In other words, rather than looking into the interaction between political culture, local institutions, and individual preferences, this chapter looks at them separately to assess their independent influence.

In the context of the study on RLPs the three factors take a slightly altered form. Local political culture concerns the different historic legacies of mass mobilisation across places given that these legacies may be a source of the electoral mobilisation of a radical left party. Existing studies emphasised in this respect the roles of industrialisation and urbanisation in Europe (Bartolini, 2002, chap. 3; Eley, 2002, chap. 3; Sassoon, 2010, chap. 1) or the degree of party integration within the labour movement at the time of mass enfranchisement on the continent (Bartolini, 2002, chap. 5). Yet, these variables have a varying

relevance across Europe given the differences in the pace of industrialisation (Scase, 1977; Oberndörfer, 1978; Obendörfer, 1979; Köhler, 1995) and the changing relations and influence of mass organisations (Bartolini, 2002, chap. 6). Instead, electoral (i.e. mass mobilisation for support of an RLP) and/or social (i.e. mass protests, strikes, etc.) historic legacies of mass mobilisation offer a more robust perspective. Such experiences highlight the extent to which a RLP has managed to channel and capture the increasing demand for representation by the working class (Bartolini, 2002) and to use its eventual experiences in local and regional governance for electoral purposes (Szajkowski, 1985; Judd, 1989). Hence, if such historic legacies influence the electoral geographies of European RLPs since 1990, it is expected that:

(H1a) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the differences between electoral units in their historic legacies of mass mobilisation are limited.

The experiences of the three cases confirm this hypothesis, but with the caveat that these legacies matter for the build-up of electoral support between elections rather than being a source of direct electoral mobilisation. In the case of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) in the Czech Republic the most important historical legacy is the authoritarian communist regime, governed by the predecessor of the party, the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ). As a party representative emphasised, the party currently 'reaps on the experiences of people from the previous regime' (Interview CZ_G, 2017), indicating the important role of the past for the electoral mobilisation of the party. This was particularly relevant for the initial democratic elections in the early 1990s. According to Jehlička and Sýkora (1991) and Kostelecký (1995), the electoral geography of KSČM in the 1990 and 1992 parliamentary elections was independent of any place-based specific characteristics, as it was rather related with the ideological convictions of the electorate. This suggests that the party had established broad electoral support during the authoritarian communist regime, mobilised during the initial post-communist years. The interviews seem to confirm this idea, as an overwhelming majority of party representatives and independent researchers pointed out that the direct continuity of the KSČM with the KSČ allowed the party to foster and maintain a strong electoral support

across the country (e.g. Interview CZ_E, 2017; Interview CZ_F, 2017; Interview CZ_A, 2017).

Yet, the interviews reveal that the real contribution of the historic legacies from the regime to the prospects of electoral mobilisation for KSČM lies in its direct linkages to contemporary attitudes. This is particularly relevant for the overwhelming support for KSČM in the regions of the former Sudetenland (particularly Ústí nad Labem, Olomouc, and Moravia-Silesia). Several independent researchers highlight that the concentration of former border guards in these regions and their work through the Club of Czech Border Areas enables the party to reach out to large portions of the electorate there (Interview CZ_I, 2017; Interview CZ_C, 2017; Interview CZ_A, 2017). The role of historical legacies in this respect is viewed in the messages the party uses to mobilise support. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the electorate in the Czech border areas remained concerned with potential property restoration claims from ethic Germans following their expulsion in the late 1940s and the resettlement of ethnic Czechs in these areas (Lach *et al.*, 2010). KSČM successfully managed to tap into these concerns, as it presented itself not only as the direct successor of the party that provided these properties to the current Czech majority population but also as the sole protector of their rights (Hanley, 2002a, p. 5). This indicates that KSČM successfully utilised its historical legacy, linking it to contemporary concerns of the electorate.

Yet, the role of historic legacies for KSČM should not be overestimated. In fact, it has a declining relevance the more recent the national election. As revealed in numerous analyses, the support for KSČM moved gradually away from history-related explanations towards the role of contemporary socio-economic circumstances. For example, Balík (2006) and Maškarinec (2011) revealed limited continuity in the electoral support for KSČM between the inter-war years and the elections held since the early 2000s. This is further confirmed by the interviews. According to party representatives, the historic legacies are an important factor to maintain support among communist core voters. 'We do regular commemorations of important dates of our history. For example, we had [...] a May Day commemoration, which is important for our members and supporters' (Interview CZ_E, 2017). This suggests that in more recent years the historic legacies are significant for the party between elections rather than during the

electoral campaign, as they maintain the loyalty of the party voters. As the interviews reveal, such a loyalty stems less from the particular historic legacies of KSČM but from the ideological convictions of its members, supporters and voters. For example, when discussing this topic with a party representative, while the person agreed that KSČM mobilises support due to nostalgia for the authoritarian communist regime and protest against the contemporary socio-economic conditions, it is the ideological convictions that play a decisive role for the level of support the party obtains across the country (Interview CZ_E, 2017).

In contrast to the significance of history for the KSČM, the cases of Die Linke and SP suggest that historic legacies play no, if not negative, role in the territorial distribution of their electoral support. In the case of Die Linke, historic legacies contributed particularly to the significant differences in the support for the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) between the Western and Eastern states in Germany during the 1990s and early 2000s. While PDS benefited electorally from its solid historic roots within East German society in the so-called 'new' states, its lack of organisational continuity in the Western 'old' states prevented strong electoral performances there (Koß, 2007, pp. 120–127). There are three important reasons for this. First, being a direct successor to the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), the ruling party of the authoritarian communist regime in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), played an important role for its limited support across Reunified Germany. In the East this legacy played a vital role for the rather restricted parliamentary presence of PDS in the short-lived democratic Volksammer (the East German parliament), where the party represented mainly the views of the supporters of the previous regime, critical to the process of Reunification and to the democratisation of GDR (Neugebauer and Stöss, 1996). This legacy, however, had a limited role for the more recent electoral support for the party in the East in Reunified Germany, as it will be revealed in the following paragraph. Yet, this legacy played a significant role in the marginal performance of PDS in the West. Being associated with an authoritarian regime, the party has not been perceived as a viable electoral option. As one independent researcher reveals in this respect, 'PDS was a foreign object in the West […] largely due to lasting anti-communist attitudes [there]' (Interview DE_K, 2017). Hence, the direct association of PDS

with its authoritarian past played a rather negative role for its electoral performance across the country.

Second, and similar to KSČM, it is the way the party linked particular historic legacies to contemporary circumstances that reveal the role of this variable for its electoral geography. During the 1990s a much prevalent and influential historical legacy was the distinctive socialisation of East German society. The failure of Reunified Germany to incorporate the experiences and particularities of the former GDR slowed the social and cultural integration between West and East Germans and preserved the historic legacies of socialisation in GDR among the East German electorate (Niedermayer and Beyme, 1996). These legacies were pivotal for PDS, as the party tapped into the mass disillusionment with the economic and social results of the initial post-reunification years, marked by the rising levels of unemployment in the Eastern states and the downsizing of the East German economy (Boltho, Carlin and Scaramozzino, 1997). In doing so, PDS mobilised support on the basis of the distinctive East German identity and political culture (Hough, 2000) of strong mistrust towards state institutions, and adherence to communitarian values, such as solidarity and egalitarianism (Neller, 2006). The interviews confirmed the importance of this legacy. For example, one party representative explained that Die Linke manages to address 'a feeling of injustice and unfairness, widespread particularly in Eastern Germany' (Interview DE_F, 2017), indicating the lasting effects of these legacies even after the 2007 merger between PDS with the predominantly West German Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG). However, while these legacies may linger, they do not seem to play a major part in the electoral geography of Die Linke anymore, given the exhausted electoral significance of such socio-cultural grievances by the early 2000s (Neugebauer and Stöss, 2003) and the transformation of Die Linke into an all-German radical left party (Hough and Koß, 2009b).

Third, more recent experiences have a growing explanatory power for the electoral geography of Die Linke. Particularly strong mobilisation potential came from the legacies of the red-green coalition between the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Alliance 90/the Greens (1998-2005) that offered Die Linke an opportunity to advocate a different policy approach. Given that this coalition government introduced a major reform on the social welfare system and labour

market, geared towards market flexibilisation (Blank, 2011, chap. 6), coupled with outspoken support for military intervention in the Western Balkans and Afghanistan (although, not in Iraq), Die Linke provided an electoral and political refuge to disillusioned SPD and Greens supporters who disagreed with these policies. As numerous interviews indicate in this respect, these legacies play an important role in an alleged rise of membership activity and numbers in Die Linke regional and local organisations particularly in the Western states (Interview DE_J, 2017; DE_E, 2017; DE_A, 2017). For example, party representatives from Western provinces explained their belonging to Die Linke through disillusionment with any alternatives: '[…] prior to entering Die Linke, I was an SPD member, although always on the political fringes […] so I joined Die Linke where I could be among similar-minded comrades' (Interview DE_C, 2017); 'People ask me why I am not [a member of] the Greens; I tell them I am in Die Linke because I am Green […] The supposedly Green policies of the Greens do not hide their support for pro-market policies' (Interview DE_L, 2017). Hence, it seems that such historic legacies play an important role for Die Linke when it comes to building-up an electoral potential across Germany between elections, rather than using them for electoral mobilisation during an electoral campaign.

The last point, using historic legacies of other parties, is particularly relevant for the case of SP, where, again, it is rather the indirect if not the absence of historic legacies that play a significant role for the electoral appeal of the party across the Netherlands. In particular, SP benefited from the de-alignment process occurring in Dutch society since the late 1960s-early 1970s. Prior to this period, Dutch politics were known for their pillarisation i.e. a system of self-sufficient network of institutions that covers all daily aspects of life, thus, ensuring close control and affiliation of each individual with her particular community, be that the confessional Catholic and Protestant pillars, or the secular Liberal/Humanist and Socialist ones (Post, 1989). Politically, this system ensured the continuous representation by political parties entirely affiliated with one of the four pillars and the consensus style of democracy of the Netherlands, underpinned by the sanctity of proportion (Andeweg, 2005) i.e. the representation of different social views according to the proportion of electoral support each pillar obtained on the latest elections. In such circumstances, a Dutch radical left party was able to establish a certain level of

support within the Socialist pillar, as revealed in the legacy of the Social Democratic Party prior to World War II (Verrips, 1995).

The disintegration of the pillarisation system, part of the major social changes in the post-war Dutch society (Dekker and Ester, 1996), offered a major opening for SP in two main ways. First, having no prior historic legacies, the party managed to fill the void within Catholic communities by offering a staunch opposition and criticism to the existing local political practices (Voerman, 1987, p. 144), while as well promoting the communitarian values dominant in such places. For example, when discussing the legacies of the pillarisation period with a party representative, the person stated that '[…] what we seek to do is exactly the return of community what was so important during that period; something that other parties once rejected but started to re-discover again' (Interview NL_G, 2017). In such a context, the strong support for SP in the Southern provinces of North Brabant and Limburg, as well as the mid-level support in the rather mixed areas, such as Gelderland and Overijssel, seems to derive from the linkage of this important legacy in these communities with the contemporary socio-economic conditions.

Second, SP benefited from the space opened by the electoral decline and subsequent transformation of the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN). While CPN maintained its presence in the Dutch House of Representatives, the left-wing turn of the mainstream social-democratic Party of Labour (PvdA) led to a significant loss of support for the communists since the 1970s. In such circumstances its continued political relevance was ensured through its close affiliation with two small left-wing parties, the Christian left Evangelical People's Party and Political Party of Radicals, as well as with the radical libertarian Pacifist Socialist Party, with whom the party merged in the late 1980s and transformed into the Green GroenLinks (GL) since the early 1990s (Lucardie, van Schuur and Voerman, 1999). The opened space, especially across former CPN strongholds, enabled SP to make electoral advances. Groningen is a typical example of this development. In conversation with a party representative from the province, the communist legacies were one of the main factors that enabled SP to establish firm support there (Interview NL_H, 2017). Yet, such historic legacies are not a significant factor for the electoral mobilisation of the party. When discussing their relevance with a party representative, the person stated

that 'these [legacies] are important blocs that reveal the potential for our party. They matter for our supporters, but if you ask any person on the street […] they would not even know about these things at all' (Interview NL_G, 2017). This, again, confirms the perspective that historical legacies are rather an important factor for establishing rather than mobilising electoral support for European RLPs.

## 3. Socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions

Another important factor of the socio-economic and socio-cultural environment with the potential to influence the electoral geographies of European RLPs since 1990 is the contemporary socio-economic circumstances. According to Franklin a voter's choice, even if based on rational considerations, does not emerge in a vacuum (Franklin, 2004, p. 202), but is rather influenced by the existing environment. As Miller and Shanks (1996, p. 192) reveal, this may include not only short-term evaluations of the candidates' and parties' expected performance but also long-term influences from the socio-economic conditions of a place. This suggests that the particular socio-economic circumstances of a place at the time of an election may affect voter preferences and, thus, be of advantage or disadvantage for political parties. In terms of European RLPs the most significant socio-economic conditions with the potential to influence their electoral geographies include two main variables. First, given their ideological and programmatic focus on economic inequalities, the differences of the economic state across places may influence their territorial distribution of electoral support. Second, the presence of a social and cultural centre-periphery divide within a country can also influence the electoral support for European RLPs, as the social and cultural periphery of a country tends to support such parties, whereas the centre – less so (van Hamme, Vandermotten and Lockhart, 2018, p. 293). In such a context, it is expected that:

(H1b) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the differences between electoral units in their socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions are limited.

The experiences of Die Linke, SP, and KSČM confirm this hypothesis. While both variables have a significant impact on the electoral prospects of the three parties across their respective territories independently, it is the combination of the two that better captures their contribution to the electoral geographies of the three cases. In the case of Die Linke, contemporary socio-economic inequalities influence the electoral geography of the party in combination with the socio-cultural differences between Eastern and Western Germany. This was particularly pronounced in the period of PDS when the party managed to mobilise significant support in the six 'new' states on the basis of social discontent with the effects of the economic transition in Eastern Germany in combination with the way the process of Reunification has been conducted. As stated in the previous section, this stemmed from the successful linkage of historic legacies with contemporary grievances done by PDS on the elections during the 1990s and early 2000s. This suggests that while the socio-economic differences across Germany may matter for electoral mobilisation, it is only when these are related to other factors of the social context of a place.

Yet, the relevance of the combination of economic and cultural differences declined in favour of solely socio-economic differences by the turn of the century. In such a context, it is noticeable that the emergence of Die Linke qualitatively improved its electoral support not only in the Western states but also in the East (see Table 3.1 in the previous chapter). In this respect, it is fundamental to note the limited relevance of the cultural differences between the Western and Eastern states. Even research conducted in the early days following the 2007 PDS-WASG merger highlights the increasing convergence of Die Linke voters (Doerschler, 2015), as well as the statistical significance of purely socio-economic place-based circumstances, such as declining industrial input, high levels of unemployment, and high levels of reliance on state services (Vail and Bowyer, 2012). Yet, there are still significant economic differences between the Eastern and Western states, as revealed in Tables 4.1 and 4.2. Hence, while culturally the East-West divide may have limited political relevance, it is the economic differences that offer a more convincing understanding for the continuous territorial imbalance of electoral support for Die Linke across the country.

The interviews confirm this analysis, but place an important caveat, as the experiences of Die Linke across different states suggests that the differences of socio-economic conditions contribute to the build-up of electoral support, rather than its mobilisation. When discussing the socio-economic impact on the electoral support for the party, East German party representatives highlight the lasting economic differences between the East and the West as a major reason for the strong electoral performance of Die Linke there. For example, a party representative from Saxony states that:

'[...] even though [Saxony] invested majorly in developing a modern economy, attracting investors with some honestly white-elephant projects in the IT branch, for example, this may have brought [a] significant improvement of the economy on macro-level, but it has also eliminated many traditional jobs in places, where people do not notice these changes. We need to work for those people and to show that there is another way of developing ourselves.' (Interview DE_I, 2017).

This suggests that while these differences provide an important opportunity, it is a matter of party efforts to use it electorally. In other words, the socio-economic differences alone do not mean automatically that voters would cast their ballot for Die Linke. Similar perspective has been offered on the role of economic inequalities for the electoral support for Die Linke in the West. A party representative from North Rhine-Westphalia explains that:

'[...] it was the harsh austerity programmes of the state government that preceded Agenda 2010, the so-called Dusseldorf Signal that pushed people away from the [social democrats]. Because of this, Die Linke is taken as a serious party that addresses the issues of social inequality and social justice and has [a] profound influence on policies here: even other parties accept that the problem of inequality in [NRW] is significant, so we are happy that they accept that' (Interview DE_B, 2017).

Similarly, the economic situation provided little opportunity for Die Linke to establish a strong electoral basis in Bavaria:

'The main challenge for us here is the comfort, as [...] Bavaria is doing well economically […] It is not that there are no issues with economic inequality here, but […] the majority of people just do not notice the acute problems of social justice, because they themselves are doing great' (Interview DE_C, 2017)

This suggests that the conditions do not allow Die Linke to reach out to potential voters and eventually mobilise them.

**Table 4.1. Gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices by German states, measured as purchasing power standard (PPS) per inhabitant in the percentage of the EU average**

| Old (Western) state | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Baden-Wurttemberg | 140 | 133 | 137 | 143 |
| Bavaria | 139 | 134 | 136 | 144 |
| Bremen | 159 | 159 | 153 | 157 |
| Hamburg | 219 | 217 | 207 | 204 |
| Hesse | 152 | 146 | 142 | 143 |
| Lower Saxony | 110 | 103 | 107 | 109 |
| Northern Rhine-Westphalia | 123 | 118 | 120 | 122 |
| Rhineland-Palatinate | 109 | 103 | 107 | 112 |
| Saarland | 112 | 115 | 112 | 117 |
| Schleswig-Holstein | 109 | 101 | 98 | 102 |

| New (Eastern) state | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Berlin | 121 | 111 | 118 | 119 |
| Brandenburg | 81 | 80 | 85 | 90 |
| Mecklenburg-West Pomerania | 77 | 76 | 81 | 84 |
| Saxony | 80 | 83 | 87 | 93 |
| Saxony-Anhalt | 76 | 78 | 83 | 87 |
| Thuringia | 77 | 77 | 82 | 91 |

Source: Eurostat (2018)
Note: Gross domestic product (GDP) is a measure for economic activity. It is defined as the value of all goods and services produced less the value of any goods or services used in their creation. The volume index of GDP per capita in Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) is expressed in relation to the European Union (EU28) average set to equal 100. If the index of a state is higher than 100, this state's level of GDP per inhabitant is higher than the EU average and vice versa. Basic figures are expressed in PPS, i.e. a common currency that eliminates the differences in price levels between countries allowing meaningful volume comparisons of GDP between countries.

**Table 4.2. Rate of registered unemployed by German states in percentage, 1991-2015**

| Old (Western) states | 1991 | 1995 | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Baden-Wurttemberg | 3.7 | 7.4 | 6.0 | 7.8 | 5.4 | 4.3 |
| Bavaria | 4.4 | 7.0 | 6.3 | 8.9 | 5.1 | 4.1 |
| Bremen | 10.7 | 14.0 | 14.3 | 18.4 | 13.2 | 12.1 |
| Hamburg | 8.7 | 10.7 | 10.0 | 12.9 | 9.5 | 8.5 |
| Hesse | 5.1 | 8.4 | 8.1 | 10.9 | 7.2 | 6.1 |
| Lower Saxony | 8.1 | 10.9 | 10.3 | 13.0 | 8.3 | 6.8 |
| Northern Rhine-Westphalia | 7.9 | 10.6 | 10.1 | 13.2 | 9.6 | 8.8 |
| Rhineland-Palatinate | 5.4 | 8.5 | 8.1 | 9.9 | 6.4 | 5.8 |
| Saarland | 8.6 | 11.7 | 10.8 | 11.7 | 8.2 | 7.7 |
| Schleswig-Holstein | 7.3 | 9.1 | 9.5 | 13.0 | 8.5 | 7.3 |
| | | | | | | |
| New (Eastern) states | 1991 | 1995 | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 |
| Berlin | 10.6 | 13.6 | 17.6 | 21.5 | 15.8 | 12.6 |
| Brandenburg | 10.3 | 14.2 | 18.4 | 19.9 | 12.4 | 9.7 |
| Mecklenburg-West Pomerania | 12.5 | 16.1 | 19.0 | 22.1 | 14.0 | 11.3 |
| Saxony | 9.1 | 14.4 | 18.5 | 20.0 | 13.1 | 9.2 |
| Saxony-Anhalt | 10.3 | 16.5 | 21.4 | 21.7 | 13.5 | 11.1 |
| Thuringia | 10.2 | 15.0 | 16.5 | 18.6 | 10.9 | 8.2 |

Source: Federal Statistical Service (2018)

The socio-cultural conditions across Germany, similarly, account for the territorial distribution of electoral support in the context of building-up an electoral potential, but not necessarily mobilising it. For example, despite the noticeable economic difference between Saxony and the Western states that serves as a source to build up electoral support, it is the development of a distinctive Saxon identity that restricts the electoral potential of Die Linke. This identity stems from the continuous rule of the centre-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in the state that fostered the so-called 'Saxon Way' as an image aimed not only at distancing Saxony from its East German legacy, but also at 'reviv[ing] the spirit of the Semperoper' (Interview DE_I, 2017), as Die Linke party representative explains, highlighting its strong conservative roots, situated in the state's royal past. This an interesting point, given that Die Linke, especially during its existence as the PDS aimed to promote an alternative, East German identity that seems to be relatively successful in the state, given the strong support for the party. Yet, as one independent researcher explains:

'This idea that Saxony is part of East Germany lost its appeal to people from the state because it essentially told them that 'you're having it bad, so vote for us'. Whereas what the CDU did with the Saxon Way was actually to reverse the perspective and highlight that

"you're great, everything is fine" and that is attractive for a lot of people' (Interview DE_G, 2017).

This suggests that whereas Die Linke aimed to tap into the economic inequalities from a rather pessimistic perspective, the apparent optimism of the alternative, the Saxon Way, had toned down the mobilisation potential for the party in the state.

The role of local identity in Bavaria has a similar impact for Die Linke. Beneath the limited mobilisation potential of the party in the state, there is a further challenge related to the distinctive Bavarian identity. An outspokenly conservative identity, promoted on religious grounds (Ford, 2007), this identity is being further enhanced by the particular historical and geographical background of a rather predominantly rural character and delayed industrialisation that developed a rather weak affiliation between the working class and left-wing parties (Müller, 2004, chap. 2). Therefore, it seems that the state does not offer suitable conditions for Die Linke, as its left-wing ideology seems incompatible with the Bavarian regional identity. Discussing this topic with a party representative confirms this, as the person stated that '[the party] ideology could not be entangled with the Catholicism here [in Bavaria]' (Interview DE_C, 2017), suggesting the limited electoral prospective for the party.

Contemporary socio-economic and socio-cultural particularities are also significant for the electoral geography of SP. In contrast to the case of Die Linke, it is the socio-cultural differences between electoral units that have higher relevance for the electoral support for the party across constituencies than their socio-economic conditions. Yet, similarly to the case of Die Linke, these differences are relevant for building up electoral support between elections, rather than its immediate mobilisation. These two observations were based on three main points. First, the interviews suggest that the relatively balanced electoral support for SP across the Netherlands stems rather from the relatively similar standard of living in a relatively wealthy country. For example, an independent researcher pointed out that

'You may notice many cultural differences across the country, what religion they are, what work they have, but beyond that there is an overall similarity in the conditions of living, so people may be similarly satisfied or dissatisfied with their lives and that's why the SP has similar support across the country beyond its obvious strongholds' (Interview NL_E, 2017).

While this statement emphasises the role of socio-cultural factors, explored further in this section, it also highlights the importance of socio-economic factors as an important reason for the balanced electoral geography of the party. This is further confirmed when discussing the particular level of support across the Netherlands. For example, a party representative from Utrecht explained the relatively weak electoral support for SP the following way:

'Utrecht is a central province of the Netherlands, a centre of service industries and banking, so it is currently among the wealthiest places in the country. Hence, very few people are interested in the fact that there are poor people in the country and that [we] need to fight social injustice' (Interview NL_C, 2017).

Similarly, it is the economic conditions that drive the relatively high levels of support for the party in Groningen:

'Maybe, here in the City of Groningen, people have it well, although if you compare with other major cities in the country, they don't. But beyond the city, in the countryside, people often have no jobs and they feel pretty abandoned. That's where we come and offer them some tools to empower themselves.' (Interview NL_H, 2017).

This suggests that the level of electoral support for SP across the country relates to the socio-economic conditions of the place of living.

Second, however, while generally, the Netherlands indeed seems to be a wealthy country, given that all of its provinces have a higher GDP than the European average (Table 4.3) and moderate levels of unemployment (Table 4.4),

the level of economic inequality between regions does not offer a convincing explanation for the level of electoral support for SP. As seen in Table 4.4, the provinces with higher levels of unemployment are such of mid- to low-level electoral support for SP, suggesting the relative irrelevance of this explanation as a sole source of the electoral fortunes of the party across the country. Therefore, rather than directly affecting the electoral geography of the party, the socio-economic inequalities across the provinces or even the electoral constituencies may be understood as an important condition for the electoral potential of SP across the Netherlands.

**Table 4.3. Gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices by Dutch provinces, measured as purchasing power standard (PPS) per inhabitant in the percentage of the EU average**

| Dutch province | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Groningen | 145 | 156 | 174 | 142 |
| Friesland | 99 | 94 | 94 | 90 |
| Drenthe | 104 | 100 | 93 | 90 |
| Overijssel | 113 | 108 | 109 | 105 |
| Gelderland | 117 | 111 | 111 | 107 |
| Flevoland | 106 | 106 | 104 | 98 |
| Utrecht | 174 | 162 | 161 | 150 |
| North Holland | 172 | 169 | 164 | 165 |
| South Holland | 145 | 141 | 137 | 129 |
| Zeeland | 101 | 99 | 103 | 100 |
| North Brabant | 142 | 135 | 134 | 133 |
| Limburg | 114 | 110 | 109 | 108 |

Source: Eurostat (2018)

**Table 4.4. Unemployment rates by Dutch provinces, in percentage, 2000-2015**

| Dutch province | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Groningen | 4.4 | 6.7 | 5.3 | 9.1 |
| Friesland | 4.5 | 4.9 | 4.8 | 7.9 |
| Drenthe | 3.5 | 5.7 | 4.5 | 7.5 |
| Overijssel | 2.6 | 4.9 | 4.4 | 6.9 |
| Gelderland | 2.5 | 4.3 | 4.1 | 6.3 |
| Flevoland | 3.8 | 6.6 | 5.2 | 7.9 |
| Utrecht | 2.1 | 3.8 | 3.7 | 6.4 |
| North Holland | 2.7 | 4.9 | 4.2 | 6.2 |
| South Holland | 2.7 | 4.9 | 5.1 | 7.8 |
| Zeeland | 3.4 | 3.3 | 2.7 | 5.3 |
| North Brabant | 2.1 | 3.9 | 4.2 | 6.5 |
| Limburg | 2.8 | 5.4 | 5.1 | 6.3 |

Source: Eurostat (2019)

Third, the inclusion of socio-cultural explanations adds an improved understanding to this point. The interviews reveal that the relevance of two

non-economic factors that play a role in building-up and eventually mobilising electoral support for SP. First, socio-cultural centre-periphery differences seem to influence the electoral potential of the party. For example, a party representative pointed out that the underlying tension between the people living in the Randstad[17] and the rest of the country can be used for electoral mobilisation:

> 'I have tried to spread the message that there are too many people in the parliament from the Randstad and, thus, they don't care about any other parts of the country. But I don't know how successful this message was' (Interview NL_F, 2017).

Talking to other party representatives, it seems that such a campaign message has strong electoral potential. For example, a party representative from Groningen stressed that

> '[…] people are feeling abandoned from The Hague; our province was anyway always neglected from the centre until they found the oil on our shores, but still, we remain underdeveloped, which we emphasise in our campaign' (Interview NL_H, 2017).

This suggests that the stronger electoral support for SP on the periphery may stem from a combination of economic underdevelopment and lasting centre-periphery social tensions. In such a context, while the balanced electoral geography of the party may be explained with the relatively limited economic inequality between provinces, it is the socio-cultural particularities of a place that accounts for the electoral potential of SP across the Netherlands.

This is further emphasised by another social aspect: personal mobility. As one independent researcher pointed out in a discussion on the differences between the voters of the populist radical right Party for Freedom (PVV) and the SP, it is the ability to move away from the community where they have lived that shapes their electoral choice.

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[17] Randstad is a term, used in the Netherlands to denote the urban economic, social, and political centre of the Netherlands, situated in the North-West of the country and including the cities of Amsterdam, The Hague, and Rotterdam.

'[…] PVV voters are a bit wealthier than [those of] the SP, they are still lower middle class, but managed to develop something, whereas voters for the SP are among those that lack much means. That is why for the PVV [voters] any changes in their community are met with hostility, as they are afraid to lose what they managed to gather, while SP voters cannot move anywhere; they lived their whole lives in a particular place and would not move out to seek for a job or a place to live. That is why they vote for the SP, as they expect the return of previous times' (Interview NL_E, 2017).

This statement indicates that areas, where voters are in a rather disadvantaged situation, tend to be fruitful electoral grounds for SP, thus its electoral geography seems a product of the distribution of this electorate across the country.

The differences in the socio-economic conditions across Czech regions play a significant role in the electoral geography of KSČM as well, especially in the more recent years. As stated in the discussion in the previous section, while initially the balanced electoral support for the party stems from the significance of historic legacies from the authoritarian communist regime across the country, gradually the main mobilisation source became the socio-economic situation across the Czech Republic. A regular theme in the conversations with party representatives and independent researchers was precisely the importance of the socio-economic circumstances across the Czech Republic. For example, the strong electoral support for the party in its strongholds, such as Ústí nad Labem, was explained by a party representative with the particular socio-economic situation in the region:

'[…] after the changes, the industry was removed and people lost their jobs, so obviously, they turn to us for support to oppose this […] Only now other parties realise the damage of destroyed communities. For example, a hospital that we fought to remain, but we were not successful, is being up for re-opening again' (Interview CZ_F, 2017).

Similarly, the weak electoral support for the party in Prague is attributed to the high standard of living in the capital: 'We are able to mobilise vast

numbers of members here in Prague, but the overall situation of wealth does not allow us to perform better' (Interview CZ_E, 2017). This suggests that the socio-economic circumstances of a place play an important role in the electoral potential of the party.

Quantitative data confirms the importance of socio-economic differences in the electoral geography of the party. First, the level of economic development reveals two important patterns. While there is a significant difference in the standard of living between Prague and the rest of the Czech Republic, there are minimal differences in the GDP levels across the remaining 13 regions (Table 4.5) and moderate differences in unemployment rates (Table 4.6), suggesting relatively similar socio-economic conditions across the country. Comparing this data with the distribution of electoral support for the party highlights a relatively high overlap between the standard of living in a place and the level of support for the KSČM. This suggests that while the socio-economic conditions of a place seem to account for the general electoral geography of the party, they do not explain well the dynamic differences in performance, presented in the previous chapter. Hence, rather than directly affecting the electoral geography of KSČM, socio-economic conditions highlight the electoral potential of the party across the country.

**Table 4.5. Gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices by Czech regions, measured as purchasing power standard (PPS) per inhabitant in the percentage of the EU average**

| Czech region | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Capital City Prague | 141 | 169 | 179 | 183 |
| Central Bohemia | 72 | 73 | 73 | 78 |
| South Bohemia | 67 | 72 | 70 | 72 |
| Pilsen | 67 | 75 | 76 | 81 |
| Karlovy Vary | 61 | 61 | 59 | 58 |
| Ústí nad Labem | 59 | 65 | 66 | 67 |
| Liberec | 65 | 66 | 63 | 67 |
| Hradec Králové | 66 | 69 | 72 | 76 |
| Pardubice | 61 | 65 | 68 | 71 |
| Vysočina | 58 | 65 | 66 | 71 |
| South Moravia | 65 | 71 | 78 | 85 |
| Olomouc | 57 | 60 | 63 | 67 |
| Zlín | 58 | 64 | 69 | 75 |
| Moravia-Silesia | 55 | 67 | 69 | 72 |

Source: Eurostat (2018)

Second, numerous quantitative studies of the electoral geography of Czech parties reveal that the support of KSČM correlates with social factors, such as economic underdevelopment, and low levels of religiosity and urbanisation (Kyloušek and Pink, 2007; Pink, 2012; Voda and Pink, 2015). This seems to be confirmed by the interviews where several independent researchers particularly stressed the significance of these variables. For example, an independent researcher explained that the strong electoral support in the communist strongholds stems from the rather conservative character of the electorate: '[…] these people are really nostalgic to the old times when they had jobs, when they were young. Now they look so much change happening around them and they relate this with the new regime and find it hard to accept those changes' (Interview CZ_A, 2017).

### Table 4.6. General unemployment rate by Czech regions, 1995-2015

| Czech region | 1995 | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Capital City Prague | 2.5 | 4.2 | 3.5 | 3.8 | 2.8 |
| Central Bohemia | 3.8 | 7.5 | 5.2 | 5.2 | 3.5 |
| South Bohemia | 2.5 | 5.8 | 5.0 | 5.3 | 4.0 |
| Pilsen | 3.3 | 6.2 | 5.1 | 5.9 | 3.8 |
| Karlovy Vary | 4.0 | 8.4 | 10.9 | 10.8 | 6.7 |
| Ústí nad Labem | 7.1 | 16.0 | 14.5 | 11.2 | 7.6 |
| Liberec | 3.9 | 6.2 | 6.5 | 7.0 | 5.5 |
| Hradec Králové | 3.1 | 6.1 | 4.8 | 6.9 | 5.6 |
| Pardubice | 3.7 | 8.3 | 5.6 | 7.2 | 4.6 |
| Vysočina | 3.7 | 6.8 | 6.8 | 6.9 | 4.7 |
| South Moravia | 3.3 | 8.3 | 8.1 | 7.7 | 5.0 |
| Olomouc | 4.6 | 12.8 | 10.0 | 9.1 | 5.9 |
| Zlín | 4.1 | 8.1 | 9.4 | 8.5 | 4.7 |
| Moravia-Silesia | 5.8 | 14.3 | 13.9 | 10.2 | 8.1 |

Source: Czech Statistical Office (2019)

Third, the importance of these aspects is further amplified by the absence of strong regional identities in the Czech Republic. In the early post-communist years the Moravian autonomist movement, represented mainly by the regionalist Movement for Autonomous Democracy–Party for Moravia and Silesia (HDS-SMS), gained a significant momentum, achieving a modest representation in the Czech parliament, based on social and economic demands for granting Moravia an equal status to the Czech and Slovak parts of the Czechoslovak federation (Musil, Rabušic and Mareš, 1991). Following the Velvet Divorce in 1993, however, the movement lost its appeal due to internal infighting and a major rejection on the side of the state to accommodate their regionalist demands (Strmiska, 2000). While this episode in the early democratic days of post-communist

Czechoslovakia suggests the presence of latent regional identities, these have played a very limited role since the emergence of the Czech Republic. As one independent researcher reveals '[...] the balance of support stems from the lack of regional identities in Czech regions. Hence, any differences of support [for KSČM] come from the fact that one region may be a bit more rural than another' (Interview CZ_C, 2017) This suggests that the de-politicisation of regional identities further facilitated the balanced electoral pattern of the party, embedded firmly in the limited socio-economic differences between Czech regions.

Last and similar to the case of SP, the interviews reveal that the balanced electoral support for KSČM seems to be related to the level of mobility between places. When discussing the importance of the Czech border regions for the electoral geography of the party, an independent researcher pointed out that the social clout of the former border guards and the party in general in the former Sudetenland seems to stem from the closely-knit character of their communities. As that person elaborated, these places experience a general lack of personal mobility that creates a rather closed community that perpetuates old habits and behaviours (Interview CZ_I, 2017) and thus ensures the continuous support for the party. In contrast, places of weak electoral support for KSČM experience a completely different process of suburbanisation i.e. the incremental growth of economic and cultural dependency of places around major cities due to a move of people from major cities towards suburban areas near them (Kostelecký and Čermák, 2004; Kostelecký, Čermák and Vobecká, 2013). Yet, as discussed with party representatives and independent researchers, the process seems to currently have no effects on their levels of support, as 'it is in places where [the party] anywhere do[es]n't perform well' (Interview CZ_G, 2017).

## 4. Salience of electoral topics

The third main element of the social context with potential impact on the electoral geographies of European RLPs relates to the individual preferences of the electorate. As discussed in Chapter 2, the specific political culture and association with local institutions may produce a specific voting behaviour that is influenced by the particularities of a place to a different degree. Yet, even if

two places may share similar legacies and the presence of similar institutions, they still may experience different patterns of voting behaviour due to the different individual preferences of their electorates. This is particularly relevant for places with a distinctive and politicised regional identity that may trump the socio-economic circumstances, evident in the cases of the Italian regions or Scotland, where the centre-periphery cleavage fosters a distinctive political agenda that diverges from the one of the political centre (Agnew, 1987; Shin and Agnew, 2008). Therefore, an indicator of these different preferences is of different salience on electoral topics. Usually, national elections are contested on topics, addressed by most if not all parties in the electoral competition. Yet, the topics themselves may have a different relevance across a territory and, hence, may influence the chances of a party to mobilise its support between places. In such a context, it is expected that:

(H1c) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the differences in the salience of electoral topics between electoral units are limited.

In regard to European RLPs, most significant electoral topics are related to economic and social inequalities, as these are emphasised in their electoral campaigns and manifestos. In this respect, the main expectation is that the difference in the salience of topics related to economic and social inequality should shape the electoral geographies of the three cases.

The cases of Die Linke, SP, and KSČM, however, reveal a very limited relevance of this factor. In fact, they highlight a relative absence of different electoral agendas between places at national elections. This is particularly noticeable in the case of Die Linke. Given the federal character of the German political system, and the presence of regional identities and significant socio-economic differences across Germany, highlighted in the previous section, it is expected that electoral topics may have different salience across the states, which shape the electoral geography of Die Linke. This, however, was not the case, as revealed in the interviews. The main reason for this is that national elections require from German parties to address more general issues, relevant to the country as a whole, rather than emphasising regional or local issues. For

example, in conversation with a party representative from Saxony, the person stated that

> 'I would love to raise awareness about education on national elections. [...] Education is quite a significant topic for Saxony, given the state of public schools here. But I cannot do that, because this will only be relevant for the people here and in other states there may be other issues that deserve more attention' (Interview DE_I, 2017).

This suggests that rather than a diverging salience of different electoral topics, it is the strategic considerations of the electoral campaign that prevents Die Linke from highlighting particular regional issues. This is confirmed by an independent researcher, who emphasised that 'the party always focuses on two or three key messages on federal elections so that it could attract as many as possible voters' (Interview DE_D, 2017). Therefore, the absence of a different salience of electoral topics across states seems to question the direct influence of the particular socio-economic circumstances of a place on the electoral support for the party across Germany. As said in the previous section, these conditions influence the electoral potential of Die Linke, but not necessarily its successful mobilisation.

A very similar situation has been revealed in the rather unitary Netherlands. Here, an initial expectation was that the different social contexts across places could foster different salience of topics, as an outcome of the lasting impact of the pillarisation period. Yet, the conversations with party representatives and independent researchers reveal a completely different picture. Discussing the relevance of local and regional topics, one party representative explained that '[...] this is an unsuitable way to mobilise support. If there is a local issue that has national importance, then we might use it, but otherwise, we need to concentrate on a single message so that we can be clear to the people what we stand for' (Interview NL_G, 2017).

Again, as in the case of Die Linke, it seems that rather than the absence of a different salience, it is a question of campaign strategy how the party approaches elections. In such a context, SP seems to purposefully avoid

addressing local issues on national elections in order to broaden its appeal. Hence, as in the case of Die Linke, the absence of different salience of electoral topics seems to support the idea that the socio-economic conditions of a place account for the electoral potential of the party, rather than mobilising support.

An important reason for SP to avoid using local or regional issues for electoral mobilisation is the influence of media on Dutch elections. Several conversations with party representatives and independent researchers pointed out that access to media and media exposure enables the Dutch parties to spread their message. Particularly for the Dutch circumstances, it is the lack of party-affiliated media in a highly privatised media market that forces Dutch parties to seek any ways possible to reach a broader audience (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005, p. 71). In such a context, it seems that emphasising a limited number of messages allows Dutch parties to develop a clear and recognisable electoral profile.

Furthermore, an important reason for the limited relevance of regional and local issues relates to electoral rules. As the interviews revealed, the absence of electoral constituencies prevents an organised and strategic emphasis on such topics during national elections, leading to rather isolated cases where these are used. For example, a party representative from Overijssel explains that

'[...] people in the province may be a bit more conservative than the rest of the country, and a colleague of mine tried to emphasise herself as a Christian socialist in order to mobilise that part of the electorate, but it is something distinctive for her, not something that the party actively and consciously promotes' (Interview NL_F, 2017).

This again reveals the lack of concerted effort at potentially addressing local particularities of places in national elections.

The lack of divergence of the electoral salience of electoral topics is also due to the significant personalisation of Dutch politics. Conversations with party representatives and independent researchers revealed that SP puts a significant emphasis on the figure of its first-placed candidate, usually the party leader. For

example, in a discussion with a party representative from the SP national headquarters, the person stated that '[...] to perform well in elections you need a very good program and a recognisable figure on top. Then our local organisations should get on work and get the support for that program, nothing more. The leader, therefore, can make the recognisability of this program better' (Interview NL_G, 2017). This highlights the significant role of personality that adds to the appeal of the party across the Netherlands. In such a context, it seems that emphasising the first-placed candidate moves the focus away from the potentially different salience of electoral topics across the country and, thus, reduces its potential impact on the electoral geography of SP.

Similarly, the territorial distribution of electoral support for KSČM is not a product of a different salience of electoral topics across Czech regions. As mentioned in the previous section, the interviews revealed an absence of regional identities that have political significance, thus there is a limited basis for the different salience of electoral topics across the Czech regions on national elections. More importantly, even when there was significant support for regionalist parties, that emphasised regional and local concerns, these topics were subjugated to the overall electoral agenda. The case of the Moravian autonomist movement from the early 1990s reveals that rather than promoting its own political agenda that may differ from the national one, the movement integrated its demands into the wider discussion on the outlook of the post-communist federal system of Czechoslovakia (Musil, Rabušic and Mareš, 1991, pp. 57-58). Returning to the case of KSČM, this suggests that rather than a different salience, it is the different attitudes on the electoral topics that matter more for the different levels of electoral support for the party. As mentioned, KSČM managed to mobilise support in its strongholds mainly by tapping into the local political culture and advantageous socio-economic conditions open to the communist policy agenda of opposing the post-communist political system. Similarly, in Prague and in the Czech inlands KSČM seems to struggle due to the relatively higher standard of living that rather makes their political messages electorally unattractive and irrelevant.

Overall, it seems that the potential divergence in the salience of electoral topics has a limited impact on the electoral geographies of European RLPs, as national elections are contested on common electoral topics. Yet, the territorial

distribution of the electoral support for the three cases may rather relate to the divergence of attitudes on these topics across a territory, stemming, potentially, from the different historical legacies and contemporary socio-economic conditions of a place. In such a context, it seems that while these two factors account for the electoral geography of the party, their role is rather indirect, as they seem to be important for building-up electoral potential between elections rather than mobilising it during elections.

## 5. Conclusion

This chapter explored the influence of factors of social context on the electoral geographies of Die Linke, SP, and KSČM. The main hypothesis was that the differences in the social contexts between electoral units, particularly in their historical legacies of mass mobilisation for common action, in their socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions, and in the salience of electoral topics influence the territorial patterns of electoral support for the three cases. The evidence of this chapter confirms the hypothesis. In particular, the differences in the historical legacies and socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions between constituencies indeed account for the different electoral geographies of the three cases. Whereas in the case of Die Linke and KSČM these different legacies and the levels of economic inequality between electoral units align with their particular territorial distributions of electoral support, it is the absence of links to the past and its linkage to the different socio-cultural conditions that enabled SP to build up its support across the Netherlands. However, the hypothesis related to the potentially different salience of electoral topics between electoral units has been rejected. The evidence of the three cases suggests that national elections are held around common, nationwide topics, regardless of the particular social context in electoral units. What the data indicated is that rather than a different salience, there are different attitudes between electoral units on these common topics that may explain the electoral geographies of European RLPs. Further research may be needed to fully address this question.

These findings make two important contributions for understanding the process of formation of electoral geography. First, they reveal that the electoral geographies of European RLPs seem a product of the influences that occur not

only during elections but also between elections. As the data in this chapter highlighted, the relevance of the historical legacies and socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions across electoral units is particularly noticeable for the period between elections. This suggests that prior to the emergence of actual electoral geography during elections its basis has already been established between elections. In other words, the electoral geography of an RLP emerges in two stages: one, between elections, when the electoral potential has been established depending on the different historical legacies and socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions across electoral units; and two, during elections, when that electoral potential has been mobilised through the electoral competition on common electoral topics. Second, the electoral geographies of European RLPs seem to be a product of different geographical influences during these two stages. As the data in this chapter reveals, whereas between elections it is the regional, place-based social contexts that matter for the electoral potential of a party, during elections it is the nationwide political demand that seems to shape directly the electoral geographies of European RLPs. This is important, as it suggests that the influence of social context on the territorial patterns of electoral performance of European RLPs varies not only across time but also across space.

These contributions have important implications for the main research question of this thesis. Given that the above-mentioned factors of social context are relevant for the electoral geography between, but not during elections, and also that the impact of social context varies between regional and national levels, it seems that the social context has a rather limited explanatory power for the electoral geographies of European RLPs. Therefore, it seems that the external socio-economic and socio-cultural circumstances influence the electoral geographies of European RLPs depending on the extent other factors provide them room to do so. To observe whether this is the case, the following chapter will explore whether political structures i.e. the political institutions and party system competition of a country that structure the different social contexts and condition certain behaviour from parties and society, influence the electoral geography of the three cases.

# Chapter 5 Political structures

## 1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the impact of political institutions and party systems on the territorial balance of electoral support for European radical left parties at national elections between 1990 and 2017. These factors have been shown to be central for the electoral geography of a party, as evident in the growing literature on party and party system nationalisation that explores the sources and effects of the extent to which the politics of a country have a common, national character (Caramani, 2004; Harbers, 2010). In particular, the electoral system of a country (Bochsler, 2010b) and the form of government (Chhibber and Kollman, 2004) can have a substantial influence on the territorial distribution of electoral support. Such factors are particularly important for European radical left parties (RLPs), given their rich history in politically, electorally, and organisationally grappling with and/or benefitting from the impact of the institutional framework of countries across the continent (Lindemann, 2009; March, 2011). Hence, the main hypothesis of this chapter is that the territorial pattern of electoral support for a European RLP at a national election since 1990 depends on the effects of political structures (H2). As conceptualised in Chapter 2, these patterns will be referred by the term 'electoral geography' for the sake of simplicity.

The literature review on party and party system nationalisation and territorial politics in Chapter 2 revealed three main institutional and party system factors that may shape the electoral geographies of European RLPs. First, the electoral system influences their territorial distribution of electoral support at national elections since 1990 through the particular method used to translate votes into seats (H2a), the boundary delimitation of electoral constituencies (H2b), and the rules for parliamentary entry (H2c) (Cox, 2002; Johnston and Pattie, 2006). Second, regional governance influences their electoral geographies through the level of regional authority (H2d) – which provides incentives for parties to develop regional legitimacy - as well as through the participation of a party in regional governance (H2e) and through the party electoral performance at regional elections (H2f) (Chhibber and Kollman, 2004; Brancati, 2008). Third, party system competition influences the electoral

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geographies of European RLPs since 1990 through the intensity of competition for similar voter groups with centre-left (H2g), small progressive (H2h), and anti-political establishment parties (H2i).

The method used to test these hypotheses is the qualitative analysis of series of semi-structured interviews, held in 2017 with independent researchers and party officials from The Left (Die Linke, Germany), the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM, the Czech Republic), and the Socialist Party (SP, the Netherlands) on national and regional levels. The three parties represent three different types of electoral geography, which enables the generalisation of the results of this analysis. While previous studies of the above-presented factors were predominantly quantitative, a qualitative research design allows their relevance to be assessed in light of the experience and expertise of persons who were either directly involved with party work or closely followed their activities. The insights from these interviews were triangulated with qualitative analysis of statistical data relevant to the specific topic and discussed variable.

The main finding of this chapter is that political institutions and party systems contribute to the electoral geography of the three cases, but that this contribution depends on particular party strategic choices and goals. First, electoral rules have a rather declining influence over time. On the one hand, these had a considerable impact on the territorial distribution of electoral support for three cases in their early electoral experiences during the 1990s, as the parties used these rules to circumvent or pass the nationwide electoral threshold. On the other hand, for more recent elections in the 2000s and early 2010s – given that the three parties are all confident in their ability to enter parliament - the data could not confirm the influence of differences in the number of electoral units and district magnitude or of the effective electoral thresholds between constituencies. Electoral rules do not seem to influence their strategic choices regarding where and how to campaign and, therefore, have limited impact on their electoral geographies.

Second, regional governance matters for the territorial distribution of electoral performance of the three cases in as much as it provides an incentive for political parties to use their involvement in regional politics to build regional legitimacy. Yet, as the data in this chapter highlights, this use depends on

particular party choices and abilities. While this confirms the importance of the level of regional authority for the territorial pattern of electoral performance, the three parties avoid or fail to translate their regional electoral performance and involvement in regional politics into electoral support at national elections.

Third, party system nationalisation also has an impact on the electoral geography of the three RLPs of this study. In particular, the intensity of competition with major centre-left parties remains a constant factor for the territorial distribution of electoral support throughout the entire timeframe of this study, whereas the intensity of the competition with small progressive and/or anti-political establishment opponents varies depending on the ideological profile of the particular RLP. These findings thus question the influence of political institutions and party systems for the electoral geography of political parties and hold significant implications for the study on party and party system nationalisation. Furthermore, they suggest that the territorial distribution of electoral support for European RLPs since 1990 depends mainly on their organisational capabilities.

## 2. Electoral system

One of the most important institutional factors shaping the electoral geography of a party is the electoral system. It is significant for its mechanical effects on the rules for parliamentary entry and the transfer of votes into seats, which create the immediate link between territorial and political representation (Caramani, 2004, pp. 26–28). More importantly, these rules carry noticeable psychological effects for voters in their effort to avoid wasting their vote on a party that has in their view a limited chance for parliamentary entry (Carey and Shugart, 1995). They also influence party behaviour. These rules require distinctive electoral strategies, including a targeted application of their organisational resources towards maximising their electoral potential. Given that these effects outline the openness of an electoral system towards political parties, it is expected that they will have a significant impact on the electoral geographies of European RLPs since 1990 given their generally small-party status. As existing studies on Green (Kitschelt, 1988; Müller-Rommel, 1993) and radical right parties (Ignazi, 1996; Kitschelt and McGann, 1996; Müller-Rommel, 1998) suggest, electoral rules have a considerable impact for their initial

electoral success. Hence, it is expected that the electoral system should have a similar significant contribution to the electoral geographies of European RLPs since 1990.

## 2.1. Number of constituencies and district magnitude

Three particular aspects of the electoral system require a close consideration. First, the literature on party and party system nationalisation explains the territorial balance of electoral support for political parties through, among others, the influence of the number of electoral constituencies and their district magnitude (Morgenstern, Swindle and Castagnola, 2009, pp. 1327–1328; Golosov, 2016, p. 250). Particularly, having a high number of constituencies increases the social homogeneity within each one and, therefore, fosters an imbalanced territorial distribution of electoral support (Golosov, 2017). As revealed in the previous chapter, while the level of social homogeneity (i.e. the similarity of historical legacies, socio-economic circumstances, and electoral attitudes across a territory) may not have a direct impact on the electoral geographies of European RLPs, it nevertheless reveals the extent the electoral efforts of different political parties may succeed in particular places. Therefore, the more socially homogeneous an electoral unit is the more accommodative or resistant it is towards these efforts. This should lead to, respectively, very high or very low levels of support within districts. Similarly, low district magnitude also fosters imbalanced electoral geographies. This is particularly felt by small parties, as it amplifies the psychological effects of a wasted vote for voters (Gschwend, 2009). Hence, the expected impact of these two factors is as follows:

(H2a) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the number of electoral units is lower, and the district magnitude is higher.

The data on three cases, however, cannot confirm this hypothesis. The three parties compete at national elections under relatively similar electoral rules. The three countries use party list (the Netherlands and the Czech Republic) or mixed-member proportional representation (Germany) systems with, generally, a similar number of multi-member electoral districts of

predominantly high district magnitude (Table 5.1). Given these similarities, it seems that the diverse electoral geographies of the three cases are cannot be a product of the mechanical and psychological effects of these factors.

More importantly, these cases' electoral geographies experience rather small change even after significant alternations to electoral rules. This is particularly noticeable in Germany and the Czech Republic, where the electoral geographies of Die Linke and KSČM remained stable even after rapid changes in the number of constituencies and in the district magnitude in the early 2000s (Table 5.1). Particularly telling for the insignificance of these changes is the lack of an organisational response. For example, an independent researcher pointed out that 'KSČM was the only major Czech party that has not changed its organisational structure following the reform' (Interview CZ_C, 2017). Although the party reacted to these changes by introducing a new organisational level, the regional organisation (*krajská organizace*), its delayed introduction suggests that KSČM does not consider the number of electoral constituencies an important factor that influences its electoral performance across a territory. Similarly, even when there is no change in the number of electoral constituencies, as is the case in the Netherlands, the SP did not adapt to these organisationally, with its structures corresponding to the administrative divisions of the country rather than those of the 20 electoral districts.

**Table 5.1. Main characteristics of the electoral systems of the Czech Republic, Germany, and the Netherlands between 1990 and 2017 and a comparison between the territorial balances of the main radical left, social democratic and other small progressive parties**

| Country | Year | Constituency number | District magnitude | Threshold | RLP territorial balance | Soc Dem territorial balance | Small Prog. territorial balance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Czech Republic** | 1990 | 8 | Highest: 40 Lowest: 14 | 5% | 0.95 | 0.76 | 0.81 (SZ) |
| | 1992 | 8 | Highest: 41 Lowest: 14 | 5% | 0.94 | 0.88 | 0.88 (DŽJ) |
| | 1996 | 8 | Highest: 41 Lowest: 14 | 5% | 0.93 | 0.91 | 0.83 (DŽJ) |
| | 1998 | 8 | Highest: 41 Lowest: 14 | 5% | 0.91 | 0.93 | 0.88 (DŽJ) |
| | 2002 | 14 | Highest: 25 Lowest: 5 | 5% | 0.91 | 0.95 | 0.94 (SZ) |
| | 2006 | 14 | Highest: 25 Lowest: 5 | 5% | 0.92 | 0.92 | 0.88 (SZ) |
| | 2010 | 14 | Highest: 25 Lowest: 5 | 5% | 0.91 | 0.91 | 0.83 (SZ) |
| | 2013 | 14 | Highest: 25 Lowest: 5 | 5% | 0.90 | 0.91 | 0.82 (SZ) |
| **Germany** | 1990 | 328 SMC / 16 MMC | Highest: 71 Lowest: 3 | 5% | 0.27 | 0.90 | 0.79 |
| | 1994 | 328 SMC / 16 MMC | Highest: 71 Lowest: 3 | 5% | 0.32 | 0.92 | 0.87 |
| | 1998 | 328 SMC / 16 MMC | Highest: 71 Lowest: 3 | 5% | 0.34 | 0.93 | 0.85 |
| | 2002 | 299 SMC / 16 MMC | Highest: 64 Lowest: 2 | 5% | 0.36 | 0.92 | 0.83 |
| | 2005 | 299 SMC / 16 MMC | Highest: 64 Lowest: 2 | 5% | 0.57 | 0.91 | 0.83 |
| | 2009 | 299 SMC / 16 MMC | Highest: 64 Lowest: 2 | 5% | 0.69 | 0.89 | 0.86 |
| | 2013 | 299 SMC / 16 MMC | Highest: 64 Lowest: 2 | 5% | 0.64 | 0.89 | 0.85 |
| **Netherlands** | 1994 | 19 | Highest: 14 Lowest: 2 | 0.67% | 0.76 | 0.91 | 0.96 (D66) |
| | 1998 | 19 | Highest: 14 Lowest: 3 | 0.67% | 0.84 | 0.94 | 0.89 (GL) |
| | 2002 | 19 | Highest: 14 Lowest: 3 | 0.67% | 0.90 | 0.90 | 0.90 (GL) |
| | 2003 | 19 | Highest: 1 Lowest: 3 | 0.67% | 0.89 | 0.92 | 0.89 (GL) |
| | 2006 | 19 | Highest: 14 Lowest: 3 | 0.67% | 0.92 | 0.91 | 0.84 (GL) |
| | 2010 | 19 | Highest: 14 Lowest: 3 | 0.67% | 0.89 | 0.90 | 0.89 (GL) |
| | 2012 | 20 | Highest: 14 Lowest: 3 | 0.67% | 0.87 | 0.92 | 0.86 (GL) |

Source: Author's compilation of public information on the websites of the respective returning officers. Balance of territorial distribution of electoral support taken from based on Bochsler's standardised and weighted party nationalisation score (Bochsler, 2010a), ranging between 0 (a party obtains its vote share from one constituency) to 1 (a party obtains the same vote share across all constituencies). The data was taken from Party Nationalisation Dataset at Constituency-Level Election Data project (Kollman *et al.*, 2018) and complemented with the author's own calculations for cases not included in the dataset. The constituency balance is calculated through Lijphart's formula for effective threshold (1994), distinguishing constituencies with a high effective threshold (ET) as those above the legal threshold from constituencies with low ET where the legal threshold is higher than their actual ET. The Netherlands has no legal district magnitude for its constituencies. The above-presented district magnitude is calculated by using the proportion of valid votes in a constituency to the overall number of valid votes.

## 2.2. Malapportionment

A second important factor that builds upon the raw number of electoral constituencies and their district magnitude is malapportionment. While the above-discussed factors may not influence the electoral geographies of European RLPs, it may be the way they are delimited that explains the different levels of support for these parties across a country. In this respect, Caramani (2000, p. 24) and Johnstone and Pattie (2006, chap. 8) point out that any border delimitation or change of district magnitude can distort, intentionally or unintentionally, the extent to which the electorate of an electoral unit obtains representation proportionate to its population. In other words, the way electoral units are delimited can also provide advantages or disadvantages to political parties or social constituencies, and, thus, influence the electoral potential of a party across a country. This is an important factor particularly for small parties, as voters remain conscious about the boundary limits of their constituency and its respective social context, fostering the particularity of tactical voting, as experienced, for example, in countries with majoritarian electoral systems (Niemi, Whitten and Franklin, 1992). Therefore, while malapportionment clearly can influence the electoral geography of a party, it may work to their advantage (ensuring parliamentary presence) or disadvantage (preventing parliamentary entry). Therefore, this factor is not necessarily tied to a particular territorial pattern of electoral support. In this context the second hypothesis states solely that:

(H2b) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the level of malapportionment is low.

The evidence from the three cases suggests that this hypothesis cannot be confirmed. While there is some evidence of malapportionment in the three countries, they have limited influence on the electoral geographies of the three RLPs. The clearest one among these is Die Linke in Germany. The mixed-member proportional system used for the Bundestag elections distributes an equal number of mandates from single-member constituencies and from regional lists. In such circumstances, while the boundary delimitation aims to divide each state into several single-member constituencies with an approximately similar number

of eligible voters, it also offers distinctive benefits for particular types of districts. On the one hand, the sparsely populated states of Rhineland-Palatine, Schleswig-Holstein or Mecklenburg-Upper Pomerania contain exclusively rather rural constituencies which incorporate their major cities, resulting in socially heterogeneous districts. On the other hand, aside from the three city-states (Berlin, Bremen, and Hamburg) several German cities represent single or several electoral constituencies within their city limits[18], accentuating the influence of their urban, roughly homogeneous circumstances on the electoral support for parties at national elections. The relevance of this boundary delimitation became apparent in 2001, as the Bundestag reduced the number of single-member constituencies from 328 to 299, prompting a major boundary review across the 16 states.

These differences in boundary delimitation, however, have had a limited effect on the electoral geography of Die Linke. The main reason for this is that the redistricting of 2001 has not affected any state boundaries from which the overall number of mandates is determined and distributed. This, therefore, leaves the overall territorial distribution of electoral support for the party intact. If anything, these changes reflect the electoral geography of Die Linke within a state rather than its overall territorial distribution of support across Germany. More importantly, changes in district magnitude between states are subject to a regular reviews of population changes (Saalfeld, 2005, p. 213). However, as party representatives from Die Linke state, these changes play a minimal role in their electoral geography. For example, a party representative pointed out that 'some comrades complain about losing a seat due to population changes. What I explain to them is that they cannot lose a seat they haven't won yet' (Interview DE_F, 2017). This indicates the importance of party efforts for electoral mobilisation rather than the particular electoral boundaries.

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[18] For example, in the 2013 federal elections 26 cities contained 41 single member constituencies (SMCs) solely in their city limits: Munich (4 SMCs), Nuremberg (2 SMCs) and Augsburg (1 SMC) in Bavaria; Stuttgart (2 SMCs), Karlsruhe and Mannheim (1 SMC) in Baden-Württemberg; Cologne (3 SMCs), Dortmund, Duisburg, Dusseldorf and Essen (2 SMCs), Aachen, Bochum, Bonn, Gelsenkirchen, Mönchengladbach, Münster, Wuppertal (1 SMC) in North Rhine-Westphalia; Dresden and Leipzig (2 SMCs), Chemnitz (1 SMC) in Saxony; Frankfurt am Main (2 SMCs) and Wiesbaden (1 SMC) in Hesse; Hannover (2 SMCs), Braunschweig and Osnabrück (1 SMC) in Lower Saxony.

The other two cases contain even less convincing evidence for malapportionment. In the Czech Republic, the boundaries of the electoral constituencies for parliamentary elections coincide with those of the country's administrative regions, while the district magnitude is determined by the proportion of valid votes in the particular region relative to the overall number of valid votes on a given election. These conditions offer two particular channels for malapportionment: first, as in many European countries, the capital city of the Czech Republic, Prague, has its own electoral constituency, suggesting a significant influence of its broadly socially homogeneous circumstances on the electoral support for political parties at national elections; second, district magnitude and, therefore, the overall balance between regions can experience major changes when there are significant differences in the voter turnout between constituencies. However, parliamentary elections since 1990 revealed no substantial differences in the voter turnout between electoral constituencies, (Table 5.2) despite Prague being among the districts with either the highest or the lowest turnout, suggesting some impact of the former development, but little on the latter. Yet, as one independent researcher pointed out, 'regions in the Czech Republic do not contain the major territorial differences of electoral support for political parties; these differences become more noticeable on lower, municipal level' (Interview CZ_I, 2017). This emphasises the importance of the geographical scope for understanding the electoral geography of Czech parties, including KSČM.

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**Table 5.2. Voter turnout across Czech constituencies on the national parliamentary elections since 1990**

| Constituency | 1990 | 1992 | 1996 | 1998 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Prague | 94.59 | 80.77 | 69.73 | 71.62 |
| Central Bohemia | 97.44 | 87.75 | 78.35 | 76.38 |
| South Bohemia | 97.58 | 88.12 | 77.67 | 75.24 |
| West Bohemia | 96.88 | 83.23 | 74.56 | 72.19 |
| North Bohemia | 96.07 | 80.40 | 72.79 | 69.89 |
| East Bohemia | 97.80 | 89.49 | 80.44 | 77.64 |
| South Moravia | 97.53 | 87.55 | 79.26 | 76.06 |
| North Moravia | 96.50 | 83.50 | 76.80 | 72.72 |
| **Constituency** | **2002** | **2006** | **2010** | **2013** |
| Prague | 59.98 | 68.51 | 67.99 | 64.14 |
| Central Bohemia | 58.78 | 65.96 | 64.26 | 61.47 |
| South Bohemia | 58.11 | 65.36 | 63.58 | 60.55 |
| Pilsen | 58.00 | 63.92 | 61.68 | 57.92 |
| Karlovy Vary | 50.17 | 56.48 | 54.04 | 51.57 |
| Ústí nad Labem | 50.65 | 57.22 | 55.66 | 51.69 |
| Liberec | 55.83 | 62.35 | 61.41 | 57.92 |
| Hradec Králové | 60.84 | 66.69 | 64.93 | 61.65 |
| Pardubice | 61.14 | 67.37 | 65.49 | 62.26 |
| Vysočina | 62.45 | 67.61 | 65.68 | 63.37 |
| South Moravia | 60.03 | 65.29 | 63.27 | 60.55 |
| Olomouc | 58.88 | 64.52 | 62.12 | 58.90 |
| Zlín | 60.02 | 66.90 | 64.27 | 61.53 |
| Moravia-Silesia | 55.22 | 61.02 | 58.19 | 55.48 |

Source: Czech Statistical Office (2018)

In the case of the Netherlands, parliamentary elections use the entire country as a single electoral district with a magnitude of 150 (the total number of parliamentary mandates). The country relies also on 20 electoral constituencies to determine which candidates from each party list should receive a parliamentary seat. In this respect, these electoral constituencies enable potential malapportionment in two main ways. First, while their boundaries resemble to a large extent those of the 12 provinces, the relatively socially homogeneous circumstances of the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague obtain significant importance as these have their own electoral constituencies. Furthermore, four provinces (Gelderland, North Holland, South Holland, and North Brabant) receive additional advantage for their particular social contexts, as they contain at least two electoral constituencies. These aspects of the Dutch electoral boundaries are particularly relevant for the smaller Dutch parties, such as the GreenLeft (GL), Democrats 66 (D66), Reformed Political Party (SGP) and the Christian Union (CU), as their electoral support that perpetuates their parliamentary presence comes predominantly

from these regions and constituencies[19]. Second, parties have significant freedom in determining their electoral list. They are allowed to place the same electoral list in a more than one electoral constituency, enabling them to skew their electoral geographies through their candidate choice. This suggests that the malapportionment of Dutch constituencies may shape the electoral geographies of small parties, as it subordinates the influence of the social circumstances of the electoral constituencies to their electoral goals.

Yet, the relevance of these factors is restricted due to the specifics of Dutch electoral politics. A general convention in the Dutch party system requires all major parties to present a common first-placed candidate and a common list, while usually leaving lower, unelectable places for either local-based candidates or for the so-called list pusher[20]. Given that in such circumstances voters cast their ballot on the same set of candidates across the country, it seems that the potential malapportionment of the Dutch constituencies has a restricted direct influence on the electoral geographies of Dutch parties. This is particularly the case for SP, as the party avoids emphasising particular places or constituencies in their strategic choices for the electoral campaign. As one party representative states in this respect: 'Although we are a party that claims to know what happens everywhere, we don't take geography into consideration when we determine our lists for national elections' (Interview NL_F, 2017). Hence, malapportionment does not have an influence on the electoral geography of the party.

## 2.3. Electoral threshold

The third significant factor of the electoral system is the electoral threshold. This emerges from the literature of the effects of electoral rules on party systems and electoral success. As Bochsler (2010b, pp. 23–24) and Lijphart (1994, p. 29) discuss in terms of the link between electoral threshold and territory, beneath the legal threshold that parties need to pass for

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[19] For example, GL and D66 consistently achieve their best electoral performances in the Amsterdam, Utrecht and The Hague constituencies. SGP, on the other hand, performs strongly not only in the Middelburg constituency (province Zeeland), but also obtains significant support in Dordrecht constituency (South Holland) and Arnhem and Nijmegen constituencies in Gelderland. CU are also performing strongly in the two Gelderland constituencies, but also in Groningen and Zwolle (Overijssel).
[20] A recognisable figure that mobilises electoral support for a particular party without the intent of obtaining a parliamentary seat

parliamentary entry, each constituency has its own effective threshold[21]. This effective threshold places a natural barrier for political parties to gain seats in a given constituency and can vary depending on the district magnitude. In such circumstances, the higher the district magnitude the lower the effective threshold. Similar to malapportionment, therefore, small parties may prioritise certain constituencies, where they expect to have a better chance of obtaining a parliamentary seat by passing the effective threshold. In this context, the lower the effective threshold of an electoral constituency is than the actual electoral threshold, the more attractive such a constituency would be for a small party. Hence, if electoral rules do contribute to the electoral geographies of European RLPs, it is expected that these parties are mindful of the effective threshold of the territorial arenas at national elections. In such a context, the hypothesis is as follows:

(H2c) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the differences of the effective thresholds between electoral units are limited.

The three cases, however, cannot confirm this hypothesis, as they offer inconclusive evidence. First, for SP and KSČM, passing the electoral threshold has minimal effects on their electoral geographies. In the Netherlands, the elections for the House of Representatives do not have an electoral threshold, although a party requires at least 0.67% in order to gain one of the 150 seats. In such circumstances, any differences between the effective thresholds of Dutch electoral constituencies have hardly any relevance for the electoral geography of any Dutch party. In the Czech Republic, passing the 5% does not seem an important challenge for KSČM, given that despite its ageing and declining voter base, it should remain a permanent participant in Czech politics for at least several decades (Linek, 2008). Beyond this, the nationwide character of the electoral threshold does not have much influence on the electoral geography of the party, as it does not place any additional performance requirements at a regional level. Hence, even if there are differences in the effective threshold between constituencies, these are not relevant for KSČM. In this context and in a similar vein to SP, KSČM barely takes geography into consideration for their

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[21] For example a district that assigns 5 mandates (m) has an effective threshold of 16.67% for any party to obtain a seat from it, given that $T_E=1/(m+1)$ according to Lijphart (1994).

electoral analysis. As a discussion with a party representative reveals, for example, past electoral performances of KSČM across constituencies are not considered when the party makes its strategic choices for upcoming elections (Interview CZ_H, 2017). Therefore, as both cases suggest, it seems that the lack of effects of the electoral threshold stems from the minor challenge it poses to the strategic application of their organisational resources.

The case of Die Linke, however, represents the opposite of the others. During the 1990s, the party struggled to pass the 5% nationwide electoral threshold. What enabled the party to establish a firm parliamentary presence was the use of special provisions of the German electoral law of a particularly territorial character. In 1990 a decision of the German constitutional court allowed parliamentary entry for any party that passed the 5% threshold in either Eastern or Western Germany on the 1990 Bundestag elections, which enabled the party predecessor, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), to enter the Bundestag despite its 2.3% nationwide support. More importantly, the German electoral rules allow parties to circumvent the 5% threshold should they win the plurality in at least three single-member constituencies. This was an important electoral provision for the development of PDS during the 1990s, as on two occasions winning single-member constituencies in East Berlin ensured their parliamentary presence (Berger *et al.*, 1994; Emmert, Jung and Roth, 1998). More importantly, the use of these provisions contributed to the substantial internal debate on whether the party should develop as an East German regionalist representative and continue to rely on its strongholds in Eastern Germany, or turn into an all-German left-wing alternative to establish broader territorial support (Patton, 2011, pp. 109–112). This suggests that circumventing the electoral threshold had a considerable influence on the strategic electoral approach of PDS and its particular efforts to establish specific electoral geography enabling parliamentary entry.

Yet, while in such circumstances these considerations stemmed from the challenge posed by the 5% electoral threshold, the choice of PDS to target particular constituencies in Eastern Germany derived rather from the accommodative social context instead of the lower electoral hurdle it had to pass. As Hough, Koss and Olsen (2007, p. 39) pointed out, the reliance of PDS on the East Berlin constituencies was a practical approach which took into account

the substantial concentration of core voters in the four (five until 1998) constituencies in East Berlin, while implicitly recognising its complete social and political absence in Western Germany. This is further confirmed by the experience of party representatives, who stressed the importance of mobilising their core voters above anything else. As one party official highlighted in a discussion on the electoral strategy of the party: 'First, you need to mobilise your core. Once you have done that, then you can think of reaching out towards peripheral voters' (Interview DE_I, 2017). Despite the importance of mobilising core voters, it seems that since the 2007 merger Die Linke has abandoned its emphasis on single-member constituencies as a way to circumvent the 5% threshold. As one party representative stated in regards to the upcoming 2017 Bundestag elections: 'Currently we require to pass the 5% hurdle and for that we will need about 7 to 10% in West Germany; if we win a couple of constituencies that will be just a bonus' (Interview DE_K, 2017), suggesting the increased relevance of establishing a territorially more balanced electoral support. Overall, it seems that electoral thresholds have limited influence on the electoral geographies of the three cases, with the exception of the PDS during the 1990s.

### 3. Regional governance

The seemingly weak impact of electoral rules does not necessarily rule out a role for political structures in determining the electoral geographies of European RLPs. In this respect, regional governance can be an important factor. The institutional framework of a country is especially significant for small parties, as they make use of their participation in regional and local politics to improve their links to society (Brancati, 2008) and, thus, improve their mobilisation potential. Left-wing parties are particularly inclined to rely on this approach, given their history of developing firm support in places where they promoted broad sets of public services (Szajkowski, 1985; Maimann, 1988; Judd, 1989; March, 2009). Therefore, the electoral geographies of European RLPs may stem from the transformation of their experiences in regional governance into electoral support at national elections.

## 3.1.  Regional authority

There are two particular factors that highlight the influence of regional governance. First, the literature on multi-level governance draws attention to the increased transfer of political authority towards sub- and supra-national institutional levels (Enderlein, Wälti and Zürn, 2010). This transfer creates new political spaces for political parties which provide them with the incentive to establish local legitimacy and transform it into support at national elections (Kedar, 2009). The literature on party and party system nationalisation further enhances this perspective, as it emphasises that increases in political decentralisation lead to territorially less balanced electoral support for political parties (Morgenstern, Swindle and Castagnola, 2009, p. 1328; Golosov, 2016, p. 248). Hence, the hypothesis for this factor states:

(H2d) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the level of regional authority is lower.

A quantitative comparison of the political authority of the respective highest administrative levels (Czech kraj, German Land and Dutch provincie) of the three countries in question seems to confirm this hypothesis. In particular, it highlights varying incentives for the political parties there to participate in regional and local politics and use these experiences to mobilise electoral support at national elections. Table 5.3 compares the Regional Authority Index (RAI) of the three countries based on the assessment of the level of political, policy, and fiscal decentralisation (Hooghe *et al.*, 2016). This index is among the few that offers cross-country comparisons and includes measures of regional autonomy from central authority and the influence of regions on the national legislative process. This makes RAI particularly suited to understanding the extent to which parties would be incentivised to get involved in regional politics in order to transform this experience into an electoral asset at national elections, since it accounts for this linkage between the regional and national levels of governance.

**Table 5.3. Regional Authority Index of the Czech Republic, Germany, and the Netherlands, 1990-2010**

| Country | Year | Administrative Level | RAI | Country | Year | Administrative Level | RAI | Country | Year | Administrative Level | RAI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Czech Republic | 1990 | Kraj | 0 | Germany | 1990 | Länder | 26 | Netherlands | 1990 | Provincies | 16.5 |
| | 1991 | Kraj | 0 | | 1991 | Länder | 26 | | 1991 | Provincies | 16.5 |
| | 1992 | Kraj | 0 | | 1992 | Länder | 26 | | 1992 | Provincies | 16.5 |
| | 1993 | Kraj | 0 | | 1993 | Länder | 26 | | 1993 | Provincies | 17.5 |
| | 1994 | Kraj | 0 | | 1994 | Länder | 26 | | 1994 | Provincies | 17.5 |
| | 1995 | Kraj | 0 | | 1995 | Länder | 26 | | 1995 | Provincies | 17.5 |
| | 1996 | Kraj | 0 | | 1996 | Länder | 26 | | 1996 | Provincies | 17.5 |
| | 1997 | Kraj | 0 | | 1997 | Länder | 26 | | 1997 | Provincies | 17.5 |
| | 1998 | Kraj | 0 | | 1998 | Länder | 26 | | 1998 | Provincies | 17.5 |
| | 1999 | Kraj | 0 | | 1999 | Länder | 26 | | 1999 | Provincies | 17.5 |
| | 2000 | Kraj | 8 | | 2000 | Länder | 26 | | 2000 | Provincies | 17.5 |
| | 2001 | Kraj | 8 | | 2001 | Länder | 26 | | 2001 | Provincies | 17.5 |
| | 2002 | Kraj | 8 | | 2002 | Länder | 26 | | 2002 | Provincies | 17.5 |
| | 2003 | Kraj | 9 | | 2003 | Länder | 26 | | 2003 | Provincies | 17.5 |
| | 2004 | Kraj | 9 | | 2004 | Länder | 26 | | 2004 | Provincies | 17.5 |
| | 2005 | Kraj | 9 | | 2005 | Länder | 26 | | 2005 | Provincies | 17.5 |
| | 2006 | Kraj | 9 | | 2006 | Länder | 26 | | 2006 | Provincies | 17.5 |
| | 2007 | Kraj | 9 | | 2007 | Länder | 26 | | 2007 | Provincies | 17.5 |
| | 2008 | Kraj | 9 | | 2008 | Länder | 26 | | 2008 | Provincies | 17.5 |
| | 2009 | Kraj | 9 | | 2009 | Länder | 26 | | 2009 | Provincies | 17.5 |
| | 2010 | Kraj | 9 | | 2010 | Länder | 27 | | 2010 | Provincies | 16.5 |

Source: Hooghe et al. (2016)

The RAI of the three countries differs substantially, reflecting the major differences in regional powers. While in the Czech Republic regions have rather implementary powers (Pink, 2017, p. 89), Dutch provinces enjoy some fiscal and policy independence (Bos, 2010) coupled with significant influence by the national legislative process through the direct involvement of provincial governments in the Dutch Senate. Meanwhile, in the case of Germany, the system of competitive federalism (Jeffery, 2002) allows states to develop distinctive policy approaches in a broader set of areas and to have substantial powers over the national legislative agenda through the Bundesrat. In such circumstances, it seems that these differences offer significantly divergent opportunities for political parties to use their involvement in regional politics. On a quantitative level, this seems to confirm hypothesis H2d.

Yet the experiences of the three parties rather question this influence. The predominant assessment of regional politics by party representatives and independent researchers reveals that, while the three parties may be incentivised to use their regional and local involvement in politics, voters are only marginally influenced by it at national elections. In this respect, the cases of the Czech Republic and the Netherlands highlighted the general lack of popular interest in or knowledge of regional and local politics as an important reason for the irrelevance of regional authority for their electoral geography. For example, one party representative of SP highlights the predominantly sensationalist focus on regional authority: '[There is] not so much interest in provincial politics, not so many people [or] the media follow it, [and when they do] it's always when you have a scandal and it's always negative.' (Interview NL_D, 2017) This is corroborated by a Czech party representative who emphasised the restricted territorial scope of public interest: 'national elections rather reflect politics in Prague instead [of] those in our region' (Interview CZ_F, 2017). This statement is further confirmed by the assessment of an independent researcher that 'the region is the last [place] where people think [it] can change something for them' (Interview CZ_B, 2017), stressing the limited importance of regional authority in the public view.

Second, as revealed in the case of Germany, even when voters are following regional politics, the significance of regional authority and how political parties use it does not influence electoral choices at national elections.

On the contrary, instead of linking the experiences of regional with national politics, the increase of regional authority prompts German voters to rather differentiate their choices between regional and national elections. In this respect, an independent researcher emphasised that ' at national elections, the party is perceived by its image on [the] federal level' (Interview DE_D, 2017). This suggests that even if a party is incentivised to use regional governance to boost its electoral chances at national elections, voters have different perceptions on the party at the national level from the party at the regional level. Such different perceptions are highlighted in the case of Die Linke by the experience of a party representative: 'Often voters tell me that they are going to support us at national elections, but never on regional ones' (Interview DE_F, 2017). Therefore, in the case of Die Linke, there is limited evidence that regional and local politics shaped its electoral geography.

## 3.2. Regional presence

The different perceptions of the three European RLPs between national and regional levels are further confirmed by their actual experiences in regional politics. As discussed in Chapter 2, an expectation is that the different experiences of these parties in regional and local governance fosters divergent perceptions of regional legitimacy among the electorate which transfers itself to their choices at the national level. While in one region an RLP may be a legitimate electoral force - underpinned by participation in a regional parliament if not regional government - in another region such party may be a marginal actor, unable to make a policy impact. European RLPs have a rich history of building up regional legitimacy and using it at national elections, evident in the lasting electoral support in the so-called 'red belts', established through the provision of cradle-to-the-grave services at regional level (March, 2009, pp. 130–131). As the initial expectation that an RLP can use these experiences as a source and reference for electoral mobilisation at national elections, a hypothesis related to this factor states the following:

(H2e) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the party presence in regional politics is more similar between electoral units.

The empirical data on the three cases, however, cannot confirm this hypothesis. On the one hand, their electoral geographies correspond to a large extent with their maps of involvement in regional parliaments. In the case of KSČM in the Czech Republic, the party maintained a regular and continuous presence in all regional legislatures since their introduction in 2000, coinciding with its balanced electoral geography at national elections. More importantly, the party entered into governing coalitions in the majority of regions[22], thus deepening its involvement in regional politics. Hence, on a basic, cursory level it seems that the balanced electoral geography of KSČM, particularly in the more recent elections, can be explained with its significant record in regional government and/or parliamentary participation.

A similar congruence between regional parliamentary presence and electoral geography at national elections is also evident in the case of Die Linke. Since the 1990s as the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the party established a regular presence in the East German state legislatures, supporting or entering regional government coalitions on several occasions[23]. Furthermore, while PDS failed to even contest regional elections in Western Germany during the 1990s, its record after the 2007 merger into Die Linke reveals a continuous regional presence in four West German state parliaments[24] and the entry at least once in further three[25]. This may account for the increasingly balanced pattern of electoral support since the merger, highlighting the potential relevance of the level of involvement in regional politics. In the case of SP in the Netherlands, the party simultaneously developed an increasingly balanced territorial pattern of electoral support coupled with an increasing presence in regional legislatures, though it entered into regional government only recently[26]. All in all, the quantitative data suggests that the territorial distribution of the presence in the regional parliament and/or government coincides with the particular electoral geography at national elections, highlighting the potentially strong abilities of

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[22] From the 14 regions, the party haven't been in government only in Prague and Liberec.
[23] Die Linke were in a coalition government with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (1998-2006), Berlin (2002-2011) and Brandenburg (since 2009), while also forming a triple coalition with the SPD and the Greens in Thuringia (since 2014) and Berlin (since 2016). It also tolerated centre-left minority government in Saxony-Anhalt (1994-2002).
[24] Bremen since 2007, Hamburg and Hesse since 2008, Saarland since 2009
[25] Lower Saxony (2008-2013), Schleswig-Holstein (2009-2012), North Rhine-Westphalia (2010-2012)
[26] North Brabant and South Holland since 2011 and Groningen, Friesland, Flevoland, and Limburg since 2015

the radical left to transform its regional presence into electoral support at national elections.

As in the case of regional authority, however, the qualitative evidence on the presence in regional politics questions this suggestion. An overwhelming theme for all three parties was the emphasis on the particular experience of such participation. As a German independent researcher puts it clearly: 'It is not about being in regional government, it is about what one does with it' (Interview DE_D, 2017). This suggests that the link between involvement in regional politics and electoral support at national elections is not as direct as it seems. The most significant reason for the lack of such a direct link is the different dynamics of regional politics, marked by its less politicised character in comparison to national politics (Webb, 2000; Copus, 2004; Aars and Ringkjøb, 2005). In such a context RLPs seem to struggle to balance between, on the one hand, behaving in a depoliticised manner on the regional level in order to establish their regional legitimacy, and, on the other hand, politicising their regional record on the national level to transform it into electoral support. In other words, the three cases reveal the inabilities of European RLPs to use their involvement in regional politics as a source of electoral mobilisation at national elections.

In the case of KSČM, the struggle of this balancing act becomes more pronounced when the party participates in regional government. Generally, while the KSČM remains critical to the particular administrative system established in the early 2000s (Interview CZ_E, 2017; Interview CZ_I, 2017), its experience on regional level contributed to the improvement of its coalition potential and enhanced its anti-political establishment image as a party allegedly not associated with political corruption (Interview CZ_E, 2017). Yet, in terms of its electoral geography at national elections, the regional experience of the party has a limited impact due to incongruence between its governmental responsibilities at regional level and its anti-establishment image at the national one. A party representative highlights this in the context of the party electoral strategy at national elections:

'The party at [the] national level should present what it has achieved. We have mayors in towns and municipalities, and we have achieved lots of things at regional and local levels, so they can use the

achievements of [our region] to do that. But if the general policy [in the central headquarters] in Prague is to play the role of the [parliamentary] opposition, they will not be willing to point these things' (Interview CZ_F, 2017).

The main reason for the incongruence is the lack of linkage between the de-politicised nature of regional governance and the more politicised character of the national one. Another party representative clarifies this point the following way:

'Practical issues prevent the party to extend its achievements on national level; the agenda there is not so much ideological, but […] even there you should try to do your best to use any opportunity to demonstrate you will do more in more popular, radical ways than others' (Interview CZ_G, 2017).

This statement suggests that even when the party performs well in regional government, it struggles to use this performance to mobilise its electorate at national elections without making the linkage between regional and national politics.

In the case of SP, this incongruence stems from electoral uncertainty, even while purposefully pursuing such an approach. Several interviews pointed out that the party aims to directly establish the most immediate, regional issues and act upon them politically (e.g. Interview NL_A, 2017; Interview NL_B, 2017). The main aim in this respect is the association of party activities with local and regional issues. As one party representative clarifies: 'We are not trying to directly convince people of our own ideas, but we're trying to convince them to take their own fate to organise themselves' (Interview NL_A, 2017). Yet this strategy seems to contribute little to the electoral geography of SP at national elections, since these remain centred on national politics and not so much on achievements in regional government (Interview NL_G, 2017) or presence in regional parliament (Interview NL_F, 2017). One party representative goes even further and points to the insignificance of regional policies even at regional elections, stating that 'the quality of [a regional] policy is only a minor factor for local elections, at national elections is even less' (Interview NL_C, 2017).

This suggests that while SP attempt to link their appeal to local or regional concerns among their potential voters, they do not consider it to have direct relevance for their mobilisation potential at national elections.

The main challenge for Die Linke in bridging the gap between national and regional politics relates more to the particular relations between regional and national party organisations. This concerns two important factors. First, the officialised factionalism within Die Linke, particularly on the national level, prevents the transformation of regional achievements into electoral support at national elections. For example, a discussion with an independent researcher on the importance of the current Die Linke-led government in Thuringia for the electoral potential of the party at national elections reveals that emulating its policies in the electoral manifesto and referencing its achievements for electoral purposes is a sensitive matter for the national organisation. An important source for this sensitivity is different ideological perceptions between various party factions on these government experiences which prompt 'everyone to find whatever suits their worldview' (Interview DE_A, 2017). This suggests that the internal party dynamics prevent Die Linke making use of its involvement in regional politics at national elections.

Second, factions aside, regional organisations seem reluctant to use examples of their counterparts from other states. For example, when discussing the role of the Die Linke-led government in Thuringia for the party organisation in neighbouring Saxony and the mobilisation efforts of the latter for the upcoming 2017 Bundestag elections, an independent researcher pointed out the reluctance of the Saxon branch to closely study the experience in Thuringia due to ideological and personal disagreements. As the individual states: 'Thuringia is difficult to copy [in Saxony] exactly due to the issue of [the] popularity of their leadership. Here [in Saxony] they don't have someone [popular] like [Bodo] Ramelow, [the prime minister of Thuringia]' (Interview NL_G, 2017). This suggests that similarly to the cases of KSČM and SP, internal party challenges further prevent Die Linke transforming its regional experience into a national electoral asset.

### 3.3. Regional performance

The third factor of regional governance is the electoral performance at regional elections. Recent studies of the territoriality of the vote in Western Europe demonstrate a growing divergence between electoral results at national and regional elections (Dandoy and Schakel, 2013). This highlights an increased detachment of regional and local politics from national politics, which casts doubt on the impact of regional governance on the electoral geography of a party at national elections. Yet, similar studies of Eastern Europe reveal a continuous link between national and regional support (Schakel, 2017). This supports the theoretical implications of the vast literature on second-order elections, which shows that that opposition, small, and anti-political establishment parties perform better at sub- and supra-national elections than national ones, as voters use the former to express their running disillusionment with the national government policies (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). If this is the case for European RLPs, the level of electoral performance at regional elections should be indicative for the territorial distribution of their electoral support at national elections. In this respect, the hypothesis related to this factor states that:

(H2f) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when a European radical left party obtains similar levels of electoral performance between electoral units on a sub-national election.

The empirical data from the three cases cannot confirm the hypothesis. Figures 5.1 to 5.3 present the electoral geographies of the three parties on national and regional elections. For the sake of simplicity, this analysis focuses at regional rather than constituency level. If the latter perspective was taken, the data at regional elections would not have been sufficient to test this hypothesis. For example, if the performance of SP had been compared between constituencies, the data would have needed to include aggregated and disaggregated data from both provincial and local elections. Instead, focusing on the regional level provides a reliable understanding of the potential linkage between national and sub-national elections. Additionally, it does not create significant discrepancies in the territorial perspective, given that in two of the

cases, Germany and the Czech Republic, the electoral constituencies coincide with the borders of their highest administrative unit (German state and Czech region). In the specific case of Germany, where state elections are not held simultaneously, the maps on the performance of Die Linke at regional elections depict the most recent regional elections that occurred at least 100 days prior to the next federal vote. This period should be sufficient for voters to make an informed assessment of the government or policy expertise of a party at the regional level. For the case of the Czech Republic, the performance in Prague represents the support for the party at local elections, as the Czech capital does not hold additional elections for regional council, as this role is taken by the City Council.

**Figure 5.1. The electoral geographies of Die Linke in national elections (right) and the last regional elections prior to the national one (left), 1994-2013**

**1994**



**1998**
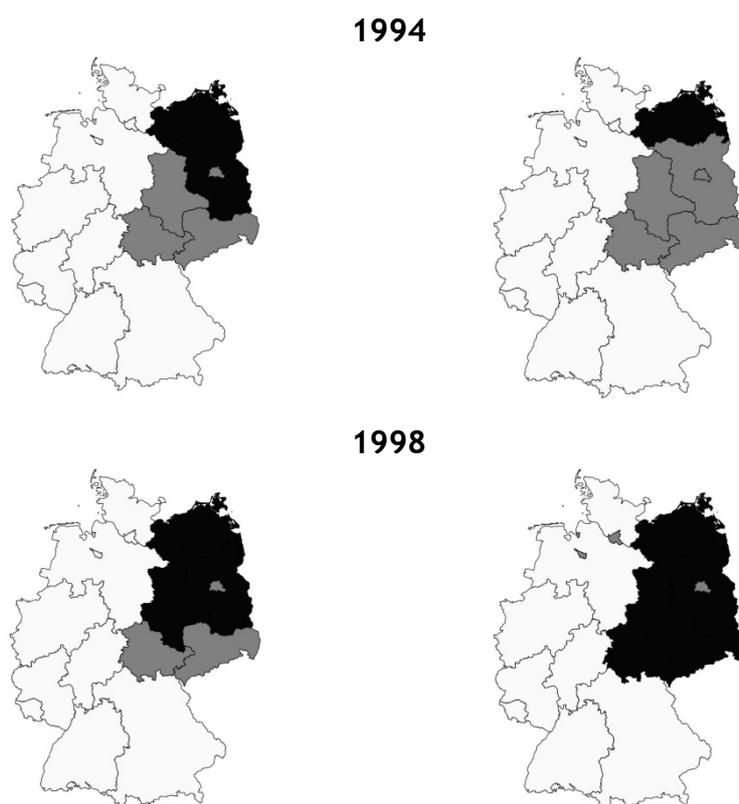
**2002**



**2005**



**2009**



**2013**



**Legend:**
Black = electoral stronghold
Grey = place of mid-level support
White = place of weak support

**Figure 5.2. The electoral geographies of the Socialist Party in national elections (right) and the last regional elections prior to the national one (left), 1994-2012**

**1994**
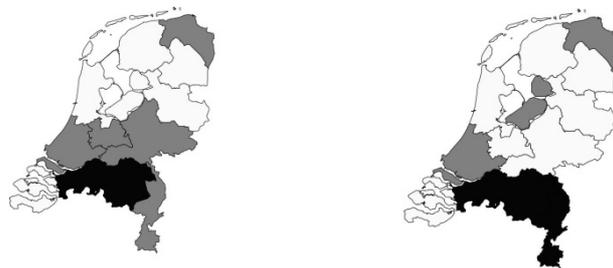


**1998**
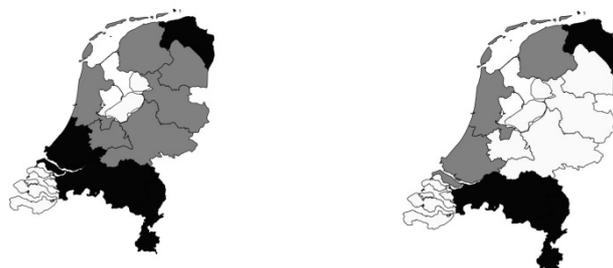


**2002**
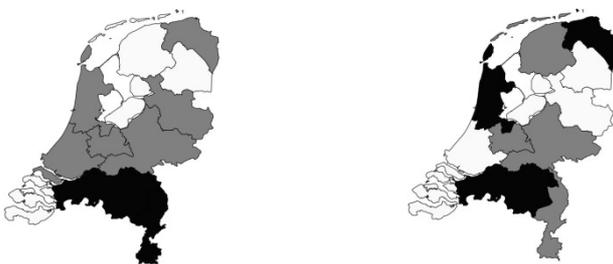


**2003**
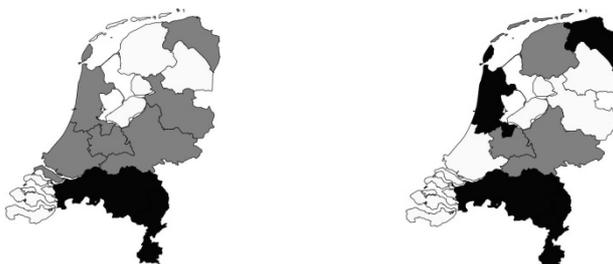
**2006**
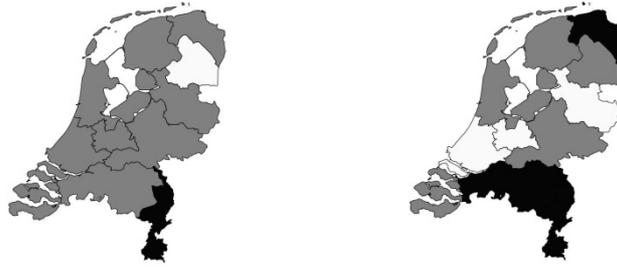


**2010**
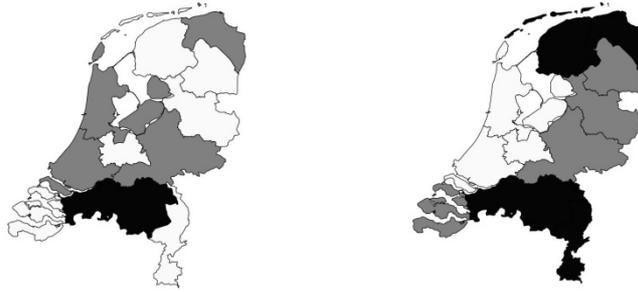


**2012**



**Legend:**

Black = electoral stronghold

Grey = place of mid-level support

White = place of weak support

# Figure 5.3. The electoral geographies of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia in national elections (right) and the last regional elections prior to the national one (left), 1990-2013

**2002**



**2006**



**2010**



**2013**



**Legend:**
Black = electoral stronghold
Grey = place of mid-level support
White = place of weak support

In contrast to the theoretical implication of second-order elections discussed above, regional electoral support for SP and Die Linke in their strongholds at national elections is lower than it is at national elections[27]. More interestingly, their electoral performance at regional elections in areas of mid-range and weak electoral support remains marginally higher than at national elections. This suggests the presence of diverging regional dynamics that potentially skew these two classes of electoral geographies. In this context, it seems that these differences in performance further highlight the expected difficulties of the three parties to transform their regional experiences into electoral capital at national elections. In the case of KSČM, the second-order effects are particularly noticeable, as its electoral performance at regional elections remains subordinated to national politics (Pink, 2017). Yet, the electoral geography of the party still differs clearly between the two types of elections. These insights suggest that regional elections could not reliably highlight the electoral geography of the three European RLPs at national elections.

There are three important reasons for this unreliability. First, campaigns for regional and national elections are prerogative of different organisational levels of the three parties. As the interviews with party representatives suggested, regional elections remain the domain of regional parties (aided by the national headquarters when needed), while national elections are overwhelmingly done by the national headquarters (e.g. Interview DE_L, 2017; Interview CZ_F, 2017; Interview NL_G, 2017). Second, there is a noticeable difference in electoral timing between the two types of elections that can contribute to different electoral geographies. While regional and provincial elections are held on the same day in all regions/provinces in the Czech Republic and the Netherlands, state elections in Germany have completely divergent electoral cycles even between states. In such a context the electoral geographies of European RLPs at regional elections reflect the changes in public voter intentions in-between national elections, rather than offering an indication on the potential territorial distribution of electoral support at national elections.

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[27] This is particularly the case for both parties until 2010, whereas afterwards the parties achieve mixed results across regions.

Third, the differences between the electoral geographies on regional and national elections can also be explained by the differences in the electoral systems. This is not so much the case in the Czech Republic, where regional and national elections are held under similar PR electoral systems. Yet in the Netherlands, despite the lack of substantial differences in electoral rules, the restricted number of mandates in each provincial legislature naturally increases the effective electoral threshold for parliamentary entry. Meanwhile, notable divergence in electoral systems can be found in Germany, where each state uses its own electoral system for its Landtag. These can differ substantially from the one used at national elections (Korte, 2017, chap. 5). Overall, the different levels of divergence between the electoral geographies of the three parties on regional and national elections, explained by the different circumstances in which they are held, ultimately reveal limited influence of regional elections on territorial patterns of electoral support for these parties at national elections since 1990.

## 4. Intensity of party competition

The third factor that can influence the electoral geographies of European RLPs is the intensity of party competition. As discussed in Chapter 2, parties of different sizes tend to have different levels of territorial balance in electoral support. Whereas major parties have more imbalanced electoral geographies due to their broader territorial outreach - which facilitates a higher chance for different levels of electoral performance - small parties tend to have more balanced electoral geographies as the restricted territorial scope of their campaigning fosters limited differences in their electoral support across a territory (Morgenstern, Polga-Hecimovich and Siavelis, 2014). In such a context the intensity of electoral competition can differ, since parties may be capable of posing a challenge to their opponents in some places but not in others. Such different intensities, therefore, can be instructive as to the territorial distribution of electoral support for political parties. In some places they may mobilise significant support because of the absence of intensive party competition, whereas in others they may fail to do so because of the actions of their opponents. This is particularly important for European RLPs, given that their usually small-party status makes them particularly susceptible to the intensity of party competition. This is because electoral competition for similar

voter groups between several parties may 'squeeze out' i.e. eliminate one of them (Cox, 1987). Parties, therefore, can have different prospects for eliminating their direct opponents across a territory depending on the intensity of competition.

The empirical data on the three cases confirms the importance of this factor. If anything, party representatives of Die Linke, SP, and KSČM and independent researchers stated that they face common electoral competition across electoral units at national elections (e.g. Interview NL_F, 2017; Interview CZ_A, 2017; Interview DE_H, 2017). Hence, an analysis of the intensity of competition between the three main party families seems even more necessary. On an ideological level, this concerns competition with centre-left and other small progressive parties, while on anti-establishment grounds it is expected that the presence of radical right and/or populist parties could influence the electoral geographies of European RLPs.

## 4.1. Major centre-left opponent

Major centre-left opponents are the most direct challengers of the European radical left, as these parties often share organisational origins (Eley, 2002; Sassoon, 2010) and an electorate (Charalambous and Lamprianou, 2017). As the discussion in Chapter 2 highlighted, these commonalities, coupled with the asymmetrical competition between large parties and smaller ones, can have a significant impact on the electoral geography of the latter. In this respect the intensity of left-left competition may differ from election-to-election, as major centre-left parties may focus on attracting centrist voters, especially if they prioritise office-seeking. In this case, the limited intensity of competition between these parties provides room for European RLPs to make electoral gains in centre-left strongholds and, thus, change their electoral geography. On the other hand, the intensity of this competition and its influence on the territorial pattern of electoral performance of the three parties may increase if a major centre-left party concentrates its efforts at deepening its support among left-wing voters, who are also the core voter base of European RLPs. This may limit the abilities of European RLPs to mobilise support across the country, and, thus, lead to more similar electoral results between electoral units. Hence, the main hypothesis for this factor states that:

(H2g) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the intensity of competition with a major centre-left opponent is higher.

This hypothesis is confirmed by the empirical data on the three cases. Overall, the three parties identify their major centre-left opponents (Czech Social Democratic Party, ČSSD; Social Democratic Party of Germany, SPD; Party of Labour, PvdA) as the main competition at national elections (e.g. Interview DE_K, 2017; Interview CZ_D, 2017; Interview NL_G, 2017). Beyond this commonality, there are some differences in the nature of competition across the cases. On the one hand, in the case of KSČM, the centre-left challenge is a 'zero-sum game' (Interview CZ_H, 2017) for the party for three main reasons. First, as one party official states: '[...] people don't see major differences between us [and ČSSD]; the more they don't see a difference, it is dangerous for us because of [the parliamentary] influence [of the social democrats] after the elections' (Interview CZ_G, 2017).

This suggests that the parties are ideologically close, whereas the noticeable divergence in their parliamentary experience poses an existential challenge to the communists in circumstances of uneven competition. One party representative stated directly that 'we can't compete with financially healthy parties, such as [...] the ČSSD' (Interview CZ_F, 2017), suggesting that resources are at the root of this imbalance. Second, the zero-sum game is enhanced by the 'natural unity of [their voters] and the [current] closeness of both parties' (Interview CZ_H, 2017), emphasising their similar voter profiles and increasing cooperation (Kopeček and Pšeja, 2008), especially at regional level (Interview CZ_H, 2017; Interview CZ_D, 2017). In such circumstances, while the two parties 'have their geographic electoral bases in different areas' (Pink, 2012, p. 84), they simultaneously make significant electoral progress in each other's strongholds (Maškarinec, 2017, p. 438). In this context, an independent researcher stressed that such shifts should be attributed to the governmental position of the social democrats: 'When the social democrats are in power, then the communists benefit, as they can criticise the government from left-wing positions, but if the social democrats are in opposition as well, then the communists are in trouble' (Interview CZ_H, 2017). Given that the two parties dominate the left-wing spectrum despite the increasing fragmentation of the

Czech party system (Balík and Hloušek, 2016), it seems that the balanced electoral geography of KSČM relates to the nationwide character of this challenge.

In the case of SP in the Netherlands, its competition with PvdA is not as clearly zero-sum. An important reason for this is the diversified ways through which SP aims to mobilise left-wing voters, which creates a different intensity of competition with PvdA. This intensity was rather low during the early 1990s, when SP focused predominantly on attracting far-left voters (de Jong, 2017), while PvdA steered towards centrist ones (van Praag, 2016). Yet, following the transformation of SP into a radical social democratic party in the early 2000s, competition between the two parties became more intense. SP clearly aimed to directly challenge PvdA in that period, visible in its claims to have restored the traditions of PvdA from the 1970s in a more radical way (Voerman and Lucardie, 2007). Yet, despite these shifts, SP does not rely solely on attracting left-wing support: more recent studies reveal its intent to mobilise even centre-right and conservative voters (de Jong, 2014), suggesting less pronounced effects of the competition with PvdA on its electoral geography than in the case of KSČM. Nevertheless, this competition remains a central one for the electoral geography of SP, as party representatives and independent researchers regularly named PvdA as one of its main competitors.

In the case of Die Linke and SPD, there are different dynamics across regions between the two parties. On the one hand, in Western Germany Die Linke clearly competes in a zero-sum game with SPD, as its overwhelming majority of members in the 'old' states are former SPD activists (Schnelle, 2007, chap. 2). It also targets predominantly SPD voters in SPD-dominated areas. For example, when discussing the electoral support for Die Linke in Bavaria at national elections, a party official highlighted that it is natural for the party to target urban constituencies, since 'that's where all the left-wing people in our state are; that's where the SPD performs best' (Interview DE_C, 2017). This highlights the particular orientation of Die Linke towards left-wing voters. On the other hand, Die Linke in Eastern Germany resembles to a very large extent a catch-all party (Hough, 2002), as it even managed to overcome SPD in the majority of the six new states since the 2007 merger (Table 5.4). In such circumstances the roles of SPD and Die Linke seem reversed, requiring the latter

to defend its position as the dominant left-wing force while maintaining its nationwide anti-political establishment image. This is revealed even in the way a party official defined the place of Die Linke in Saxony: 'we are not just an opposition to the established parties of the Grand Coalition, but also a defender of democracy against the extreme right that is quite strong here' (Interview DE_I, 2017). In such a context of divergent dynamics between the two parties in Eastern and Western Germany, it seems that the left-left competition in Germany makes a noticeable contribution to the electoral geography of Die Linke.

**Table 5.4. A comparison of the electoral performance of PDS/Die Linke and SPD in the six Eastern states according to their regional list vote share, 1990-2013**

| | 1990 | 1994 | 1998 | 2002 | 2005 | 2009 | 2013 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Berlin** | PDS: 9.7% | PDS: 14.9% | PDS: 13.5% | PDS: 11.5% | Die Linke: 16.4% | **Die Linke: 20.2%** | Die Linke: 18.5% |
| | **SPD: 30.6%** | **SPD: 34.0%** | **SPD: 37.8%** | **SPD: 36.6%** | **SPD: 34.4%** | SPD: 20.2% | **SPD: 24.6%** |
| **Brandenburg** | PDS: 11.0% | PDS: 19.3% | PDS: 20.3% | PDS: 17.2% | Die Linke: 26.6% | **Die Linke: 28.5%** | Die Linke: 22.4% |
| | **SPD: 32.9%** | **SPD: 45.1%** | **SPD: 43.5%** | **SPD: 46.4%** | **SPD: 35.8%** | SPD: 25.1% | **SPD: 23.1%** |
| **Mecklenburg-West Pomerania** | PDS: 14.2% | PDS: 23.6% | PDS: 23.6% | PDS: 16.3% | Die Linke: 23.7% | **Die Linke: 29.0%** | **Die Linke: 21.5%** |
| | **SPD: 26.6%** | **SPD: 28.8%** | **SPD: 35.3%** | **SPD: 41.7%** | **SPD: 31.8%** | SPD: 16.6% | SPD: 17.8% |
| **Saxony** | PDS: 9.1% | PDS: 16.7% | PDS: 19.2% | PDS: 16.2% | Die Linke: 22.8% | **Die Linke: 24.5%** | **Die Linke: 20.0%** |
| | **SPD: 18.2%** | **SPD: 24.3%** | **SPD: 29.1%** | **SPD: 33.3%** | **SPD: 24.5%** | SPD: 14.6% | SPD: 17.8% |
| **Saxony-Anhalt** | PDS: 9.4% | PDS: 18.0% | PDS: 20.7% | PDS: 14.4% | Die Linke: 26.6% | **Die Linke: 32.4%** | **Die Linke: 23.9%** |
| | **SPD: 24.7%** | **SPD: 33.5%** | **SPD: 38.1%** | **SPD: 43.2%** | **SPD: 32.7%** | SPD: 16.9% | SPD: 18.2% |
| **Thuringia** | PDS: 8.3% | PDS: 17.2% | PDS: 21.2% | PDS: 16.9% | Die Linke: 26.1% | **Die Linke: 28.8%** | **Die Linke: 23.4%** |
| | **SPD: 21.9%** | **SPD: 30.2%** | **SPD: 34.5%** | **SPD: 39.9%** | **SPD: 29.8%** | SPD: 17.6% | SPD: 16.1% |

Source: Federal Returning Officer (2018)

## 4.2. Small progressive opponent

Aside from competition with a major centre-left opponent, a European RLP can face a significant electoral challenge from other, small progressive parties. A typical example in this respect are Green parties (Richardson and Rootes, 1995; van Haute, 2016), but, as the discussion in Chapter 2 highlighted, the number of parties campaigning on similar issues to the radical left has grown substantially in the past few decades (Erlingsson and Persson, 2011; Otjes and Krouwel, 2015; Mazur, 2017; Buble, Kikaš and Prug, 2018; Furlan, Slukan and Hergouth, 2018). The intensity of electoral competition with these opponents should also be expected to play a role in shaping the electoral geographies of European RLPs. Party age plays an important part in determining this intensity, since intense competition could be of electoral benefit for the younger party due to its "newness" (Sikk, 2005). In this respect, the default hypothesis states that:

(H2h) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the intensity of competition with small progressive opponent/s is higher.

In contrast to the expectations about competition with the centre-left, this hypothesis cannot be confirmed in its entirety. Challenges from small progressive parties are not always relevant for the electoral support of European RLPs. This is because the low intensity of competition does not provide an electoral advantage to European RLPs as originally anticipated. The main reason for this unexpected finding is the significance of the differences between European RLPs and small progressive parties in their ideologies and party origins. In the Czech Republic, for example, the Green Party (SZ) is the main political organisation which resembles the kind of small progressive party mentioned above. It has contested all parliamentary elections since 1990 and managed to enter the Chamber of Deputies on two occasions based on its environmental and good governance-focused electoral manifesto[28] (Jehlička and Kostelecký, 2003; Deets and Kouba, 2008). This achievement, however, was based on mobilising centre-right and liberal voters due to the party's roots in the democratic

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[28] The party had 3 MPs between 1992 and 1996 and re-entered the parliament with 6 MPs between 2006 and 2010.

opposition against the authoritarian communist regime (Jehlička and Kostelecký, 1995, 2003) and the overall association of left-wing ideas with authoritarianism in the Czech context (Mansfeldová, 2013, pp. 226–227). This suggests rather limited intensity of competition between the two parties which has no noticeable influence on the electoral geography of KSČM.

A party that offered a genuine left-leaning competition during the 1990s was the niche Pensioners for Life Security (DŽJ). DŽJ emphasised senior citizens' interests during the 1990s, thus targeting mainly communist core voters, but failed on three consecutive occasions to pass the 5% threshold[29]. Yet, the party made noticeable electoral gains in the peripheral Czech regions[30], which – as discussed in Chapter 3 – are the main electoral strongholds of KSČM, suggesting that this challenge exerted some influence on the electoral geography of the latter. Given that DŽJ emerged much later than KSČM, it seems that party age played a role in determining how the intensity of this competition influenced the electoral geography of the communists. While both parties competed for a similar electorate, KSČM seemed to have largely staved off the challenge from DŽJ. This explains why the high intensity of competition did not make a major contribution to the electoral geography of KSČM. Overall, the case of KSČM suggests that even when there are small progressive parties within the party system, these may not pose a direct electoral challenge for European RLPs due to differences in their ideological profiles and party origins.

In contrast to the Czech Republic, competition with Alliance 90/the Greens remains an important factor for the electoral geography of Die Linke in Germany. Similar to competition with SPD, the intensity of competition between these two parties differs in Eastern and Western Germany. In the former, the Greens barely represent a viable electoral option. For example, when discussing electoral competition in Saxony, a party representative highlighted that the Greens are electorally relevant in some of the major cities in the state: 'perhaps [...] in Dresden, maybe in Leipzig as well, but not in Chemnitz' (Interview DE_I, 2017). This reflects the overwhelming consensus in the literature on the Greens in Germany that highlighted its electoral weakness in Eastern Germany despite

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[29] On the elections in 1992, 1996 and 1998 the party was among those that were closest to passing the threshold, as it mobilised respectively 3.77%, 3.09% and 3.06%
[30] The constituencies/regions, where the party achieved its best results are Northern, Central, and Western Bohemia.

its strong roots in the democratic opposition against the authoritarian communist regime in GDR (e.g. Güllner, 2012, chap. 2).

In the Western Germany, the intensity of competition between the two parties grew significantly after the merger which created Die Linke. Prior to 2007 its predecessor, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), was a marginal electoral force across the Western states, being considered 'a foreign object' in West German context due to its regionalist, East German profile (Interview DE_K, 2017). More importantly, its entanglement with the extreme left fringe (Meuche-Mäker, 2005, p. 81) did not present a significant challenge to the Greens, as the latter aimed at more centrist, socially liberal and economically left-wing voter groups (Walter, 2010, pp. 91–95). Yet, after the 2007 merger of PDS and the Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG), party officials of Die Linke and independent researchers claim that Die Linke increasingly attracted disillusioned Green voters to establish a firm presence at once Green electoral strongholds (e.g. Interview DE_A, 2017; Interview DE_L, 2017).

The main source for this change of intensity is the loosening of the pacifist positions of the Greens in the 1990s, which enabled Die Linke to make electoral advances among Green voters. As one independent researcher highlights: 'Currently Die Linke became a more [attractive] option for especially younger voters, as it maintains its anti-war positions, whereas the support for the involvements in Kosovo and Afghanistan still plagues the Greens' (Interview DE_J, 2017). This suggests that, while competition with the Greens mattered little for the electoral geography of Die Linke prior to the merger, the party later increased the intensity of competition in places of mid-range and weak electoral support by exploiting changes in the policy positions of its competitors. Such a change in the intensity of electoral competition, given the lack of significant competition between the two parties in the East, still has a noticeable impact on the electoral geography of Die Linke. This is evident in its increasingly territorially balanced electoral support since the 2007 merger. This also reveals that party age, in this case, is an advantage for Die Linke: since the party emerged in its current form much later than the Greens, the increased intensity of competition has worked in its favour since the merger.

In the case of SP in the Netherlands, small progressive parties can influence its electoral geography, but this has not happened due to the rather low intensity of their direct competition. On the one hand, SP party representatives across different provinces regularly named the GreenLeft (GL) as one of their main competitors at national elections (e.g. Interview NL_F, 2017; Interview NL_D, 2017; Interview NL_H, 2017). The conversations revealed that GL is considered competition in the respect that they manage to mobilise younger voters (Interview NL_F, 2017), a group that SP is interested in mobilising but fails to do so (Interview NL_B, 2017; Interview NL_H, 2017). Given that younger voters are not the core voter group of SP, however, it seems that the intensity of this competition has little impact on the electoral geography of the party. This is further confirmed when observing the competition with other small progressive parties. While some party officials named the animal rights-interest Party for the Animals (PvdD) and the senior citizens-interest 50Plus (e.g. Interview NL_C, 2017; Interview NL_F, 2017), they do not seem to pose a considerable challenge for the electoral geography of SP given their restricted membership numbers[31], which prevent them from mounting a comprehensive electoral challenge for the socialists. Hence, while the case of GL reveals that high intensity of competition does indeed make an impact on the territorial pattern of electoral support for SP in line with the hypothesis, the remaining cases of smaller progressive parties do not provide support for it.

## 4.3.  Anti-political establishment opponent

Finally, another direct electoral challenge can come from anti-political establishment parties (APE). Given that European RLPs and other APE parties tend to target disillusioned and/or protest voters, their competition may serve as an important factor shaping the electoral geography of the former. Yet, in contrast to the previous two factors, this competition mainly disadvantages European RLPs. As the discussion in Chapter 2 noted, European RLPs are rather vulnerable to competition from APE parties; the contemporary research highlights radical left voters switching their support to other APE parties rather

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[31] PvdD was established in 2002, while it reached about 12,500 members in 2013. 50Plus emerged in 2009 and until 2013 had almost 6,000 members. In contrast, in 2013 the SP had almost 46,000 registered members (Voerman, 2013)

than the other way around. Hence, in contrast to the previous two factors, this one is unidirectional. From that perspective, the main hypothesis states:

(H2i) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the intensity of competition with anti-political establishment opponent/s is lower.

Similar to the expectation about small progressive parties this hypothesis cannot be confirmed in its entirety, since APE parties do not always compete directly with RLPs for voters. In the case of KSČM, competition with APE parties has a significant influence on its electoral geography. The party faced three major challenges from such parties, which had diverse impacts. First, during the 1990s KSČM competed with the radical right Coalition for Republic–Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (SPR-RSČ)[32] as they both shared firm opposition to the social developments of the emerging Czech democracy (Hanley, 2012, pp. 73–79). In such a context, their electoral efforts rather reinforced each other as it enabled the mobilisation of different types of protest voters (Interview CZ_I, 2017), suggesting that competition with SPR-RSČ influenced levels of electoral support for the KSČM across the country in a positive way. In contrast to the original expectation that the high intensity of competition with APE parties would affect negatively the territorial balance of electoral support for European RLPS, this case suggests the reverse: such high intensity can improve the territorial balance, as it boosts electoral support for both sides.

Second, a significant electoral challenge for KSČM since 2013 comes from the populist centrist ANO 2011 and the radical right Dawn of Direct Democracy (Úsvit), as these parties 'offer protest voters more options to choose' (Interview CZ_E, 2017), as one party official stated. While this can be the case, such a challenge is reflected little in the electoral geography of KSČM in the 2013 parliamentary elections when these two parties emerged. The main reason for this is that both ANO 2011 and Úsvit mobilised a mixture of right-wing and left-wing voters (Maškarinec, 2017, pp. 441–442). Their lack of organisational structure was balanced by the significant financial resources of their respective

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[32] The party emerged in the early 1990s and entered the Czech parliament in 1992 and in 1996. Following its failure to re-enter the Chamber of Deputies in 1998, the party experienced a major internal split, which marginalised its electoral potential.

leaders, Andrej Babiš and Tomio Okamura, coupled with Okamura's political credentials from his period as a senator in the Czech Senate. In this context it seems that, in contrast to the hypothesis, moderate intensity of competition with these two parties did not influence the electoral geography of the communists.

Similarly, in the case of SP in the Netherlands, some APE parties have made an impact on the territorial distribution of its electoral support. On the one hand, the Pim Fortuyn List (LPF) had a less pronounced influence on the electoral geography of SP, as LPF mobilised 17% during its first electoral participation in 2002, attracting voters across the political spectrum (Pennings and Keman, 2003). In such a context, it seems that LPF had a more pronounced influence on the electoral geographies of major parties rather than smaller ones. More importantly, despite the electoral collapse of LPF at the 2003 parliamentary elections and the expectation that SP would replace it as the main APE actor in Dutch politics (Harmsen, 2003, p. 3), SP experienced little change in its electoral geography, further confirming the limited influence of this competition. On the other hand, the emergence of the populist radical right Party for Freedom (PVV) in 2006 offers more evidence for the influence of APE parties on the territorial distribution of electoral support for SP. Despite their divergent ideologies, the parties have noticeable overlap in their voter profiles (Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove, 2014), which is also reflected in their electoral geographies. For example, both parties attract considerable electoral support in the Southern provinces of North Brabant and Limburg, particularly in the constituencies of Maastricht, Tilburg, and 's-Hertogenbosch, as well as in Den Helder in North Holland. This suggests similarly to the case of KSČM and SPR–RSČ, where both parties amplify their mobilisation potential and, thus, the intensity of competition exerts a significant, albeit indirect, influence on their electoral geographies. Yet, the case of SP highlights again that the intensity of competition with APE parties is not a factor that regularly influences the electoral geographies of European RLPs.

In the case of Die Linke, there is little evidence for the influence of other APE parties on its territorial distribution of electoral support. First, during the 1990s, noticeable APE competitors were the radical right The Republicans, the German People's Union (DVU) and the extreme-right National Democratic Party

(NPD), all of which grew during the late 1980s and early 1990s through their involvement in regional politics (Morgenstern, 2006). Yet while DVU and NPD operated predominantly in Eastern Germany after reunification - prompting analysts to observe a link between the strong support for PDS and for the far-right (Backes, 2006) - this was barely reflected at national elections. Even at the highpoint for both parties – their electoral alliance for the 2009 federal elections – they failed to pass the 5% threshold in any state, suggesting restricted influence on the electoral geography of PDS. The Republicans have even less geographical impact on the territorial distribution of PDS. Aside from its marginal electoral performance since the 1990s, its relative electoral strongholds were mainly in Western Germany (Thomczyk, 2001, pp. 150–154).

Second, the most important APE challenger to Die Linke in more recent elections is the populist radical right Alternative for Germany (AfD). At the 2013 federal elections, the party managed to pass the 5% electoral threshold in a plurality of states despite failing to achieve parliamentary representation. Yet, its electoral geography reveals that its support is rather scattered across both Western and Eastern Germany[33]. In this context, as it is in the majority of cases of competition between the three radical left parties with other APE ones, it seems that (at least in 2013) the AfD had a rather minor impact on the electoral geography of Die Linke. Overall, this evidence on the case of Die Linke suggests that the low intensity of competition with APE parties goes against the original hypothesis. Die Linke does not seem to have benefited much from its limited competition with such parties, evident in its lasting, imbalanced pattern of territorial distribution of electoral support.

## 5. Conclusion

This chapter tested the impact of political structures on the electoral geographies of European radical left parties since 1990. The main hypothesis was that factors of the institutional and party system of a country influence the territorial distribution of electoral support for the three cases through the electoral system, the system of regional governance, and the intensity of party competition. A qualitative analysis of evidence from the experience and

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[33] For example, in 2013 AfD passed the 5% threshold in Hessen (5.6%), Saarland (5.2%) and Baden-Württemberg (5.2%) in the West and in Saxony (6.8%), Thuringia (6.2%), Brandenburg (6%) and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (5.6%) in the East

expertise of party officials from Die Linke, KSČM, and the SP and independent researchers confirmed this hypothesis. In particular, the evidence of this chapter highlighted that both the level of regional authority and the intensity of electoral competition with major centre-left opponents have a noticeable impact on the electoral geographies in the three cases.

In contrast, several other hypotheses could not be confirmed. Electoral rules seemingly have limited influence on the electoral geographies of the three parties, since no impact was observed for the number of electoral units and district magnitude, the level of malapportionment or the differences in the effective threshold between electoral units. Similarly, while the level of regional authority provides an incentive for parties to use their experiences in regional governance for electoral mobilisation at national elections, the evidence on the three cases revealed that such participation is not necessarily relevant for the territorial distribution of their electoral support. Hence, this chapter could not confirm the contribution of a presence in regional politics and electoral performance at regional elections for electoral geography in these three cases. Also, the intensity of competition with small progressive and/or anti-political establishment opponents does not necessarily influence the electoral geographies of the three cases, and, therefore this chapter could not confirm the relevant hypotheses.

These findings make an important contribution towards understanding the formation of territorial patterns of electoral support. While the previous chapter highlighted the different stages and levels of influence on electoral geography, this one suggests that the factors from the three alternative hypotheses influence each other. In particular, the evidence of this chapter reveals that the effects of the political structures of a country depend very much on factors from internal party life. For example, the three cases suggest that the impact of the electoral system and the system of regional governance depend on the particular strategic choices and resources of the parties. In the case of the former, the experiences of Die Linke, KSČM and SP point towards declining influence of electoral rules, as these parties relied on them to circumvent the electoral threshold in their initial electoral experiences when passing the electoral threshold was a crucial goal. Similarly, the impact of government and/or policy expertise accumulated at a regional level depends on the choices and abilities of

the parties to transform these experiences into a source of electoral mobilisation at national elections. Therefore, the effects of factors from the political structures of a country depend very much on aspects of the internal life of a party, such as its particular party goals.

Ultimately, the evidence in this chapter questions theories from the literature on party and party system nationalisation. Rather than having a direct impact, these findings suggest that political institutions and party system competition have contextual relevance for the level of party and party system nationalisation. They are conditioned to a large extent by specific party goals and organisational abilities. This, therefore, requires new approaches to the study of parties and party system nationalisation. More importantly, this chapter, like the previous one, again highlighted a major caveat for the impact of factors of the political structures given their dependence on factors relating to internal party life. From this perspective, while political structures contribute to the territorial distribution of electoral performance in the three cases of European RLPs, it seems that the dependence of its impact on other factors reveals a rather secondary role in this respect. Given that the previous chapter made a similar conclusion regarding social context, this potentially leaves the organisational capabilities of parties with a decisive impact on the territorial distribution of electoral support in the three cases. Whether or not this is the case, the following chapter will focus on factors related to the organisational capabilities of the three parties, encompassing their organisational resources and opportunities.

# Chapter 6 Organisational capabilities

## 1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the impact of party organisation on the territorial distribution of electoral support for European radical left parties (RLPs) since 1990. The existing literature on European RLPs highlights the potentially important role of their organisational capabilities in this respect, given their historical reliance on mass organisation and membership to mobilise electoral support (Eley, 2002; Lindemann, 2009; Sassoon, 2010), as well as their contemporary use of grassroots support through their own organisational resources or with the help of their relations with the radical left subculture (Tsakatika and Lisi, 2013a; Wennerhag, Fröhlich and Piotrowski, 2016). From that perspective, the main hypothesis of this chapter is that the territorial pattern of electoral support for European RLPs at national elections since 1990 depends on the differences of their organisational capabilities between electoral units (H3).

As stated in Chapter 2, the organisational capabilities represent the organisational resources and opportunities at the disposal of a party to pursue its goals. Given that European RLPs are generally small parties, their organisations can serve as important assets to weather the influences of external socio-economic and political circumstances and to be instrumental for their own electoral performance across places. As a reminder on the discussion from Chapter 2, the territorial distribution of electoral support refers to the territorial pattern, emerging from the differences in the levels of electoral support for a party between electoral units. In this context, different territorial patterns are categorised according to the level of balance of electoral support across electoral units, where a balanced territorial pattern corresponds to minimal differences in the party vote shares between electoral units, while an imbalanced one contains major differences in this respect. For the sake of simplicity, this research uses the term 'electoral geography' to denote the particular pattern of territorial distribution of electoral support for European RLPs.

The literature review on the topic of territorial politics highlighted four main factors that may influence the electoral geographies of European RLPs. First, the party complexity may shape the electoral geography of a party depending on the organisational coverage (H3a) and concentration of members across a territory (H3b). Second, the candidate selection process of an RLP may also influence its electoral geography. This depends on the level of autonomy of their regional party organisations. Hence, a decentralised candidate selection leads to a more balanced electoral geography (H3c), as it allows the party to directly address the different social circumstances across a territory and, thus, improve its electoral support across electoral units. Third, the relations of the radical left party organisation with the wider radical left subculture can also influence its electoral geography. Given that, historically, these parties used their links to mass organisations and social movements for electoral mobilisation, it is expected that the what is known as the environmental linkage influences the territorial distribution of electoral support for the European radical left at a national election depending on the geographic scope of these relations (H3d).

The basis for the analysis of these hypotheses is the data from qualitative semi-structured interviews with independent researchers and party officials on national, regional, and local levels from The Left (Die Linke, Germany), the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM, the Czech Republic), and the Socialist Party (SP, the Netherlands). This data provides first-hand insights on the experience and expertise of these persons, involved directly with day-to-day party work across communities or following closely the work of the radical left party organisations. As the three cases represent three different types of territorial patterns, this chapter uses the method of difference that ensures generalisation of the small-N analysis, as it covers a wide scope of manifestations of the dependent variable (the territorial pattern of electoral support). Where needed, the data from the interviews were complemented by a qualitative analysis of relevant statistical data.

The main finding of this chapter is a confirmation of the significance of party organisation for the electoral geographies of European RLPs since 1990. In particular, first, their party complexity has a significant role for their territorial distribution of electoral support as it provides them with a presence through

their party organisation and engagement through their party members with the local and regional communities. Second, the three cases reveal that a decentralised candidate selection makes no contribution to the electoral geographies of European RLPs, as regional party organisations are generally not involved significantly with the strategic and campaign decisions for national elections and because these procedures have limited influence on voters. Third, the environmental linkages with the radical left subculture do not influence the electoral geographies of the three cases, given the marginal social clout of these subcultures and the strained relations between an RLP and subculture in the three cases. Yet, while these linkages are irrelevant for electoral mobilisation, they are important to build up electoral support across a country between elections. These findings, hence, contribute to the growing literature on party organisation as they highlight its important role for the territorial distribution of electoral support.

## 2. Party complexity

The first main organisational factor with the potential to shape the electoral geographies of European RLPs is party complexity, represented by, among others, the organisational outreach of a party across a territory and by the size of the party membership. In this respect, Harmel and Janda (1982, p. 43) reveal that a vast network of relatively small local and regional party branches is, among others, an important prerequisite for parties to reach out to potential voters and establish social roots. European RLPs historically have rich experience in using their own party complexity for electoral mobilisation regardless of the circumstances. As Childs (2000) reveals, a significant strength of the European communist parties was their mass character: their widespread organisational networks and significant numbers of membersnot only was a major basis for their electoral breakthroughs in the late 19th/early 20th century but also enabled them to survive organisationally in circumstances of political bans and persecutions. Furthermore, as Guiat (2003) points out for the cases of the communist parties in France and Italy, the local party organisation has a significant social role within communities that often trumps the influence of traditional local institutions. Similar evidence, but with a lesser impact, is presented by Becket for the role of the communist party organisation in the

United Kingdom (Beckett, 1998). Hence, party organisation of a European RLP can play an important role for the territorial distribution of electoral support.

A central role for the influence of the party organisation has its direct engagement with communities. According to the literature on electoral geography, there are two main ways for a party to interact with potential voters. First, party organisations establish a lasting, long-term relationship with a community through a process of socialisation, understood here as a regular direct contact between a party member and a citizen (Johnston and Pattie, 2006, p. 55). Hence, the different results of the socialisation process across a territory can lead to different levels of electoral support for a party between electoral units. Second, from a short-term perspective, parties campaign to mobilise support during elections, using their party members as a campaign resource that reaches out to the wider society and spread the party messages (Seyd, Richardson and Whiteley, 1996; Seyd and Whiteley, 2002). Therefore, the differences in the short-term activities of party members between electoral units also may contribute to the particular territorial distribution of electoral support for a party. Overall, both processes of socialisation and campaigning highlight that the party organisation may produce electoral geography through its organisational presence across a territory and its concentration of party members. Accordingly, the first two hypotheses state that:

(H3a) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the territorial outreach of its network of regional and local organisations is wider.

(H3b) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when a European radical left party has a balanced concentration of party members across electoral units.

## 2.1. Direct engagement in the cases of Die Linke, SP, and KSČM

The evidence from the cases of Die Linke, SP, and KSČM on their direct engagement with communities suggests that they all rely on their organisational presence and members to interact with potential voters. Particularly interesting

in this respect is that all three parties have a nationwide, relatively common approach when conducting a short-term engagement with communities i.e. when mobilising voters on national elections. In other words, while European RLPs may have campaigned differently in different places to overcome their potential shortcomings in terms of organisational presence or membership across a territory, the evidence from the three cases suggests that their level of engagement depends on their party complexity rather than a tailored campaign strategy. A German independent researcher stated in this respect: 'There might be some discussion among [Die Linke] whether it would make sense to add a poster here or there, but in general, the party maintains a nationwide campaign with the same brochures, prospects, programs, so there is no specific approach for any state' (Interview DE_D, 2017).

A party member highlights a potential reason for such a common approach: 'We might do a specific campaign for our state, but we need to stick to our messages, not to confuse people and promise them one thing here, while in [another state] something different' (Interview DE_B, 2017), indicating the importance of coherent message on national elections. Similarly, an SP party representative adds that tailored campaigning is a matter of a personal style, rather than a purposeful party strategy: 'When I campaigned in East Netherlands, where I am from, I tried to stimulate the people's grievances with the Randstad, but that was just my personal approach. It was not something that our party purposefully aimed at addressing' (Interview NL_F, 2017).

In the case of KSČM having a common campaign seems a matter of a tried-and-tested approach for the party. As one party member states: 'We don't have different campaigns, we make meetings with our members across the country and that's it' (Interview CZ_E, 2017). One of the reasons to rely on such an approach is that any attempt to do anything else seems unproductive. '[KSČM] tried in 2010 to do a modern campaign, with billboards and TV spots, but they haven't got any better in terms of electoral support, so that's why they stopped doing it' (Interview CZ_H, 2017), says an independent researcher in this respect. Another reason for this is the rather restricted aims of the party for its campaign, as explained by another independent researcher: 'The campaign serves solely for informing the party members and supporters about the elections, nothing else. That's why they don't require a more sophisticated

campaign' (Interview CZ_I, 2017). Therefore, it seems that rather than differentiated campaigning, it is the common electoral campaign that accounts for the diverse electoral geographies of the three cases, highlighting the importance of party presence.

Similarly significant is the party presence between elections, as the three cases place a major emphasis on their work with communities between elections. One SP party representative states in this respect: 'What makes the difference between us and other parties is that we try to take care of people also after elections' (Interview CZ_B, 2017). Generally, the interviews reveal three main ways for the long-term direct engagement with communities that improve the electoral potential of the three parties across their respective countries. First, European RLPs offer basic civic services to locals. In the cases of Die Linke and SP, the majority of regional and local organisations provide an advising service to any citizen related to practical matters, such as legal advice and support with administrative tasks, such as filling out tax forms or explanation of utility bills. The importance of such a service was particularly highlighted by both parties during interviews. An SP party member stressed that 'this way we convince people not in our ideology, but that we care about them' (Interview NL_A, 2017), while when discussing the ways Die Linke in Saxony interacts with communities on a longer term, a party representative stressed that 'we must adapt to the way[s] people behave. We can't expect them to solely come to our office, we must [go to them] instead' (Interview DE_I, 2017). In such a context, it seems that by providing an everyday service, the parties expand their social clout by becoming a social focal point. As similar experiences elsewhere (Weisskircher, 2019) reveal, such a long-term engagement leads to a significant improvement of electoral support.

Second, the three parties engage regularly in regional and local campaigns that can be transformed into national matters of significant electoral influence. For example, all of the three parties named housing as a significant issue that grew out of local concerns and now is one of the most significant topics addressed by them at the national level (e.g. Interview DE_A, 2017; Interview CZ_G, 2017; Interview NL_H, 2017). More importantly, the experience of the parties even in places of weak electoral support shows that engaging in local campaigns on certain matters improves their visibility and, thus, helps a party

electorally. An SP party member from such place, for example, explains that 'we did some campaigns here so that we show that we can do something for the community and [...] hopefully get next time into the council' (Interview NL_A, 2017). Third, related to this statement is the eventual local or regional representation of the parties. As discussed in the previous chapter, the three parties are rather ambivalent on the use of their experiences in regional governance for electoral purposes. Nevertheless, such participation provides another channel for them to expand their regional and local influence among the electorate. Overall, these three ways for social engagement suggest that European RLPs aim to establish a firm basis for electoral support on national elections. In such a context, their organisational outreach and membership concentration seem vital factors to successfully do so.

## 2.2. Territorial outreach of party organisation

In terms of organisational outreach, the data confirms hypothesis H3a. The analysis of the organisational network of the cases of Die Linke, SP and KSČM reveal that they all have similarly complex organisational networks spread across the entirety of their respective countries and covering different geographic levels. Generally, all three parties comprised of a single national, several regional, and numerous local organisations. These structures do not differ significantly from their political competitors, as other parties in the Czech Republic, Germany, and the Netherlands are organised in a relatively similar fashion in order to address the specific administrative division of the country and the changes of authority scope across them (Detterbeck, 2012). Yet, while all organisations in the three countries have party structures on national and regional levels, their organisational complexity differs substantially on a local level. Given that this level provides potentially the most immediate connection to a particular community, it presents an important challenge for a party to be able to have as much territorial coverage as possible. In the context of the small-party status of the majority of European RLPs, this challenge is more than relevant. Hence, the more local organisations there are across a territory, the more balanced the territorial pattern of electoral support may be.

In the case of Die Linke, its organisational network provides an important context for its imbalanced electoral geography throughout the years. By 2011

the party had district branches (*Kreisverband*) in almost all German districts: out of 401 administrative districts, Die Linke had party branches in 349 of them (Table 6.1). The difference between these numbers is important, as it reveals the inability of the party to establish active party organisations across the country. This concerns mainly West German districts, where Die Linke also has its lower levels of electoral performance throughout the years. For example, while Bavaria, one of the main places of consistently weak performance of Die Linke, has 96 administrative districts, the party had only 44 district branches in 2011, uniting several districts into one, as neither the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), nor the Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG) was able to establish many structures in the state (Koß, 2007; Nachtwey, 2007). Prior to the merger, the situation was even more skewed. For example, in 1994 the PDS had the same number of district branches in entire West Germany as it had in the city of Rostock in the East German state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (Koß, 2007, p. 25), thus revealing the significant organisational absence of the party in the Western states. In contrast, Die Linke remains well-developed in the East, where it also performs much better electorally on national elections. As seen in Table 6.1, the party maintains a vast organisational network, covering all East German districts and having multiple local branches in the bigger cities. This suggests that the rather imbalanced electoral pattern of support for Die Linke throughout the entire time period can be explained through, among others, the imbalanced territorial outreach of its party organisation.

| | 2001 | | 2006 | | 2011 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Districts | Branches | Districts | Branches | Districts | Branches |
| Baden-Wurttemberg | 44 | 25 | 44 | 35 | 44 | 35 |
| Bavaria | 96 | 27 | 96 | 24 | 96 | 44 |
| Berlin | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 |
| Brandenburg | 18 | 20 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 17 |
| Bremen | 14 | 9 | 14 | 6 | 14 | 4 |
| Hamburg | 7 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 7 |
| Hesse | 26 | 15 | 26 | 10 | 26 | 25 |
| Mecklenburg-West Pomerania | 18 | 17 | 18 | 17 | 8 | 10 |
| Lower Saxony | 45 | 31 | 46 | 24 | 46 | 43 |
| North Rhine-Westphalia | 54 | 36 | 54 | 35 | 53 | 53 |
| Rhineland-Palatinate | 36 | 11 | 36 | 13 | 36 | 30 |
| Saarland | 6 | 1 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 6 |
| Saxony | 29 | 28 | 29 | 23 | 13 | 13 |
| Saxony-Anhalt | 24 | 24 | 24 | 24 | 14 | 14 |
| Schleswig-Holstein | 15 | 4 | 15 | 10 | 15 | 15 |
| Thuringia | 23 | 21 | 23 | 20 | 23 | 21 |
| **Total** | **467** | **283** | **468** | **282** | **401** | **349** |

Source: Die Linke/PDS official party websites

Similar to Die Linke, the territorial distribution of KSČM party branches across the Czech Republic corresponds to its balanced electoral geography. The party inherited a comprehensive party network from its predecessor despite losing a significant number of basic party organisations, founded in workplaces (Grzymala-Busse, 2002a, p. 86). While KSČM struggles to maintain its complete coverage of the country due to its ageing and increasingly inactive membership base (Linek, 2008), the party still seems to have a considerable territorial outreach. Data on the number of KSČM local party organisations was difficult to obtain, given that the party does not maintain a publicly accessible list. That is why this research focused on the county level (*okres*) to establish the territorial coverage of KSČM. On it, the party achieves complete coverage as well. According to party web presence, all of the current 77 counties of the country have a KSČM party organisation, revealing its comprehensive territorial coverage. Hence, even if the party lost a significant number of party structures since the end of the authoritarian communist regime, it still maintains a considerable territorial presence. Therefore, the balanced electoral pattern of

electoral support seems a product of this organisational presence across the Czech Republic.

In contrast to the other two cases, the case of SP suggests that the territorial distribution of local party organisations does not necessarily correspond to the levels of electoral support across the Netherlands. The party established a fairly comprehensive network in Southern Netherlands, particularly focusing on building up structures on workplaces, given its Maoist ethics in its early days (Voerman, 1987, pp. 130–133). By the late 1980s and 1990s, SP expanded its number of branches, being able to field candidates in an increasing number of municipalities on local elections (Table 6.2)[34]. Currently, SP still enjoys the existence of a high number of branches. As seen in Table 6.3 the party has, on the one hand, a dense concentration of party cells in its electoral strongholds of North Brabant and Limburg in the South, as well as in places of weak performance, such as Utrecht and Gelderland. On the other hand, however, in Overijssel, North and South Holland its mid-range electoral support coincides with a rather sparse coverage with party structures. A party representative from Overijssel suggests that SP manages to overcome the absence or weakness of a party organisation through regular transfers of members during campaign periods: 'We have a huge membership base [in our council area], while [the other council area] doesn't. That's why often when they need help, we send some guys over to support their campaign and vice versa' (Interview NL_D, 2017). This suggests that while parties may overcome any limitations related to party membership, territorial coverage is a necessary precondition for building-up support and electoral mobilisation.

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[34] While these numbers do not reflect the actual number of local organisations the party had throughout time, as often local party branches refrained from participating in local elections, the act of putting candidates on them indicates significant organisational activity.

# Table 6.2. Participation of the Dutch Socialist Party in local elections, 1982-2014

| | 2014 | | 2010 | | 2006 | | 2002 | | 1998 | | 1994 | | 1990 | | 1986 | | 1982 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | SP List | Total | SP List | Total | SP List | Total | SP List | Total | SP List | Total | SP List | Total | SP List | Total | SP List | Total | SP List |
| Groningen | 23 | 10 | 23 | 6 | 25 | 5 | 25 | 4 | 25 | 5 | 25 | 2 | 25 | 2 | 50 | 2 | 50 | 2 |
| Friesland | 24 | 2 | 31 | 5 | 31 | 3 | 31 | 3 | 31 | 2 | 31 | | 31 | | 31 | 1 | 44 | |
| Drenthe | 12 | 4 | 12 | 4 | 12 | 3 | 12 | 2 | 34 | 2 | 34 | 2 | 34 | 2 | 34 | 3 | 34 | 1 |
| Overijssel | 25 | 9 | 25 | 9 | 25 | 7 | 26 | 4 | 45 | 6 | 45 | 5 | 45 | 3 | 45 | 6 | 47 | 4 |
| Flevoland | 6 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 6 | - | 6 | 1 | 6 | - | 6 | 1 | 6* | 1* |
| Gelderland | 56 | 15 | 56 | 12 | 56 | 8 | 69 | 7 | 84 | 8 | 84 | 7 | 84 | 7 | 84 | 7 | 95 | 8 |
| Utrecht | 26 | 9 | 29 | 10 | 29 | 8 | 33 | 4 | 36 | 3 | 38 | 1 | 38 | 2 | 48 | 3 | 48 | 2 |
| North Holland | 53 | 14 | 60 | 15 | 64 | 13 | 65 | 4 | 70 | 5 | 70 | 4 | 76 | 3 | 81 | 4 | 81 | 5 |
| South Holland | 65 | 19 | 73 | 19 | 82 | 16 | 92 | 12 | 95 | 13 | 95 | 11 | 101 | 12 | 103 | 12 | 142 | 14 |
| Zeeland | 13 | 7 | 13 | 6 | 13 | 3 | 17 | 2 | 17 | 1 | 30 | | 30 | 1 | 30 | 1 | 30 | |
| North Brabant | 67 | 22 | 68 | 22 | 68 | 20 | 70 | 12 | 70 | 16 | 132 | 19 | 133 | 17 | 133 | 16 | 133 | 10 |
| Limburg | 33 | 11 | 34 | 11 | 47 | 9 | 48 | 8 | 55 | 7 | 56 | 6 | 70 | 7 | 70 | 4 | 70 | 4 |
| | 403 | 126 | 430 | 121 | 458 | 98 | 494 | 63 | 568 | 68 | 646 | 58 | 673 | 49 | 715 | 60 | 780 | 51 |

Source: Electoral Council (2018)

**Table 6.3. Number of SP party branches (afdeling) and the total number of municipalities in Dutch provinces, 2005-2016**

|  | 2005 | | 2011 | | 2016 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Council | Branch | Council | Branch | Council | Branch |
| **Groningen** | 25 | 6 | 23 | 11 | 23 | 13 |
| **Friesland** | 31 | 4 | 27 | 8 | 24 | 8 |
| **Drenthe** | 12 | 4 | 12 | 8 | 12 | 4 |
| **Overijssel** | 25 | 6 | 25 | 11 | 25 | 10 |
| **Flevoland** | 6 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 4 |
| **Gelderland** | 56 | 11 | 56 | 26 | 54 | 21 |
| **Utrecht** | 33 | 7 | 26 | 14 | 26 | 13 |
| **North Holland** | 65 | 17 | 58 | 18 | 48 | 18 |
| **South Holland** | 86 | 21 | 72 | 23 | 60 | 22 |
| **Zeeland** | 13 | 4 | 13 | 7 | 13 | 8 |
| **North Brabant** | 68 | 25 | 67 | 30 | 66 | 28 |
| **Limburg** | 47 | 11 | 34 | 17 | 33 | 14 |
| **Total** | **476** | **119** | **419** | **177** | **390** | **163** |

Source: SP official website

## 2.3. Concentration of party members

While finding data on party structures was a significant challenge due to issues of reliability, accuracy, and access, it was an even bigger challenge to find information on membership numbers. This was not a surprise, as parties remain secretive regarding the extent of their social presence and often tend to inflate their membership bases in order to present a bigger presence in society (Mudde, 2007, pp. 267–268). More importantly, even when numbers are relatively reliable, it remains unclear how much of these are active members, regardless of what 'active' attributes[35]. Beyond these methodological and conceptual challenges, there is even a bigger challenge to find data of the distribution of party members across a country, as record-keeping might differ even between party organisations. In the case of the three parties in question, only Die Linke offered a comprehensive membership breakdown on a state level, while information regarding KSČM and SP was rather scarce and based on anecdotal accounts from the interviews. Still, in the absence of any other reliable data, this one was sufficient to draw important conclusions on the relevance of the distribution of party members for the electoral geography of these parties.

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[35] This could be based on whether a person attends party meeting regularly, involves herself in electoral campaigning, or just pays her membership fee.

The data suggests a noticeable, but rather weak link between the level of electoral support and membership concentration. In the cases of KSČM and SP, neither party has its biggest party cell in an electoral stronghold. The former has by far the largest overall membership numbers in the country (van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012, p. 48), while its largest party organisation remains in Prague (Interview CZ_E, 2017). Yet, despite such a strong presence, its electoral support in the capital staggers (Table 3.9 in chapter 3). A party representative explains this situation as a product of the particular social context of Prague: 'We are able to mobilise vast numbers of members here in Prague, but the overall situation of wealth does not allow us to perform better' (Interview CZ_E, 2017). More importantly, the conversations also reveal a declining level of activity across party branches. As one party representative explains: 'Our members, unfortunately, are unable to actively support us for a long time. That is why we often don't know whether a party organisation in a particular place, especially if it is a small place, still exists' (Interview CZ_G, 2017). This suggests that in the case of KSČM the number of party members does not indicate the level of electoral performance in a particular place, whereas the level of activity may account for the overall electoral volatility between elections. Hence, the territorial pattern of electoral support of KSČM does not seem to be related to the level of concentration of party members.

A more noticeable link can be observed in the case of SP. The party claims to have one of its biggest local organisation in the city of Rotterdam with about 1,400 members (SP Rotterdam, 2018), while numerous party cells claim to have the largest number of members in their respective local area(e.g. SP Zoetermeer, 2018). This rather scarce information suggests that the territorial distribution of party members may not be related to its electoral geography, given that the electoral support for SP in Rotterdam throughout the years was consistently close to the overall nationwide electoral result of the party (Table 3.6 in Chapter 3). More importantly, the party does not achieve the highest electoral result in the majority of municipalities across the country. In fact, since 1994 SP was on the first place on 11 occasions only: six in 2006 (in Brunssum, Heerlen, and Landgraaf in Limburg; Doesburg and Nijmegen in Gelderland, and Oss in North Brabant), four in 2010 (Boxmeer, Cuijk, and Oss in North Brabant, Gennep in Limburg) and in one council area in 2012 (Boxmeer in

North Brabant). The main explanation for this is the nationwide character of the parliamentary elections in the Netherlands. As one party representative explains in this respect:

'On national elections, nine out of ten results are [the] product of the national image of the party and not necessarily of the strength of our local [branch]. For example, this year there were places where we aren't so strong, but performed well, and in other places where we are strong, they made a big mess' (Interview NL_G, 2017).

Yet, despite this seemingly absent relation between results and membership numbers, the latter is an important asset for the party. For example, when asked about the reasons for the electoral strength of the party in its local area, a party representative from Overijssel named the number of active members as one of the most important factors in this respect (Interview NL_D, 2017). Overall, it seems that while the concentration of its members matters for the electoral abilities of SP to build-up and mobilise support, it has limited influence on its electoral geography.

In contrast to the other two parties, the case of Die Linke points towards some connection between the territorial distribution of party members and electoral performance. On the one hand, as in the previous two cases, a more noticeable mismatch is visible when electoral results are compared with the total number of party members. For example, throughout the entire timeframe Die Linke had its biggest party organisation in Saxony (Tables 6.4 and 6.6), described by one party representative as the 'weakest party stronghold' (Interview DE_I, 2017), given the relatively low electoral support on national elections compared to the other East German states (Table 3.2 in Chapter 3). A similar mismatch can be observed also in the cases of Saarland and Bremen. While both states contain the smallest party organisation on the state level, respectively, before (Table 6.4) and after the merger (Table 6.6), the electoral support for PDS and Die Linke there is among the strongest in Western Germany (Table 3.2 in Chapter 3). This again seems to confirm the limited connection between the territorial distribution of party members and electoral geography.

**Table 6.4. PDS membership in absolute numbers in the German states, 1990-2006**

| | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BW | | 109 | 65 | 102 | 188 | 206 | 209 | 266 | 306 | 404 | 410 | 433 | 499 | 470 | 466 | 624 | 681 |
| BY | | 48 | 61 | 104 | 278 | 156 | 225 | 218 | 302 | 398 | 460 | 503 | 524 | 457 | 439 | 601 | 699 |
| BE | 50281 | 31200 | 27062 | 23633 | 22176 | 21373 | 19427 | 18319 | 17316 | 15463 | 14273 | 12558 | 11056 | 10385 | 9423 | 9311 | 8911 |
| BB | 42662 | 24998 | 22864 | 20679 | 18258 | 17950 | 16962 | 15793 | 14950 | 14271 | 13427 | 12883 | 11597 | 10894 | 10428 | 10178 | 9710 |
| HB | | 80 | 87 | 122 | 50 | 97 | 110 | 112 | 137 | 169 | 199 | 188 | 197 | 160 | 158 | *168* | *195* |
| HH | | 102 | 156 | 166 | 171 | 180 | 160 | 147 | 152 | 187 | 226 | 233 | 332 | 341 | 348 | 388 | 480 |
| HE | | 73 | 104 | 150 | 276 | 266 | 265 | 274 | 400 | 486 | 532 | 528 | 501 | 477 | 481 | 637 | 757 |
| MV | *33031* | 21903 | 18170 | 15857 | 14154 | 13246 | 11846 | 11433 | 10614 | 10015 | 9455 | 8636 | 7990 | 7534 | 7110 | 6793 | 6423 |
| NI | | | | | 225 | 232 | 285 | 296 | 406 | 496 | 520 | 620 | 725 | 667 | 667 | 880 | 1058 |
| NW | | 98 | 101 | 175 | 498 | 548 | 490 | 556 | 831 | 1215 | 1105 | 1138 | 1361 | 1219 | 1135 | 1583 | 1913 |
| RP | | 23 | 19 | 31 | 84 | 105 | 95 | 101 | 152 | 182 | 214 | 229 | 250 | 250 | 258 | 411 | 454 |
| SL | | 20 | *2* | *8* | *35* | *51* | *46* | *40* | *104* | *101* | *83* | *101* | *120* | *100* | *108* | 300 | 582 |
| SN | 71510 | 45425 | 39876 | 34294 | 32853 | 29910 | 27401 | 25125 | 24333 | 22281 | 20871 | 19696 | 17572 | 15969 | 15280 | **14607** | **14066** |
| ST | 43745 | 23180 | 20984 | 19470 | 18270 | 15726 | 13861 | 12985 | 12107 | 11141 | 10321 | 9658 | 8186 | 7631 | 6434 | 6576 | 6420 |
| SH | | *19* | 22 | 33 | 66 | 64 | 58 | 64 | 127 | 135 | 207 | 199 | 199 | 237 | 260 | 364 | 438 |
| TH | 39053 | 25301 | 17130 | 16530 | 16137 | 14748 | 13479 | 12740 | 12210 | 11470 | 11002 | 10052 | 9482 | 8778 | 8232 | 7681 | 7387 |
| Federal Bureau | | 39 | 52 | 32 | 82 | 110 | 155 | 180 | 180 | 170 | 190 | 214 | 184 | 158 | *168* | 164 | |
| Total | 280282 | 172579 | 146742 | 131406 | 123751 | 114940 | 105029 | 98624 | 94627 | 88594 | 83475 | 77845 | 70805 | 65753 | 61385 | 61270 | 60338 |

Source: Niedermayer (2017)

In bold, the state with the highest number of members, in italics and underlined – the state with the lowest number of members.

BW = Baden-Wurttemberg; BY = Bavaria; BE = Berlin; BB = Brandenburg; HB = Bremen; HH = Hamburg; HE = Hesse; MV = Mecklenburg-West Pomerania; NI = Lower Saxony; NW = North Rhine-Westphalia; RP = Rhineland- Palatinate; SL = Saarland; SN = Saxony; ST = Saxony-Anhalt; SH = Schleswig-Holstein; TH = Thuringia

**Table 6.5. PDS membership per 1000 citizens in the German states, 1991-2006**

| | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BW | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 | _0.02_ | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.05 | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.06 | 0.06 |
| BY | _0.00_ | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.02 | _0.01_ | _0.02_ | _0.02_ | _0.02_ | _0.03_ | _0.04_ | _0.04_ | _0.04_ | _0.04_ | _0.04_ | _0.05_ | _0.06_ |
| BE | 9.05 | 7.81 | 6.80 | 6.39 | 6.16 | 5.62 | 5.35 | 5.09 | 4.57 | 4.22 | 3.71 | 3.26 | 3.06 | 2.78 | 2.74 | 2.62 |
| BB | 9.83 | 8.99 | 8.15 | 7.20 | 7.06 | **6.64** | 6.14 | 5.77 | 5.49 | 5.16 | **4.97** | 4.49 | 4.23 | 4.06 | 3.98 | 3.81 |
| HB | 0.12 | 0.13 | 0.18 | 0.07 | 0.14 | 0.16 | 0.17 | 0.21 | 0.25 | 0.30 | 0.28 | 0.30 | 0.24 | 0.24 | 0.25 | 0.29 |
| HH | 0.06 | 0.09 | 0.10 | 0.10 | 0.11 | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.11 | 0.13 | 0.13 | 0.19 | 0.20 | 0.20 | 0.22 | 0.27 |
| HE | 0.01 | 0.02 | 0.03 | 0.05 | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.05 | 0.07 | 0.08 | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.08 | 0.08 | 0.08 | 0.10 | 0.12 |
| MV | **11.58** | **9.74** | **8.60** | **7.72** | **7.27** | 6.52 | **6.32** | **5.90** | **5.60** | **5.32** | 4.91 | **4.58** | **4.35** | **4.13** | **3.98** | 3.79 |
| NI | | | | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.05 | 0.06 | 0.07 | 0.08 | 0.09 | 0.08 | 0.08 | 0.11 | 0.13 |
| NW | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.05 | 0.07 | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.08 | 0.07 | 0.06 | 0.09 | 0.11 |
| RP | 0.01 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.02 | 0.03 | 0.02 | 0.03 | 0.04 | 0.05 | 0.05 | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.10 | 0.11 |
| SL | 0.02 | _0.00_ | _0.01_ | 0.03 | 0.05 | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.10 | 0.09 | 0.08 | 0.09 | 0.11 | 0.09 | 0.10 | 0.29 | 0.56 |
| SN | 9.71 | 8.59 | 7.44 | 7.17 | 6.55 | 6.03 | 5.56 | 5.42 | 5.00 | 4.72 | 4.49 | 4.04 | 3.70 | 3.56 | 3.42 | 3.31 |
| ST | 8.21 | 7.50 | 7.01 | 6.62 | 5.74 | 5.09 | 4.81 | 4.53 | 4.21 | 3.95 | 3.74 | 3.21 | 3.02 | 2.58 | 2.66 | 2.63 |
| SH | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.05 | 0.05 | 0.07 | 0.07 | 0.07 | 0.08 | 0.09 | 0.13 | 0.15 |
| TH | 9.84 | 6.73 | 6.53 | 6.41 | 5.89 | 5.41 | 5.14 | 4.96 | 4.68 | 4.53 | 4.17 | 3.96 | 3.70 | 3.50 | 3.29 | 3.20 |

Source: Calculated from Niedermayer (2017) and Destatis (2018)

In bold, the state with the highest concentration of members, in italics and underlined – the state with the lowest concentration of members.

BW = Baden-Wurttemberg; BY = Bavaria; BE = Berlin; BB = Brandenburg; HB = Bremen; HH = Hamburg; HE = Hesse; MV = Mecklenburg-West Pomerania; NI = Lower Saxony; NW = North Rhine-Westphalia; RP = Rhineland- Palatinate; SL = Saarland; SN = Saxony; ST = Saxony-Anhalt; SH = Schleswig-Holstein; TH = Thuringia

**Table 6.6. Die Linke membership in absolute numbers in the German states, 2007-2013**

|  | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BW | 2214 | 2639 | 3046 | 2950 | 2880 | 2602 | 2803 |
| BY | 2374 | 3225 | 3218 | 2847 | 2567 | 2290 | 2521 |
| BE | 9105 | 9008 | 9008 | 8801 | 8325 | 7800 | 7821 |
| BB | 9319 | 9127 | 8942 | 8481 | 7963 | 7360 | 7171 |
| HB | *453* | *492* | *523* | *629* | *462* | *456* | *480* |
| HH | 996 | 1289 | 1405 | 1489 | 1327 | 1118 | 1242 |
| HE | 2001 | 2610 | 2733 | 2605 | 2498 | 2322 | 2445 |
| MV | 6042 | 5833 | 5684 | 5417 | 5123 | 4719 | 4522 |
| NI | 2546 | 2864 | 3376 | 3259 | 3139 | 2944 | 2728 |
| NW | 5905 | 7764 | 8555 | 8681 | 8123 | 6827 | 7468 |
| RP | 1450 | 1655 | 1992 | 1746 | 1761 | 1675 | 1649 |
| SL | 1904 | 3065 | 3610 | 2308 | 2309 | 2247 | 2422 |
| SN | **13280** | **12682** | **12390** | **11614** | **10927** | **10200** | **9686** |
| ST | 6124 | 5720 | 5642 | 5427 | 5048 | 4605 | 4401 |
| SH | 815 | 1066 | 1093 | 980 | 983 | 912 | 965 |
| TH | 7070 | 6850 | 6750 | 6360 | 5970 | 5638 | 5387 |
| Federal Bureau | 113 | 79 | 79 | 64 | 53 | 47 | 46 |
| **Total** | **71711** | **75968** | **78046** | **73658** | **69458** | **63761** | **63757** |

Source: Niedermayer (2017)

In bold, the state with the highest number of members, in italics and underlined – the state with the lowest number of members

BW = Baden-Wurttemberg; BY = Bavaria; BE = Berlin; BB = Brandenburg; HB = Bremen; HH = Hamburg; HE = Hesse; MV = Mecklenburg-West Pomerania; NI = Lower Saxony; NW = North Rhine-Westphalia; RP = Rhineland- Palatinate; SL = Saarland; SN = Saxony; ST = Saxony-Anhalt; SH = Schleswig-Holstein; TH = Thuringia

On the other hand, there seems to be a significant link between the proportions of party members from the total population in given state and electoral performance. Measured in such terms the party organisation with the highest concentration of party members on the state level was in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and in Berlin (during the period of PDS) and in Brandenburg (after the merger), all in Eastern Germany, while the smallest one can be found in Bavaria (Tables 6.5 and 6.7). Correspondingly, these states consistently can be found among the places with highest (in the case of the former three) and lowest (in the case of the latter) electoral support across the country (Table 3.2 in Chapter 3). The significance of this link is recognised by Die Linke. For example, when discussing the ways to improve its electoral prospects in the state, a party official from Bavaria named the increase of party membership as a primary objective, adding that 'nothing can be achieved without active members

that knock on doors and meet with people in town' (Interview DE_C, 2018). This suggests that while the territorial distribution of party members and electoral geography may not be interrelated, the relative weight of the party members within a particular community matters for the levels of electoral performance of a party. In other words, the more party members there are as a proportion of the total population of a community, the higher the electoral performance would be.

**Table 6.7. Die Linke membership per 1000 citizens in the German states, 2007-2013**

|      | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| BW   | 0.21 | 0.25 | 0.28 | 0.27 | 0.27 | 0.25 | 0.21 |
| BY   | *0.19* | *0.26* | *0.26* | *0.23* | *0.21* | *0.18* | *0.19* |
| BE   | 2.67 | 2.62 | 2.62 | 2.54 | 2.50 | 2.31 | 2.67 |
| BB   | **3.68** | **3.62** | **3.56** | **3.39** | **3.25** | **3.00** | **3.68** |
| HB   | 0.68 | 0.74 | 0.79 | 0.95 | 0.71 | 0.70 | 0.68 |
| HH   | 0.56 | 0.73 | 0.79 | 0.83 | 0.77 | 0.64 | 0.56 |
| HE   | 0.33 | 0.43 | 0.45 | 0.43 | 0.42 | 0.39 | 0.33 |
| MV   | 3.60 | 3.50 | 3.44 | 3.30 | 3.19 | 2.95 | 3.60 |
| NI   | 0.32 | 0.36 | 0.43 | 0.41 | 0.40 | 0.38 | 0.32 |
| NW   | 0.33 | 0.43 | 0.48 | 0.49 | 0.46 | 0.39 | 0.33 |
| RP   | 0.36 | 0.41 | 0.50 | 0.44 | 0.44 | 0.42 | 0.36 |
| SL   | 1.84 | 2.97 | 3.53 | 2.27 | 2.31 | 2.26 | 1.84 |
| SN   | 3.15 | 3.02 | 2.97 | 2.80 | 2.70 | 2.52 | 3.15 |
| ST   | 2.54 | 2.40 | 2.39 | 2.32 | 2.22 | 2.04 | 2.54 |
| SH   | 0.29 | 0.38 | 0.39 | 0.35 | 0.35 | 0.32 | 0.29 |
| TH   | 3.09 | 3.02 | 3.00 | 2.85 | 2.74 | 2.60 | 3.09 |

Source: Calculated from Niedermayer (2017) and Destatis (2018)

In bold, the state with the highest concentration of members, in italics and underlined – the state with the lowest concentration of members

BW = Baden-Wurttemberg; BY = Bavaria; BE = Berlin; BB = Brandenburg; HB = Bremen; HH = Hamburg; HE = Hesse; MV = Mecklenburg-West Pomerania; NI = Lower Saxony; NW = North Rhine-Westphalia; RP = Rhineland- Palatinate; SL = Saarland; SN = Saxony; ST = Saxony-Anhalt; SH = Schleswig-Holstein; TH = Thuringia

## 3. Candidate selection procedures

The previous section highlighted the importance of party members and of an organisational network in quantitative terms for the development of particular electoral geographies. However, as indicated, while the three cases

enjoy comprehensive party structures and large memberships, they may need to engage with communities in other ways as well in order to build up and mobilise support. One of the main factors to do so is their internal dynamics. As the current literature on party politics (Lawson, 1980; Schwartz, 2005) highlights, a party organisation can encourage membership participation through its internal procedures, which, thus, provides it with important tools to establish firm social roots within communities. Central in this respect is the level of centralisation of party authority. Existing studies on this factor explain the increase of electoral performance both by the centralisation of authority in the hands of the party elite, if not leadership (Grzymala-Busse, 2002a; Keith, 2011), and by the decentralisation of party power across different internal party institutions (Harmel and Janda, 1982; Gherghina, 2014). While the former (centralised party power) allows concentrated electoral efforts towards the party goals, the latter (decentralised party power) provides the flexibility to respond to any changes in the surrounding circumstances. Hence, in the context of electoral geography, it seems that decentralisation allows parties to link to the diverse socio-economic circumstances across a country and to robustly use the political structures at their disposal. Therefore, the main hypothesis for this factor states that:

(H3c) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when a European radical left party has a more decentralised candidate selection procedure.

The analysis of the party statutes and of the experiences of the three cases rather rejects this hypothesis, as the data suggests that the candidate selection procedures have no effect on the electoral geographies of European RLPs. In the case of Die Linke, the party offers a significantly decentralised process of candidate selection. A decisive role in terms of choosing direct candidates and ordering the regional lists for Bundestag elections have the 16 state-level party organisations. This is done through state-level and constituency-level party conferences, involving the registered party members of the respective territories (Die Linke, 2007a). Such a decision-making process is not innovative or different compared to other German parties. The party statues of the PDS and WASG (PDS, 1997; WASG, 2005), like those of other major left-wing German parties, such as SPD and the Greens, contain similar procedures (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2016; SPD, 2017). This decentralisation, therefore,

implies that the choice of direct candidates and the order of the regional lists will rather promote people with strong local standing within the party, if not the community, as this decision is less dependent on the party dynamics at a national level and also brings the candidate selection procedure closer to the local electorate. This suggests that in German circumstances the sub-national organisations have significant powers at the expense of the federal structures, highlighting their potential influence on the electoral geographies of their respective parties.

The experience of PDS and Die Linke in applying these rules reveals the electoral significance of this decentralisation, as there are significant differences in the candidate profiles between the candidates selected from different state-level party organisations. Broadly speaking, West German state organisations prefer the selection of more uncompromising and radical candidates, given the general absence of experienced politicians in their ranks, while candidates from East German state generally tend to be more consensus-oriented and experienced in everyday politics (Koß, 2007). Yet, the assessment on the importance for the electoral geography of the party of such differences between candidate profiles, stemming from the selection process, remains inconclusive. While one party member stressed that 'with the selection of Sahra Wagenknecht on top of our regional list, our party organisation is completely satisfied for the upcoming elections' (Interview DE_L, 2017), independent researchers suggest that these choices rarely have particular significance for the electorate. For example, an independent researcher from Saxony revealed that:

> 'Maybe for some party members here is important that with Katja Kipping Saxony has a leading figure from the state in national authorities or that the Dresden local cell elected her as a direct candidate, but that does not conceal the fact that the party generally lacks personalities that can excite the wider public' (Interview DE_G, 2017).

This statement suggests that the local standing of the candidate within a community does not have a significant role. In such a context it seems that the decentralisation of candidate selection in the case of Die Linke has no effect on its electoral geography.

Similarly irrelevant is the level of party centralisation in the case of KSČM. The party statute presents a rather unclear picture of a candidate selection procedure that contains rather contradictory elements. On the one hand, the general party provisions state that candidates are selected through primaries among party members (KSČM, 2016, p. 5). On the other hand, these selections are later presented as nominations that can be altered at local and regional levels, while confirmed and/or rearranged by the Central Committee of the party on the national level (KSČM, 2016, p. 15). In such circumstances, it seems that while KSČM aims to widen its candidate selection process across communities, the procedure remains fundamentally a highly centralised effort. As a result, the candidate selection procedure of the party seems to fail to reflect the particular circumstances of the different Czech constituencies, thus having a rather restricted effect on the electoral geography of KSČM. The case of SP is further confirmation for such relative insignificance in a rather exaggerated form. Here, the candidate selection occurs completely detached from any territorial basis, as any party member, willing to put herself on the electoral list, requires to sign herself up at the internal electoral board and be approved as a candidate (SP, 2017, p. 11). The final order of the electoral list is proposed by the national party executive and confirmed by the national party congress (SP, 2017, p. 11), revealing a very limited involvement of any regional and local organisations in the process. This suggests that the candidate selection process does not influence the electoral geography of SP.

## 4. Radical left subculture

The third main factor of party organisation with the potential to shape the electoral geographies of European RLPs is the relations with the wider radical left subculture. Political parties are not the only participant in the political life of a country, as the past decades saw an increase in the activities and influence of a wide plethora of other forms of political organisation, such as social movements, interest groups, etc. (Wennerhag, Fröhlich and Piotrowski, 2016). The existing literature on historic and current anti-political establishment parties, such as Green parties, highlighted the significance of such non-party organisations for their electoral breakthrough, as these provided the needed organisational resources and policy expertise in the early days of party existence (Müller-Rommel, 1989; Poguntke, 1993). From that perspective, existing studies

on the electoral support for anti-political establishment parties tend to look not only at the parties themselves but also at the wider ideological milieu to which these parties belong (Minkenberg, 2003, 2017). Hence, the relations between a party and its respective subculture seem to play an important role in the electoral support for the former.

European RLPs are a particularly good example for the use of such relations for electoral purposes. Their historic origins can be traced back to the organised labour movement across Europe (Childs, 2000; Eley, 2002; Sassoon, 2010), providing a much-needed link between them and their potential voters among the working class. In more recent times the growing radical left subculture of organisations, aiming at a radical improvement of human conditions by overcoming the effects of economic inequalities, allowed European RLPs to build up and mobilise electoral support among social groups that were out of their previous electoral reach (Hudson, 2000, 2012). A central role in this respect has the nature of the relations between a party and its subculture. According to the literature on European RLPs, these parties either can maintain rather vanguardist relations, where the party dominates the radical left milieu through its network of affiliated and front organisations (Tsakatika and Lisi, 2013b, p. 9), or can foster reciprocal relations, where the party immerses itself within the milieu and voices the demands of the subculture within political institutions (Tsakatika and Lisi, 2013b, pp. 11–13). From a territorial perspective, both types of relations require from parties a broad territorial outreach if they want to establish balanced electoral geography across the country. In other words, the main hypothesis for this factor states that:

(H3d) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the relations between European radical left parties and radical left subcultures have a wider territorial scope.

## 4.1. The relations of Die Linke, SP, and KSČM with their radical left subcultures

The evidence from the three cases on the types of their relations offers an inconclusive understanding of the electoral potential of the radical left

subculture. An important reason for this is the significant changes in these relations throughout the years. The most pronounced changes can be observed in the case of Die Linke. The party lost almost overnight its vast network of affiliated and front organisations in the early 1990s, thus having to go through a major rebuilding effort during the 1990s. During its period as the regionalist Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the party was relatively successful in this task, establishing a moderately comprehensive network on vanguardist terms, given its organisational strength in Eastern Germany (Hough, 2001) and the general weakness of non-party organisations in the region (Roth and Rucht, 2008). In Western Germany PDS remained almost completely isolated due to its authoritarian and East German image, thus affiliating itself with fringe left-wing groups (Meuche-Mäker, 2005, p. 81). Despite these developments, it is difficult to argue that these relations made a significant contribution to the electoral geography of PDS. The main reason for this is that none of the organisations, affiliated to PDS, had any significant social clout. In such a context, it seems that on the elections up to the 2007 merger of PDS with the Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG), the relations of the party with its subculture had rather restricted impact on its electoral potential.

This situation changed significantly in the early 2000s with the emergence of WASG. Particularly, a combination of geography and new affiliation brought a qualitative and quantitative change of the place of Die Linke within the radical left subculture. Rooted in the growing cooperation between disillusioned trade unionists and autonomous social justice movements against the policies of the red-green government at the turn of the century (Schnelle, 2007) and, coupled with its strong West German character (Weichold, 2013), WASG compensated for the marginal place of PDS within the non-party organisation realm in the West. The electoral impact of this fundamental shift was significant. Analysis on the federal elections in 2005 and 2009 (Neugebauer and Stöss, 2008; Neugebauer, 2011) suggest that the strong electoral support of Die Linke across the country can be partially explained by its firm integration within the radical left subculture, thus capitalising on the growing protest sentiment in the country. In such a context, it seems that the relations of Die Linke with other organisations of the radical left milieu made a noticeable contribution to the declining territorial imbalance of electoral support for the party in the past two decades.

A similar trajectory of improved relations with the left-wing social environment can also be found in the case of SP. Prior to the 1990s, the party maintained strong vanguardist relations, based on a relatively comprehensive network of affiliated and front organisations. While this network included traditional mass organisations, such a small trade union, it was the structures concerned with practical matters, such as the Association for Tenants and Home Seekers or the healthcare organisation, Prevention is Better, that brought significant electoral support for SP on local and regional elections during the 1970s and 1980s (Voerman, 1987, pp. 134-135). As one party representative stated in an interview: 'These organisations showed the people that our party cares about them and it will help them in their everyday matters' (Interview NL_C, 2017).

Since the 1990s there were noticeable changes of the SP relations with the radical left milieu. The ideological shift of the party from Maoism to socialism included the incremental dismantling of the existing network of front organisations and the increasing attempt of SP to gain access to existing left-wing mass organisations and social movements. These attempts were moderately successful: SP managed to increase its presence in the major trade union confederation Federation of Dutch Trade Unions on the expense of the social democratic Party of Labour (PvdA) (Lingen, 2016). Furthermore, since the turn of the century the party became increasingly involved in joint campaigns with social movements, involving, for example, opposition to the Dutch involvement in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, campaigning against the 2005 EU constitution, or in more recent years the protests against the commercialisation of public services (Interview NL_H, 2017). Such a change seems to have an important electoral role for SP: aiming at taking governmental responsibility, it seems that the party benefited from these improved links by developing a coalitionable and reliable image.

In contrast to the other two cases, KSČM seems to be a rather isolated entity within the Czech left-wing environment. Similar to the Die Linke, the party lost its affiliations with mass organisations following the fall of the authoritarian communist regime in the country. In their place, KSČM facilitated a small network of interest-based organisations through which it kept a rather vanguardist approach. Among the most significant of those was the Club of the

Czech Border Areas, which, according to both independent researchers and party representatives, plays an important social role in the main electoral strongholds of the party in the border regions. As one independent researcher summarises: 'Those people worked as border guards during the communist period and stayed in the same places as they were back then' (Interview CZ_D, 2017), emphasising the lack of mobility as the main cause for the relative relevance of this association.

Beyond such affiliations, the party has failed to establish any lasting cooperation with independent mass organisations or social movements. The main reason for this inability is the rather unattractive public image of KSČM, especially among younger activists. On the one hand, there is an ideological mismatch between the party and the radical left milieu. An independent researcher points out that '[…] many of these organisations remain very anti-communist and suspicious [of] associating [themselves] with the communists. Some of them are even more radical than KSČM, so it is difficult to find a common ground' (Interview CZ_B, 2017). Another important point is that the party offers little room to integrate new members. In the words of an independent researcher:

> 'Generally, if you are young, your place is not really in [KSČM]. You go to a party meeting and there most of the people are in retired age, so even if you want to contribute, it would be very difficult to do so, as the others are interested in totally different topics than yourself as a young person' (Interview CZ_H, 2017).

This rather restricted affiliation with the radical left subculture suggests that this factor has a limited influence on the electoral geography of KSČM. Coupled with the changing relevance of these relations for the electoral support for the other two cases, it seems that this factor does not necessarily contribute to the electoral geographies of European RLPs.

## 4.2. Geographic scope of relations and electoral impact

This perspective is further confirmed by the similar geographic scope of these relations. As indicated in the interviews with representatives of the three

parties, their relations with their respective subcultures exist predominantly at regional and local levels, while a nationwide affiliation and/or cooperation is rather a rarity. For example, when asked about such linkages in the case of KSČM, an independent researcher pointed out an interesting example involving trade unions: 'It depends where any trade union sees it feasible to work with the communists. For example, in Ostrava, they work very well, because of the huge mining business there, but across the country trade unions are reluctant in having something in common with them' (Interview CZ_D, 2017).

Such regional linkages, however, have a very random character, as active existing cooperation with the radical left milieu can be found in a variety of places: in areas of strong electoral support, as well as in places of average or even weak performance. For example, Die Linke experiences significant difficulties to establish linkages with social movements and mass organisations in its electoral strongholds and in places of weak support for different reasons. On the one hand, in terms of the former, the experience from Saxony shows that the party fails to develop lasting relations with non-party left-wing organisations due to the general weakness of the latter in East Germany. As a party representative from the state points out: 'We would love to work with social movements [here], but the only influential social movement in the state is [the extreme right] Pegida' (Interview DE_I, 2017). On the other hand, Die Linke does not maintain strong relations with such organisations in its weak point, Bavaria, for ideological differences. One party member refers to this as '[…] complete incompatibility. I meet with [representatives of fringe left-wing organisations] quite regularly, but they fail to grasp the need to engage in electoral politics' (Interview DE_C, 2017).

The main reason for this randomness seems the rather unofficial way of coordinating and organising any common activities. Across the cases, numerous party members reported that the relations depend to a large extent on the personal relations of key members on both sides. For example, an SP party representative from the province of Overijssel, where the party performs similarly to its nationwide result, offers a clear example of such interaction, based on mutual benefits: 'We work with such organisations […] ad hoc. I call the guy from [an organisation], whenever there is something to be done and he calls me as well if he needs support for something' (Interview NL_B, 2017). In

such a context, it seems that despite the relative importance these linkages might have for the electoral geography of the party, their impact depends very much on the local if not personal circumstances rather than on more systematic sources.

Ultimately, the three cases do not support the hypothesis that the geographical scope of the relations with the radical left subculture influences the territorial pattern of electoral support for a European RLP. There are two important reasons for this. First, non-party organisations in the three countries remain relatively irrelevant in social terms. For example, when discussing their role for the electoral support of SP, a party representative highlights that 'these organisations do not have that much influence, as the Netherlands remains generally a conservative society' (Interview NL_H, 2017). Similar statements were given also by party representatives of Die Linke (e.g. Interview DE_J, 2017) and of KSČM (e.g. Interview CZ_C, 2017).

Secondly, non-party organisations rarely participate directly in electoral campaigns. For example, when discussing the role of the radical left subculture for the performance of Die Linke, an independent researcher highlighted that '[…] although they might have their sympathies for the party, none of these social movements or trade unions makes an official electoral recommendation or involves itself with the campaign of a particular party' (Interview DE_K, 2017). Therefore, even in the case of Die Linke where the linkages with the radical left subculture matter electorally, it seems that their impact is rather indirect. An important reason for such reluctance from the wider subculture to support the party electorally is more related with their own strategic choices. For example, in the case of SP, the radical left milieu avoids a close affiliation with any particular party as they strive for cross-party support for their causes. One party representative explains this further:

> 'Our […] political landscape is so fragmented that no organisation wants to be associated with just one party. You may say that, for example, environmental organisations are closer to GroenLinks, but they will avoid saying that they support GroenLinks, because we or the Animal Party will, quite rightly, complain about it. Same goes for our closeness to social organisations.' (Interview NL_F, 2018).

Another important reason is the lasting suspicion of these relations, even if they are set for mutual benefit. For example, a party activist of Die Linke states that 'Although I meet with people from social movements and trade unions to organised political actions, I kind of sense that they don't take me truly as one of them; as if they think "do your own business, but nothing more"' (Interview DE_E, 2017). This highlights that either the personal relations between these organisations matter substantially or that both sides, parties and non-party organisations, pursue their own goals without much expectation for mutual support.

## 5. Conclusion

This chapter investigated the potential effects of the organisational capabilities of European RLPs on their electoral geographies at national elections since 1990. Main hypotheses were that these capabilities, comprised of the organisational resources and opportunities of parties to pursue their goals, influence the territorial pattern of electoral support through the territorial outreach and concentration of party members across electoral units, the level of decentralisation of candidate selections procedures, and the relations with the wider radical left subculture.

A qualitative assessment of a series of semi-structured interviews with party officials from Die Linke, KSČM, and SP and with independent research confirms this hypothesis. Particularly, the experiences and expertise of the interviewees reveal that the territorial outreach of the party organisation and the levels of concentration of its party members across electoral units accounts for their electoral geographies. Furthermore, the impact of the relations with the radical left subculture could not be confirmed, although the interviews emphasised the significant symbolic meaning of these relations. Lastly, the evidence rejects the importance of candidate selection procedures, as rarely voters make their electoral decision based on the local standing of the candidate, and also because of the limited involvement of sub-national party organisation in the party strategic and organisational choices related to national elections in two of the cases (KSČM and SP).

These findings highlight important aspects from the process of the formation of electoral geographies of European RLPs. The evidence of this chapter suggests that the organisational outreach and membership concentration across electoral units provide the parties with vital resources to directly engage with communities across a country. Given that according to Chapter 4 the electoral geography of the three parties forms in two stages (between elections and during elections), it seems that the party organisation plays an important role for both stages. During the former stage, its organisational and membership presence enables the party to directly engage communities in what Johnston and Pattie (2006, p. 54) call 'socialisation' i.e. regular direct interaction between party member and voter that forms a certain level of legitimacy for the party in the eyes of the voter. Such an interaction, hence, seems vital for parties to build up electoral support by addressing and managing the influences of the regional, place-based contexts between electoral units and developing government and policy expertise through their involvement in regional politics. From that perspective, the relations with the wider radical left subculture may augment the organisational efforts of the party to build up such support.

During the second stage, the evidence of this chapter highlights the importance of its organisational presence to mobilise electoral support by managing and using the effects of the political institutions and party system competition. As seen in the three cases, while the relations with the wider radical left subculture are less relevant for the period during elections, the organisational and membership presence becomes all the more vital for the electoral geographies of European RLPs to implement their strategic choices in pursuing their party goals for national elections. Given that Chapter 4 highlighted that between elections it is the diversity of sub-national contexts that outline the potential electoral geography, while during elections nationwide contexts directly shape the territorial pattern of electoral performance, a party organisation should be able to transform its organisational presence and direct engagement with voters across electoral units into a source for electoral mobilisation at national elections. How and to what extent these parties are able to do so is a matter of further research. Overall, the organisational capabilities seem to influence the electoral geographies of European RLPs through their organisational presence, direct engagement with communities, and

abilities to transpose from regional contexts to the national character of electoral competition at national elections.

Such an influence has three important implications from a theoretical perspective. First, it highlights the significance of the internal relations between the party elite and regular members for the territorial distribution of electoral support for a party. This poses a significant question to existing works that focused predominantly on party elites as the sole arena of internal party life. In doing so, the insights of this chapter call for a more systematic operationalisation of organisational factors in future research on electoral geography. Second, this chapter confirms the importance of organisational resources for the territorial distribution of electoral support. While these resources could not be captured adequately in quantitative terms, it is important to take into consideration their qualitative characteristics in order to better understand the ways small parties manage to punch above their weight electorally or, more importantly, to plummet following a history of social and electoral significance. Third, it seems that the organisational capabilities provide an important context for understanding the diversity of territorial patterns of electoral support among European RLPs. The main reason for this is the omnipresence of these capabilities: they are relevant not only at the different stages of formation of a territorial pattern of electoral performance, but also provide parties with vital resources to pursue their party goals and, thus handle the effects of the political and socio-economic environment across a country. This, therefore, confirms the importance of studying the party organisations of RLPs as providing a context to understand their electoral performances across Europe.

# Chapter 7 The electoral geographies of European radical left parties and their diversity since 1990

## 1. Introduction

This chapter returns to the discussion from the introduction of this work. To reiterate, the collapse of the Soviet bloc at the end of the 1990s catalysed the processes of organisational and ideological mutation among European radical left parties (RLPs), resulting in a plethora of trajectories of transformation, evident in the diverse profiles of parties within the radical left party family and their different electoral fortunes across Europe. Overall, in the past three decades, European RLPs improved their performances, but this occurs in the context of diverse territorial balances of electoral support across electoral units.

This chapter provides an explanation for this development through a qualitative analysis of the empirical data and theoretical insights from the previous three chapters. The discussions in Chapters 1 and 2 on the literatures on European RLPs and on the spatial distribution of electoral support highlighted the need for a systematic study on the sources for their electoral geographies at national elections. In this context, this chapter responds to the main research question: Which factors best explain the electoral geographies of European radical left parties at national elections since 1990?

Electoral geography represents the territorial pattern of distribution of electoral performance across electoral units (dependent variable). This pattern derives from an assessment on the extent the electoral results of a party (its vote share) are similar across electoral units. From that perspective, this pattern may range between balanced (minimal differences in electoral support between electoral units) and imbalanced (maximal differences in electoral support between electoral units). Drawing from the literatures on electoral geography, party and party system nationalisation, and territorial politics, this thesis highlighted three alternative explanations, focused on the potential impact of the differences in social contexts across electoral units i.e. the differences of their socio-economic and socio-cultural characteristics (H1), the effects of the political structures of a country i.e. their political institutions and party system

competition (H2), and the role of the organisational capabilities of RLPs i.e. their organisational resources and opportunities to pursue their party goals (H3).

The basis for the systematic investigation of these hypotheses was a qualitative discussion on the empirical data, gathered from series of semi-structured interviews with independent researchers and with party officials at national, regional, and local levels from The Left (Die Linke, Germany), the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM, the Czech Republic), and the Socialist Party (SP, the Netherlands). The insights from these interviews reveal the practical relevance of the factors, related to the three explanations, based on the experience and expertise of the interviewees. The three cases were chosen for their different electoral geographies, underpinning similar levels of electoral performance of parties that face similar electoral and organisational challenges.

The main finding of this chapter is that all three explanations contain factors that influence the electoral geographies of the three cases since 1990. Beneath this ambiguity, however, the empirical data highlights important caveats to understand the context in which these factors contribute to the electoral geographies. Particularly, the data emphasise that the social context of a place matters for the electoral geographies of European RLPs, but only for building-up electoral support between elections, whereas the effects of the political institutions depend on the extent RLPs use them to maximise their efforts for electoral mobilisation. In such a context, the factors related to the organisational capabilities of the three cases also play a significant role in the territorial distribution of electoral support. This is because the organisational capabilities of European RLPs filter the effects of the different social contexts and of the political structures across electoral units.

The empirical data reveals that the three cases of European RLPs are capable to create electoral geography on their own depending on how three organisational factors channel the influences of the external socio-economic and political environment. First, their territorial outreach, represented by the presence of regional and local party organisations across a country and concentration of party members, is an important prerequisite for them to be able to reach out to potential voters between and during elections. The wider

the territorial outreach of a party in terms of a network of local party organisations, the more balanced would be its electoral geography, as the party would be more capable to make use of the different socio-economic and political circumstances across a country. Second, the level of long- and short-term engagement with communities across electoral units matters for parties in order to build up and mobilise electoral support on national elections. The more active the regional and local party organisations of European RLPs are across electoral units, the more likely it is to reflect and address the external environment in accordance to its ideology and goals, and, hence, develop balanced electoral geography. In other words, any differences in the level of activity can explain the differences in electoral support between electoral units on national elections. Third, the abilities of the party to transform its experiences of community engagement into an electoral asset on national elections are crucial for the direct contribution of the organisational capabilities on its electoral geography. The more capable a party is to use its regional and local involvement with communities for electoral purposes, the more likely it is that it will foster electoral geography that suits its party goals. In this context, the diversity of the electoral geographies of European RLPs since 1990 seems to emerge from the different impact of their organisational capabilities across their respective countries.

This chapter is structured as follows: the first section recaps the main empirical and theoretical insights from the previous chapters considering the three alternative explanations for the electoral geographies of the three cases. The following section discusses these insights in light of the research question and outlines the causal relations between the three explanations. The final section views the role of these casual relations for the diversity of electoral geographies of European RLPs since 1990.

## 2. What has this research established so far

The previous three chapters discussed the three alternative explanations for the electoral geographies of the cases of European RLPs from the Czech Republic (KSČM), Germany (Die Linke), and the Netherlands (SP). This section provides an overview of their main empirical and theoretical conclusions. Overall, while these chapters found a confirmation for most of the hypotheses

related to the three alternative explanations, their relevance has a different weight for electoral geographies of European RLPs. Chapter 4 found that factors of social context influence the territorial pattern of electoral support for European RLPs, but only regarding the build-up of electoral support between elections, not for the electoral mobilisation itself. Chapter 5 highlighted that the influence of political structures declines over time, as they depend on the extent RLPs respond to their effects. Chapter 6, in contrast, confirmed the direct influence of the organisational capabilities of European RLPs for both, the period between and during elections.

## 2.1. The volatile impact of social context

The first main explanation considered factors of social context. According to the literature on electoral geography, these constitute the socio-economic and socio-cultural environment of an electoral unit that may differ in its responsiveness to the ideological, programmatic and organisational efforts of an RLP. This led to the main hypothesis, discussed in Chapter 3 that the electoral geography of a European RLP at a national election since 1990 depends on the differences in social context between electoral units (H1).

In light of this hypothesis, a discussion in Chapter 2 highlighted that the voters' rational choices do not emerge in a vacuum (Franklin, 2004, p. 202), but are subject of external influences, one of which includes the surrounding socio-economic and socio-cultural environment of a place (Miller and Shanks, 1996, chap. 9). In this respect Agnew's work on electoral geography (Agnew, 1987, 2002) revealed that the main factors of social context that may influence voters' choices and, hence, the electoral performance of a political party within a place are the place-based political culture, its main institutions, as well as the individual electoral preferences. Transforming those with the help of the existing literature on the European radical left revealed that the differences between electoral units in their historic legacies of mass mobilisation (H1a), of their socio-economic circumstances (H1b), and in the salience of electoral topics (H1c) may contribute to the territorial pattern of electoral support for a European RLP. A summary of the three hypotheses related to H1 with the conclusions from Chapter 4 is presented in Table 7.1.

## Table 7.1. Social context

**(H1) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 depends on the differences in social context between electoral units.**

| Factor | Variable | Hypothesis | Conclusion |
|---|---|---|---|
| Historic legacies | Historic legacies of mass mobilisation | (H1a) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the differences between electoral units in their historic legacies of mass mobilisation are limited. | **Confirmed** |
| Socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions | Contemporary socio-economic and socio-cultural differences | (H1b) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the differences between electoral units in their socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions are limited. | **Confirmed** |
| Electoral topics | Salience of electoral topics | (H1c) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the differences in the salience of electoral topics between electoral units are limited. | **Rejected** |

Chapter 4 confirmed H1a and H1b and rejected H1c. While this confirms H1, the empirical data suggests that the differences in the social context between electoral units matter only for the build-up of electoral support between elections. In contrast, the particular social context of an electoral unit has limited relevance for the mobilisation of that support during elections. This can be observed in the ways each of the three factors of social context is relevant for the electoral geography of the three cases.

The hypothesis related to the historic legacies stated that the territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when there are limited differences in the historical legacies of mass mobilisation between electoral units (H1a). While Chapter 4 confirms this, the experience of the three parties highlights that these historic legacies alone matter to a limited extent during elections, as voters are rarely mobilised electorally solely because of past traditions of support. While this is certainly the case for SP during the entire timeframe (1990-2017), history lost its mobilising potential for Die Linke and KSČM since the late 1990s. More importantly, even when such legacies were an important factor for electoral mobilisation, Die Linke and KSČM reveal that it is the linkage to the contemporary socio-economic conditions that fuel the electoral relevance of historic legacies. Die Linke was able during the 1990s to tap into the non-integrated political socialisation of Eastern Germany due to the negative socio-economic effects post-Reunification. KSČM invoked its historic credentials as a provider of social welfare during the authoritarian communist regime to mobilise support in its electoral strongholds in the border areas in circumstances of salient communist/anti-communist electoral divide in the early post-communist years.

Despite this limited relevance for electoral mobilisation, the main reason for confirming H1a was the relevance of historic legacies between elections as the main source to build-up electoral support. Here all three cases highlighted their invocation of historical legacies, including paying tribute to regional and local events of mass mobilisation, as important activities to link their party organisations to the regional and local communities across their countries. In contrast, where the three parties struggle to establish a strong electoral basis, it is partially due to the general absence of relevant legacies, to which they can

relate to. These concern particularly the cases of Die Linke in Western Germany and SP in the Randstad area. Alternatively, the case of KSČM in Prague shows that negative legacies also can also restrict the electoral potential of a European RLP. Therefore, the differences in the historic legacies matter for the electoral geographies of European RLPs, when it comes to building up electoral support.

Similarly, the differences in the current socio-economic conditions between electoral units matter for only for the period between elections. Originally, the main hypothesis for this factor expected that the electoral geography of a European RLP on a national election since 1990 will be more balanced when there are limited differences between the socio-economic conditions of electoral units (H1b). Relevant differences for European RLPs concerned the level of economic inequality and the socio-cultural centre-periphery differences between electoral units (van Hamme, Vandermotten and Lockhart, 2018). In this respect, it was expected that the electoral support for these parties may be more pronounced in geographically and socially peripheral electoral units that experience economic underdevelopment. The three cases confirmed H1b, given that, for example, the relatively balanced electoral geography of KSČM reflects the economic and socio-cultural differences between Prague and the remaining regional electoral constituencies. Furthermore, the imbalanced pattern of support for Die Linke corresponds to the unequal economic levels and socio-cultural differences between the Eastern and Western state constituencies. The case of SP suggests that the economic differences between electoral units may not be necessarily relevant for its electoral geography. While, for example, the party struggles electorally in some wealthier constituencies (e.g. Utrecht and the four North Holland constituencies), it also performs well in such places (e.g. Groningen). As the empirical data on the case reveals, the socio-cultural centre-periphery differences between Dutch constituencies better explain the electoral geography of SP[36]. Therefore, while the electoral geographies of Die Linke and KSČM are largely a product of the combination between socio-economic and socio-cultural differences, the territorial pattern of SP derives rather from the latter factor. Overall, this confirms H1b.

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[36] It should be noted that economic differences still matter for the case of SP, but their importance is illuminated more clearly at a local level.

Yet, while confirming the previous hypothesis would suggest that the differences in the social contexts between electoral units would be relevant during elections, the third hypothesis reveals that this is not the case. Originally, there was an expectation that due to the different socio-economic conditions between electoral units, voters would be interested in supporting a party that addresses the particular socio-economic matters of the place, where they live. From that perspective, the third hypothesis for the relevance of social context was that there may be a different salience of electoral topics between electoral units, underpinned by these different socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions. Hence, the electoral geography of a European RLP at a national election since 1990 should be more balanced when there are limited differences between the salience of electoral topics in electoral units (H1c). The evidence from the three cases, however, rejects this hypothesis, as in neither case national elections have major differences in this respect. According to the data, local issues and topics have limited relevance for the electoral mobilisation at national elections, as the competition at national elections has a common electoral agenda, involving issues relevant across electoral units, regardless of their particular socio-economic conditions. In this context, instead of a different salience of issues, it is the difference in attitudes on the common electoral topics that matters more for electoral mobilisation. This suggests that while the different socio-economic conditions may influence the electoral geographies of European RLPs, they are rather important for the period between elections when voters' attitudes on the electoral topics on national elections are formulated.

Overall, the conclusions of Chapter 4 reveal that social context influences the electoral geography of the European radical left, but indirectly. The empirical data on the three cases require a theoretical modification of the existing explanations, given that the interviews made a clear distinction between influences between and during elections. While the particular, regional or local social context of an electoral unit matters more between elections, it has a limited influence during elections. Therefore, the social context of an electoral unit matters for the development of an electoral potential i.e. the build-up of electoral support across electoral units between elections, rather than influencing directly the electoral geographies of European RLPs during elections. Hence, to understand the diversity of the electoral geographies of

European RLPs, this distinction between influences between and during elections should be recognised.

## 2.2. The conditional influence of political structures

The second alternative explanation focused on the impact of political structures i.e. the political institution and party system competition of a country. As political structures aim to channel social processes and condition party behaviour, they should be able to directly influence the type of territorial pattern of electoral performance. This is particularly highlighted by the literature on party and party system nationalisation that explores the sources and effects of the extent the politics of a country have a common, national character (e.g. Caramani, 2004). In this context, the main hypothesis was that the electoral geography of a European RLP at a national election since 1990 depends on the effects of political structures (H2)

The theoretical discussion on this explanation in Chapter 2 highlighted nine potential factors accounting for the impact of political structures. First, the electoral rules may predispose a particular electoral geography depending on the number of electoral constituencies and district magnitude (Morgenstern, Swindle and Castagnola, 2009) (H2a), as well as due to the effects of malapportionment (Caramani, 2000) (H2b) and the differences between the effective thresholds of electoral units (Lijphart, 1994) (H2c). Second, the system of regional governance offers incentives for political parties to build their electoral support from the bottom up (H2d), using their experiences in regional and local politics (Brancati, 2008) (H2e) and their electoral performance on sub-national elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Dandoy and Schakel, 2013; Schakel, 2017) (H2f). Three, the intensity of competition from centre-left (H3g), small progressive (H2h), and anti-political establishment parties (H2i) across a territory may further condition the electoral geographies of European RLPs, as these pose a direct competition for their main electorate with the resulting prospect of one party being 'squeezed out' (Cox, 1987). A summary of the hypotheses related to political structures with the conclusions from Chapter 5 is presented in Table 7.2.

## Table 7.2. Political structures

**(H2) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 depends on the effects of political structures.**

| Factor | Variable | Hypothesis | Conclusion |
|---|---|---|---|
| Electoral system | Number of electoral units<br>District magnitude | (H2a) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the number of electoral units is lower and the district magnitude is higher. | **Not confirmed** |
| | Malapportionment | (H2b) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the level of malapportionment is low. | **Not confirmed** |
| | Effective threshold | (H2c) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the differences of the effective thresholds between electoral units are limited. | **Not confirmed** |
| System of regional governance | Regional authority | (H2d) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the level of regional authority is lower. | **Confirmed** |
| | Regional presence | (H2e) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the party presence in regional politics is more similar between electoral units. | **Not confirmed** |
| | Regional electoral performance | (H2f) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when a European radical left party obtains similar levels of electoral performance between electoral units on a sub-national election. | **Not confirmed** |

| Party system competition | Major centre-left opponent | (H2g) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the intensity of competition with a major centre-left opponent is higher. | **Confirmed** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Small progressive opponent | (H2h) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the intensity of competition with small progressive opponent/s is higher. | **Not confirmed** |
| | Anti-political establishment opponent | (H2i) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the intensity of competition with anti-political establishment opponent/s is lower. | **Nor confirmed** |

The empirical data from the cases of Die Linke, SP, and KSČM seems to confirm H2. Yet, while the discussion on the cases in Chapter 5 confirmed the importance of the level of regional autonomy (H2d) and of the intensity of competition with centre-left parties (H2g), a majority of the hypotheses could not be confirmed for all cases (H2a, H2b, H2c, H2e, H2f, H2h, H2i) based on the evidence. As in the case with the previous explanation, the context for these conclusions matters. In particular, the main reason for not being able to confirm six of the hypotheses is that their impact depends on the particular strategic or ideological choices of the three RLPs.

First, the influence of the electoral system on the electoral geographies of the three cases could not be confirmed. Chapter 5 revealed that, contrary to the literature on party and party system nationalisation, the role of the number of electoral constituencies and district magnitude for the electoral geographies of the three parties declines over time. A common reason for this is the strategic focus on passing the nationwide electoral threshold for parliamentary representation, regardless of any place-based specifics. In the case of Die Linke, especially during its existence as the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) during the 1990s and early 2000s, this involved the use of special rules to circumvent the 5% threshold through gaining a minimal number of direct mandates. This, therefore, prompted the party to restrict its geographic scope of campaigning in winnable seats, while neglecting marginal ones. The result of such a strategy was an imbalanced electoral pattern. While this experience suggests the potentially strong and direct impact of the electoral system, Die Linke abandoned such place-based strategies after its 2007 merger as it faced no significant threat of passing the 5% threshold. More importantly, despite a major reform in the district magnitude of the German electoral constituencies prior to the 2002 federal elections, the electoral geography of the party retained its imbalanced levels.

Similarly, to Die Linke, the experiences of KSČM and SP show that these parties chose to widen their geographic outreach in order to maximise their mobilisation efforts and, thus, ensure a wider parliamentary representation through more balanced territorial patterns. In such a context, the number of electoral constituencies, district magnitude, and differences between the effective thresholds rather pose a challenge for Czech and Dutch political parties

that do not have the organisational capabilities to ensure a territorial coverage that leads to parliamentary representation. Hence, H2a and H2c could not be confirmed due to their different relevance over time. In particular, it seems that these variables from the electoral system are more relevant for the initial period of the existence of a party, when it lacks the organisational capabilities to ensure its broad presence and activity across a country and, thus, maximise its electoral potential. Yet, the more a party grows electorally and organisationally, the less these factors have an effect on its electoral geography.

In contrast to the conditional influence of the above-discussed factors, malapportionment has a limited influence on the electoral geography of the three parties for different reasons. Given that the border delimitation of electoral constituencies in the Czech Republic, Germany, and the Netherlands are tied to the administrative system of a country or to the number of inhabitants, there is a limited potential for providing direct or indirect advantages for any political parties. Hence H2b could not be confirmed as well. Overall, Chapter 5 suggests that the impact of electoral rules on electoral geography seems to decrease with the increase of party size. This corroborates recent calls in the party and party system nationalisation literature to include party size as an important factor accounting for the territorial balance of electoral support (Morgenstern, Polga-Hecimovich and Siavelis, 2014).

Second, regional governance has a rather latent potential to shape the electoral geographies of European RLPs. In this respect Chapter 5 reveals that the administrative systems of the Czech Republic, Germany, and the Netherlands offer noticeable incentives for political parties to use their experiences from participation in regional politics. This, therefore, confirmed hypothesis H2d. Yet, the three cases have not made use of such experiences as they avoid (Die Linke) or are unable (KSČM and SP) to transform them into an electoral capital on the national level. This evidence, therefore, led Chapter 5 to conclude that H2e could not be confirmed. There are three reasons for this. The first one emerges from the case of Die Linke. The party does not see regional politics as a relevant factor for national elections, as voters tend to differentiate the two contexts when making their electoral choice. The second one relates to the case of SP. The attempts of the party to transform its experience in regional politics fail due to the different nature of regional from national politics: where the

former remains largely depoliticised, the latter is a significantly politicised realm. The third one reflects the evidence from the case of KSČM. The interviews with party representatives and independent researchers revealed a significant mismatch between the office-oriented goals of regional and local party organisations from the policy-oriented ones of the national party organisation. In such circumstances, even if the party is willing to use its regional and local expertise, it is unable to do so for its lack of internal coherence. Lastly, H2f cannot be confirmed, as the electoral performance of the three cases at regional elections did not provide a reliable indication for their levels of electoral support across electoral units at national elections. Overall, similarly to the impact of electoral rules, it seems that the system of regional governance has the potential to influence the electoral geographies of European RLPs, depending on the strategic choices and organisational capabilities of the parties.

Third, the intensity of party competition has a direct influence on the electoral geographies of European RLPs. In particular, the competition with the major centre-left opponent remains a constant factor for their territorial distribution of electoral support. The cases of Die Linke, KSČM and the SP revealed that the intensity of competition between them and their social-democratic opponents had a consistent influence on the levels of electoral support across electoral units, thus confirming H2g. In contrast, competition from other small progressive or anti-political establishment parties matters for their electoral geographies depending on the ideological profile of the respective RLP. On the one hand, in the case of KSČM, a significant challenge across Czech constituencies comes from anti-political establishment parties of authoritarian nature. On the other hand, it was other small progressive parties that proved a direct challenge and opportunity for the electoral chances of Die Linke and SP across Germany and the Netherlands. Given that the impact of small progressive and anti-political establishment parties depends on the ideological profile of the particular RLP, hypotheses H2h and H2i could not be confirmed. The overall conclusion of Chapter 5, therefore, was party choices related to their campaign strategy and ideological profile condition the extent factors of political structures influence the electoral geographies of European RLPs. This suggests that the factors of the different alternative explanations

shape not only the electoral geography of a party but influence each other as well. Hence, knowing the direction of this influence may reveal the relations between the three explanations.

## 2.3. The omnipresence of organisational capabilities

The third alternative explanation, discussed in Chapter 6, focuses on the organisational capabilities of European RLPs i.e. their organisational resources and opportunities. As the existing literature on European RLPs (Eley, 2002; Sassoon, 2010; Hudson, 2012) indicates, their reliance on mass membership and involvement with wider movements for political emancipation allowed them historically to improve their electoral performance. Hence, the main hypothesis for this explanation states that the electoral geography of a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 depends on the differences of its organisational capabilities between electoral units (H3)

As the literature on territorial politics and party politics emphasised, three major factors may contribute to the particular territorial distribution of electoral support for European RLPs. First, party complexity i.e. its territorial outreach through a network of regional and local party organisations and spread of members across a country should enable a party to mobilise its electorate in different places. This should occur through the process of long-term socialisation (Johnston and Pattie, 2006, p. 54) and short-term campaigning (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992, 2002) that influence voters' choices in its favour. Therefore, the electoral geography of a European RLP at a national election since 1990 should be more balanced when the territorial outreach of its network of regional and local organisations is wider (H3a) and when it has a more balanced concentration of party members across electoral units (H3b).

Second, the candidate selection process may further condition the extent a party is capable to respond to the regional and local social contexts across a country. As highlighted in the existing literature, a decentralised candidate selection should facilitate a rather balanced electoral geography (H3c), as it signals an improved integration of the party within a local community. Such integration enables it to steer the effects of the specific socio-economic and political conditions across a country towards its electoral goals (van Biezen,

2003; Tavits, 2013; Gherghina, 2014). Third, party linkages with the wider radical left subculture i.e. with the plethora of mass organisations and social movements that share similar political agenda as these parties could further influence their electoral geographies. These relations provide a vital organisational basis for building up support and maximising the mobilisation efforts of a party, as revealed in the experiences of RLPs from Southern Europe (Tsakatika and Lisi, 2013a). Hence, the electoral geography of a European RLP since 1990 should be more balanced when the relations between European RLPs and the radical left subculture have a wider territorial scope (H3d). A summary of the hypotheses and their results is presented in Table 7.3.

## Table 7.3. Organisational capabilities

**(H3) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 depends on the differences of its organisational capabilities between electoral units.**

| Factor | Variable | Hypothesis | Conclusion |
|---|---|---|---|
| Party complexity | Territorial outreach of party organisation | (H3a) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the territorial outreach of its network of regional and local organisations is wider. | **Confirmed** |
| | Concentration of party members across electoral units | (H3b) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when a European radical left party has a more balanced concentration of party members across electoral units. | **Confirmed** |
| Participatory linkage | Decentralisation of candidate selection procedures | (H3c) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party at a national election since 1990 is more balanced when a European radical left party has a more decentralised candidate selection procedure. | **Rejected** |
| Environmental linkage | Relations with wider radical left subculture across electoral units | (H3d) The territorial pattern of electoral support for a European radical left party on a national election since 1990 is more balanced when the relations between European radical left parties and radical left subcultures have a wider territorial scope. | **Not confirmed** |

The discussion on the impact of the organisational capabilities, detailed in Chapter 6, confirms the overall hypothesis H3. Particularly, the chapter confirmed the relevance of the territorial outreach of the network of regional and local organisations (H3a) and the spread and concentration of party members across electoral units (H3b). Furthermore, while Chapter 6 rejected H3c, the empirical data on that hypothesis pointed towards internal party reasons that made the candidate selection process insignificant. Lastly, hypothesis H3d could not be confirmed, as the environmental linkages with the radical left subcultures were either plagued by general mistrust (Die Linke), were irrelevant for the parties (KSČM), or the subcultures themselves did not have significant social clout at first place (SP). This again confirms the observation from the previous explanations that the context, in which these hypotheses are discussed, is a key for understanding their actual influence on the electoral geographies of European RLPs.

First, a closer look at the role of party complexity for the electoral geography confirms the importance of the territorial outreach of party organisation and of the concentration of party members across electoral units. The statistical evidence on the number of party organisations and members across a country points out that in the three cases the more local organisations a party has in a certain place, and the more members it has as a proportion of the total population of a place, the more likely it is to mobilise high levels of electoral support. As Chapter 6 revealed, the organisational presence of the three parties at the local level corresponds to a large extent with their levels of electoral performance across their respective countries. In the case of Die Linke, their dense organisational network in the East stands in stark contrast to its difficulties to establish organisations across districts in the Western states. Similarly, the balanced electoral pattern of KSČM reflects its wide territorial coverage through its party organisations. In the case of SP, the differences in the electoral support for the party across electoral units coincide to some degree with the differences of its organisational presence in Dutch provinces. In such a context, the more widespread the network of local and regional party organisations, the more balanced the electoral geography of a European RLP seems to be.

The discussion on the latter factor, the concentration of party members, reveals that the more party members there are as a proportion of the total population in a place the more likely it is to mobilise high levels of electoral support. In such a context, while KSČM may have their largest membership in Prague, its weak electoral support there seems to be related with the fact that this large membership operates in an even larger city, which rather reduces the potential impact of their actions. The reversed is relevant as well: Die Linke may not have its largest organisation in Brandenburg, but the relative proportion of its membership from the total population is the highest there, which coincides with the relatively strong electoral support for the party there. Hence, in terms of their electoral geographies, all three parties provided evidence that the more balanced the concentration of their members would be across a territory, the more balanced its electoral geography would become. Overall, the cases of Die Linke, KSČM, and SP suggest that the organisational and membership presence is a basic prerequisite for RLPs to be able to influence their own electoral geographies.

Second, candidate selection procedures have a very limited influence on the electoral geographies of European RLPs. The experience of the three parties in this respect suggests that voters rarely make their electoral decision based on the local standing of the candidates in the electoral lists. From that perspective, it seems that these procedures are rather irrelevant for their electoral geographies. More importantly, the data also highlights a significant detachment between the national and regional organisational structures. While Die Linke and KSČM have mechanisms at a place to involve their respective regional and local party organisations in the candidate selection process, they seem rather excluded from matters related to the strategic choices of a party around national elections. This is either due to the different political agendas between the different organisational levels of these parties (KSČM) or due to significant involvement of party factionalism in the process (Die Linke). As a result, the effects of the candidate selection process on the electoral geographies of the three cases seem further neutralised due to their specific organisational choices. Hence, while Chapter 6 rejected H3c, the empirical evidence highlights also important factors related to the internal party life that explain this irrelevance. Therefore, despite the fact that candidate selection procedures may not have an

influence on the electoral geographies of European RLPs, other internal party factors may have.

Third, the role of the party relations with the radical left subculture for the electoral geographies of European RLPs remains unclear. On the one hand, the evidence from the cases of Die Linke, SP, and KSČM highlight two major reasons for the limited influence of these relations for their electoral geographies. The first one stems from the experiences of KSČM and SP. These reveal that the radical left subculture remains socially marginal and, thus, it does not offer significant prospects for organisational and electoral mobilisation. Given these circumstances, the geographical scope of these relations for KSČM and SP is rather restricted and, hence, has a limited influence on their electoral geographies.

The second reason relates to the case of Die Linke and reveals that even when a radical left subculture may be socially influential, its relations with an RLP may not have an impact on the electoral geographies of the latter due to their nature. In the case of Die Linke, the significantly improved integration of the party within West German radical left circles following the 2007 merger between the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and the Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG) has not balanced out its overall territorial distribution of electoral support. As the interview data revealed, an important reason for this is the noticeable mistrust between Die Linke and the subculture.

Despite this evidence on the limited effects of this factor on the electoral geographies of the three cases, the interviews with party representatives and independent researchers also suggested that nevertheless, the relations with the radical left subculture are an important source for building up an electoral potential. Due to the marginal social role of the radical left subcultures in the Czech Republic and the Netherlands, these relations seem to have a rather symbolic role, signalling an image of left unity. In contrast, such relations are an important strategic asset for Die Linke that works in concert with other actions towards building up of electoral support across Germany. Therefore, while Chapter 6 could not confirm H3d, it concludes that the relevance of this factor for the electoral geography of the European radical left depends on the extent parties are interested and capable of using it for their party goals.

## 3. The electoral geographies of European radical left parties since 1990

### 3.1. Sources for the electoral geography of a European radical left party

Turning to the main research question of this thesis ('Which factors best explain the electoral geographies of European radical left parties at national elections since 1990?'), the above-presented data confirms that the electoral geographies of European RLPs since 1990 can be explained by the three alternative hypotheses. This is particularly visible through the confirmation of the relevance of six factors of social context, political structures, and organisational capabilities (Table 7.4). As it stands, the differences in the historical legacies and in the socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions between electoral units highlight the importance of social context for the electoral geographies of European RLPs. Similarly, the level of regional authority and competition from a major centre-left competitor provide external inputs for the strategic choices of European RLPs. From that perspective, their electoral geography depends on how these parties react to those inputs and on the extent they are capable of using them for their party goals. Finally, the organisational outreach and membership concentration between electoral units provides evidence for the impact of the organisational capabilities of European RLPs on their electoral geographies.

**Table 7.4. Summary of factors, influencing the electoral geographies of European radical left parties since 1990**

| Explanation | Social Context | Political structures | Organisational capabilities |
|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | Differences between electoral units in historic legacies of mass mobilisation for common action | Level of regional authority | Territorial outreach of party organisation across electoral units |
| | Differences between electoral units in socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions | Intensity of competition with a centre-left opponent | Difference between electoral units in the level of concentration of party members |

The empirical data also highlights that these factors matter within specific contexts. In particular, the experiences of the three parties revealed three such contexts. First, the evidence of the three empirical chapters suggests that the electoral geographies of European RLPs emerge as a product of the interaction between internal and external to the party factors. While the former

relates to their organisational capabilities, the latter stem from the regional or national social contexts and political structures of a country. This is important for the theoretical implications of this study. Originally the theoretical framework implied that all factors independently influence the electoral geography of a party. However, the evidence points out that it is important to recognise the mutual influence between these factors. This, therefore, requires further analysis in order to highlight how these factors influence each other in order to understand the causal mechanisms for the emergence of electoral geography.

Second, there is a significant variation in the impact of these factors over time. Chapter 5 highlighted that the regional historic legacies and socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions of electoral units are not a strong source for the mobilisation of electoral support during elections, but they do have an important role for building-up that support between elections. Similarly, Chapter 6 revealed that while the electoral rules may not have a currently strong influence on the territorial distribution of electoral performance during elections, participation in regional politics between elections can serve as an important source for building up support. These examples suggest that the electoral geography is not only a product of the direct impact of the factors, included in any of the three explanations, during elections but also on the indirect influence of such factors between elections that outline a potential (not necessarily actual!) electoral geography. Therefore, the interaction between the social context and political structures (external factors) and the organisational capabilities (internal factors) seems to occur in two stages. The first one is between elections when the electoral support has been built up by the party depending on the regional and local socio-economic and political conditions across electoral units. A second stage occurs during elections when that electoral support is mobilised by the party by addressing the particular electoral attitudes between electoral units on the common electoral topics and by channelling the effects of the electoral rules and party system competition on its electoral geography.

Third, these factors have different relevance from a spatial perspective. In particular, the evidence of the three cases confirms that the electoral geography of a party is a product of both, nationwide and regional-level

influences. Looking again on the examples from the previous paragraph, it can be observed that the different stages of formation of electoral geography have different sources. Between elections, it is the place-specific, regional contexts that condition the extent parties would be able to mobilise support. In this respect, the interaction between the regional party organisation and the regional socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions shapes the potential electoral geography. As the evidence of three cases suggests, their regional party organisations have different ways of engaging with communities across electoral units. For example, where KSČM was present in the regional government of the Ústí nad Labem region, enabling the party to potentially build up support through its regional governmental record[37], this was not an option for KSČM in the Capital City Prague. In Prague, as the interviews highlighted, the party rather emphasises non-parliamentary activities rather than its participation in the City Council (e.g. Interview CZ_B, 2017; Interview CZ_E, 2017).

These differences also relate to the role of the wider radical left subculture for building up support. If a party relies on such non-parliamentary activities, its relations with the radical left movement become increasingly significant. For example, SP in Groningen benefited from its linkages with the anti-earthquake protest movement that strengthened the potential party support there (e.g. Interview NL_F, 2017, Interview NL_H, 2017). In contrast to the relevance of place-based, regional contexts for building up support between elections, during national elections the national conditions directly influence the actual electoral geography of a European RLP. As the evidence of the three cases highlights, national elections are held around common electoral topics and where RLPs face the same party competition across electoral units. For that reason, the salience of local issues has a limited relevance during national elections, as pointed out in Chapter 4, and for the same reason, the participation in regional governance is not necessarily a significant source for electoral mobilisation. Therefore, it is one thing for parties to build up an electoral potential between elections by addressing the place-specific

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[37] It should be noted that the party avoided doing so. The evidence in Chapter 5 suggests that this is due to the different party goals that the KSČM regional organisation pursues compared to the national party organisation.

particularities across electoral units, it is another matter to mobilise that support at national elections.

### 3.2. The interaction between social context, political structures, and organisational capabilities for the electoral geographies of European RLPs

The discussion above indicated that while the three cases provided support for all three alternative explanations, there are specific contexts within which the different alternatives matter for the electoral geographies of European RLPs since 1990. This is important in order to understand the main causal mechanisms for the emergence of electoral geography. Applying these contexts on the three cases not only confirms the importance of social context and political structures but also highlights the significant role of the organisational capabilities of European RLPs in shaping their electoral geographies. Particularly, these capabilities filter the impact of the social contexts and political structures across electoral units and, thus, enable the party to channel their influences according to its goals.

There are two main points underpinning this perspective. First, the influence of social context varies over time and space. As the discussion in Chapter 4 highlighted, social context has a significant influence on the electoral geographies of the three cases mainly for the period between elections. Particularly the diverse socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions across electoral units create different circumstances that parties need to accommodate and use for building up support. As the interview data, discussed in Chapter 4, revealed in this respect, the three parties failed or avoided mobilising support across different places at national elections by tapping into the voters' perceptions on the local socio-economic conditions or historical legacies of these places. Instead, the interviews indicated that at national elections people are mainly concerned on the main nationwide topics, addressed by the party campaigns.

In such a context, the place-specific socio-economic conditions matter by creating certain attitudes among the electorate of a given place between elections. As the interview data, discussed extensively in Chapter 4, reveals,

these attitudes provided the three European RLPs with a certain level of mobilisation potential across a country. Particularly, the interviews and available statistical data, explored in Chapter 4, indicated that places of material deprivation, economic decline, and historic legacies of mass mobilisation are particularly accommodative for the activities of European RLPs. Hence, the lower the differences between these conditions across a country are, the more likely it is for a European RLP to establish a balanced electoral geography.

This likelihood depends also very much on the organisational capabilities of European RLPs, as they provide these parties with tools to channel the effects of the socio-economic conditions and historical legacies for their electoral potential. As the interview data, discussed in Chapter 6, indicated, having local party organisations with many active members are important prerequisites for the three European RLPs to build-up their electoral base across their respective countries. Often this has unexpected results. For example, as detailed in Chapter 4, in the Netherlands there are limited differences in the socio-economic conditions across the country, which may mean that the SP should have a balanced electoral geography. This, however, is not entirely the case; the party established electoral geography of a relatively mid-level of balance, where it achieves generally similar levels of support across the Netherlands with few noticeable electoral strongholds. Chapter 6 indicated in this respect that this pattern is very much due to the fact that SP became increasingly active across the Netherlands through its wide-spread participation in local elections. More importantly, its presence in places in the North (Groningen) and the South (Limburg and North Brabant) allowed the party to establish firm support by linking to the historical legacies of mass mobilisation (e.g. Interview NL_H, 2017; Interview NL_F, 2017) or by its extensive local work of its engaged members (e.g. Interview NL_D, 2017). This shows that while there may be certain advantageous or disadvantageous conditions across a country, the party resources in terms of organisational presence and active members are a significant factor determining the extent the party would be able to seize these conditions electorally.

Second, the impact of political structures depends on the particular strategic choices and organisational resources of European RLPs. In this respect,

Chapter 5 highlighted that the level of regional authority provides an incentive for a party to use its participation in regional politics to build-up its electoral potential across a territory between elections. The interview data, discussed in Chapter 5, revealed that parties indeed recognise the importance of regional politics for their electoral performance in different electoral units, as it allows them to show and develop their governmental and policy expertise. Yet, the interviews also highlighted that the impact of this factor depends on whether a party actually is willing and capable to make use of its involvement in regional politics. For example, in the case of Die Linke, at federal elections the party does not make use of its state-level government and parliamentary record, even though this may potentially improve its electoral potential, as Die Linke is aware that this record has little influence on voters' choice at national elections. Hence, while the imbalanced electoral geographies of Die Linke may be related to the strong regional authority of the German states, given the permanent presence of the party in the East German Landtäge and its weaker involvement in regional politics in the West, the interviews suggest that this is not the case due to party choices. Hence, the party itself has an important role in determining the extent regional authority would shape its electoral geography.

The case of SP reveals that beyond party choices the importance of regional authority for the electoral geography of a European RLP depends also on the organisational capabilities of the party. The interview data, discussed in Chapter 5, suggested that even when a party recognises the importance of regional authority and is willing to reference its involvement in local politics to mobilise support across places at national elections, it is up to its abilities to transpose this involvement. As interviews with SP representatives in Chapter 5 revealed, the party did not shy away from trying to sway voters across the Dutch constituencies by pointing out its government and policy expertise at a provincial and local level. Yet, these representatives also recognised that SP very much failed in its efforts to do so, given that such references have very limited impact on voters at national elections. Hence, it seems that European RLPs need to be able to make these references salient and relevant for voters in order to make use of them at national elections. In this context, the significance of party authority depends very much of whether the party would recognise it and is able to transpose it into the context of national elections.

Similarly, the influence of the intensity of competition with a major centre-left opponent on the electoral geography of a European RLP depends on the abilities of the latter to handle this challenge. The interview data from Chapter 5 indicated that this competition is a rather zero-sum game, as both party families aim to mobilise similar voter groups. Party resources, therefore, play an important role in how much this factor would influence the electoral geography of a European RLP. As Chapter 6 revealed, having party organisations with many active members across a country allows a European RLP to compete with the centre-left opponent, and, thus, cushion the potentially negative effects of the high intensity of such competition. For example, the electoral meltdown of the Die Linke predecessor, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), in 2002 has been underpinned by its most balanced electoral geography (in relative terms!) to that date. As the statistical data from Chapter 6 indicated, the party had almost no presence in the West with a very shallow network of local and regional organisations and a very small number of members, whereas in the East it enjoyed exactly the opposite: comprehensive organisational network and many members. Given the organisational disarray of PDS at that time, presented in Chapter 3, it seems that the party failed to make use of these resources to prevent the rising challenge by the social democrats from the SPD, which campaigned on a platform that attracted many former PDS voters (Neugebauer and Stöss, 2003).

A very different situation can be observed for the 2009 federal elections. By that time, Die Linke had a much-improved presence in the West with an increasing number of members and local and regional party organisations, as seen in the analysis of the statistical data in Chapter 6. This enabled Die Linke to mount a serious challenge to SPD in the West German strongholds of the latter. As the interview data from Chapter 4 reveals, in the West Die Linke focuses on attracting left-wing voters in left-wing constituencies, which was not entirely possible prior to the merger. This improved presence in the West, coupled with a strong and active organisational presence in the Eastern states allowed the party not only to overturn the SPD as the main left-wing party in many of the Eastern states in 2009 (Table 5.4), but also to make significant gains in social democratic strongholds even though the SPD intensified the competition with Die Linke (Neugebauer, 2011). The result of this high intensity was an increasingly

balanced electoral geography of Die Linke (again, in relative terms, compared to the other electoral geographies of the party!). Hence, while Die Linke faced again an intensive competition from the social democrats that resulted in an increased territorial balance of support across the German states, this time around the party had the resources to benefit from this competition by making electoral gains at the expense of the social democrats. This comes to show that an improved party presence across a country with an increasing number of local and regional organisations and of active party members are important resources that allow the parties to handle the effects of the electoral context. In the case of Die Linke, this resulted in a noticeably more balanced electoral geography than, for example, its 2002 one.

Overall, this discussion reveals how an electoral geography emerges. On the one hand the diverse social contexts in terms of socio-economic circumstances and legacies of mass mobilisation create certain conditions across a country for a European RLP to address. On the other hand, the political structures of a country, represented by the level of regional authority and intensity of competition with centre-left opponent, create the electoral conditions, in which a party competes. In such a context, the organisational capabilities of a party play a significant role, as these provide a European RLP with the tools to channel that impact according to its electoral and organisational goals. Hence, while the effects of the social context and political structures are important, the organisational capabilities seem to have the role of a filter that skews the external influences of the diverse social contexts and of the political structures on the electoral geography of a European RLP. This, itself, reveals that the organisational capabilities of a party provide an important contribution to the territorial distribution of electoral support for European RLPs on par with the external factors, related with the social context and political structures. This is important in order to understand the diversity of electoral geographies of European RLPs, indicated in the introduction of Chapter 1.

## 3.3. Explaining the diversity of electoral geographies of European radical left parties

Returning to the research context of this study, the diversity of electoral geographies of European RLPs since 1990 can be understood in light of the significant role of the organisational capabilities in combination with factors of the social context and political structures. The experiences of Die Linke, SP, and KSČM reveal that these developments are a matter of the ways their own organisations filter the effects of the external environment. In this context, a party perspective reveals how well the three parties were capable of doing so. The three cases indicate in this respect the importance of organisational presence, direct engagement, and transposition as important factors for the abilities of European RLPs to create their own electoral geographies. Hence, the following paragraphs offer a tentative explanation for the diverse electoral geographies of European RLPs from the perspective of the parties themselves that opens a discussion for future studies.

The organisational presence represents the two factors highlighted in this work: the territorial outreach of the party network of regional and local organisations and the concentration of its members across a territory. These are a basic precondition for any party to be able to shape its electoral fortunes across a territory. This may seem intuitive, but it should be reiterated for the case of European RLPs given their generally small-party status across Europe. As existing studies on party and party system nationalisation reveal, small parties may not be able to ensure such a presence across a territory (Morgenstern, Swindle and Castagnola, 2009, pp. 1327–1328), which prevents them from building up or maximising their electoral potential across a territory. In this context, the organisational presence through members and party structures across electoral units provides the party with important resources to directly engage with potential voters between and during elections (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992, 2002; Seyd, Richardson and Whiteley, 1996; Johnston and Pattie, 2006). That way a party has the basis to channel the influences of the social context and political structures towards its own goals. In particular, as it was pointed out in the previous section, the organisational presence is important for European RLPs in order to address the existing socio-economic circumstances of a place and its historical legacies of mass mobilisation; it allows them to engage

in regional politics, as well as to face the electoral challenge of intensive competition with centre-left opponents.

The importance of organisational presence is particularly illuminated by the experience of Die Linke, as its imbalanced territorial distribution of electoral support stems from the major differences in the territorial outreach of its party network of regional and local organisations across Germany. Prior to the 2007 merger between PDS and WASG, the party established a highly imbalanced pattern, underpinned by its significant organisational presence in the Eastern states and its non-existence in the West in practical terms. As the discussion in Chapter 6 revealed, the increased presence of the party in the West since the merger, facilitated by WASG, has led to a noticeable improvement of its electoral geography in the past two decades. In this context, the lasting territorial imbalance of its electoral support can be explained with the remaining differences in its organisational capabilities between the East and West. While Die Linke improved its presence in the West, visible also by some noticeable breakthroughs in West German state parliaments, it still lags significantly behind compared to its East German organisational network, as seen in Chapter 6. These experiences come to show that the mere organisational presence of a European RLP can have a noticeable impact on its electoral geography. In this context, the differences in the organisational presence of European RLPs between electoral units can contribute to the diversity of territorial patterns of electoral support among these parties after 1989.

Direct engagement refers to the activities of the party organisation across a country. In other words, while the organisational presence is important, a party should be active in order to filter the effects of the external conditions on its electoral geography. This means that a party should actively engage with communities in order to pursue its goals. The literature on electoral geography highlighted in this respect the significance of a long-term socialisation, understood as the regular direct contact between a party member and a potential voter at a particular place (Johnston and Pattie, 2006, p. 54), as well as of the short-term activities of a party related to electoral campaigning (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992, 2002; Seyd, Richardson and Whiteley, 1996). The previous section provided examples of such activities from the experiences of the three cases of this study. Furthermore, an RLP may be active as a part of a wider

radical left subculture, thus augmenting its organisational and membership presence across a country. Such activities allow the party to directly influence the individual voting behaviour, as it represents one of the external, often place-based influences on voters' choice (Miller and Shanks, 1996, p. 192). In other words, being present and active across a country can change hearts and minds and actively shape the electoral geography of a party. In such a context, the diversity of electoral geographies of European RLPs can be explained with their different levels of activity between electoral units.

Such a difference of activity is particularly important to understand the electoral geography of KSČM. In the initial post-communist years, the party enjoyed a significant organisational presence across the Czech Republic, which enabled it to establish and maintain balanced electoral geography even when the party retained its communist profile and restricted its electoral prospects. Yet, the declining activity of the regional party organisations underpinned a drop in the balance of its electoral geography since the mid-1990s. As the interviews with party officials and independent researchers revealed, the inability of the party to remain active across the Czech Republic is a major challenge that prevents KSČM to maximise its electoral potential across the country. Coupled with its rather isolated role within the minuscule Czech radical left subculture, the party lacks external resources to respond to this internal challenge. In such a context, the continuously balanced electoral geography of the party has more to do with the general similarity of socio-economic and political conditions across the country, than the abilities of the party organisational network of the communists to channel their effects towards the party goals. This was particularly highlighted in the 2017 elections when KSČM achieved its worst electoral performance in the post-communist period, underpinned by balanced electoral geography. In the context of declining electoral support, the electoral geography of the party seems to stem from the declining activity of the party across the country that reduced its abilities to respond to its mounting electoral challenges.

Finally, transposition refers to the abilities of RLPs to use their organisational presence and direct engagement with communities across a country to mobilise voters at national elections, as evident in the three empirical chapters. The interview data in Chapter 4 highlighted in this respect

that on the one hand between elections parties need to reflect the differences in the socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions between electoral units, whereas during national elections they need to address the nationwide electoral agenda of common electoral topics. In order to do so, a party should be able to transform its organisational presence and direct engagement into an electoral asset by being able to address the dominating attitudes across electoral units in its electoral manifesto. Similarly, as Chapter 5 revealed, participation in regional politics carries the potential to build up electoral support for an RLP between elections, whereas it is up to the party to choose and, more importantly, be able to use this participation for electoral purposes on national elections.

Particularly relevant in this respect was the experience of SP. The history of the party is a fine example of both, successful and unsuccessful transposition of its organisational presence and engagement with communities onto national elections. The timeframe of this study (1990-2017) particularly reflects not only the constant struggle of SP to build up support from the bottom up through its active work in communities and its participation in regional and local politics but also the challenge to transform this involvement into a source for electoral mobilisation at national elections. As seen particularly in Chapter 4, the party successfully addressed the place-based grievances across electoral units after 1990, reflected in an increasingly balanced electoral geography. The success in this endeavour was built upon the abilities of the party to mobilise significant support in places where it has a strong presence in regional and local politics and established a very active and longstanding organisational presence, whereas it rather struggled to reach voters in places where it was less active and involved.

Yet, Chapters 5 and 6 reveal also significant challenges in this respect, as its presence in regional politics is difficult to transform into an electoral asset on national elections due to the limited relevance of and interest in regional politics among voters on national elections. This was particularly relevant for the period before 1990 when its presence in regional and local parliaments does not seem to influence its electoral prospects across the Netherlands. More importantly, the period since 2006 highlights similar challenges for SP, suggesting that its electoral geography in more recent years is rather a product

of the increased impact of the external socio-economic and political environment, enabled by the declining organisational capabilities of the party to transpose its experiences from local and regional politics. From that perspective, the diversity of electoral geographies of European RLPs may stem from the different extent these parties are willing and able to transpose their local presence and organisational engagement with local communities across electoral units into an electoral asset at national elections.

It should be noted that these three factors represent a tentative observation from the perspective of European RLPs based on the interview evidence from the three cases, explored in this research. This means that they are up for comprehensive testing and further exploration. For example, the abilities for transposition of European RLPs may relate to the non-material organisational resources, such as usable pasts and official expertise, whose importance has been highlighted in the studies of communist successor parties. As seen in Grzymala-Busse's study (2002a) it was these resources that enabled the communist successors from Central Europe to centralise their party organisations and concentrate their organisational efforts at mobilising electoral support. In terms of electoral geography, these factors can make a vital contribution to the abilities of these parties to maximise their electoral potential across electoral units.

Similarly, the direct engagement highlights an important gap of knowledge in the contemporary literature on European RLPs, related to the ways these parties mobilise voters and, generally, fulfil their social functions (Gherghina, 2014). While this research has highlighted potential pathways of European RLPs in this respect, there is still a need to explore how exactly these parties use the opportunities at their disposal and, particularly, how their party goals influence their choices. Overall, although these observations may be tentative, they point out potentially important factors of party organisation that go hand in hand with the main finding of this study – that the organisational presence and concentration of party members across a country, among others, are central sources for the electoral geographies of European RLPs, as they filter the effects of the different social contexts and political institutions across electoral units.

## 4. Conclusion

This chapter discussed the empirical data and theoretical insights, presented in the previous parts of this thesis, in light of the research question of this study and the underlying research context. A qualitative analysis of this information provided three important findings. First, the electoral geographies of European RLPs is a product of the influences from the social context, the political structures, and their organisational capabilities. In this respect, this chapter summarised that the differences between electoral units in their historic legacies of mass mobilisation, and in their socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions are significant factors of the social context that influence the territorial distribution of electoral performance. Furthermore, it is the differences in the levels of regional authority, as well as in the intensity of competition with a major centre-left opponent across electoral units that highlight the significant impact of political structures on the electoral geographies of the three cases (Die Linke, SP, and KSČM). Also, the territorial outreach and membership concentration across electoral units show the impact of the organisational capabilities on the territorial patterns of electoral performance of the three cases.

Aside from confirming the three alternative hypotheses, this chapter revealed the mechanisms for the emergence of electoral geography of European RLP. In this respect, the effects of the social context and the political structures are filtered through the organisational capabilities of the party, leading to a particular territorial pattern of distribution of electoral support. Given this filtering role of organisational capabilities, this chapter made the tentative observation from a party perspective on the ways the party organisation contributes to the electoral geographies of European RLPs across Europe since 1990. The interview data on the three cases highlight in this respect the significance of not only their organisational presence, enshrined in the territorial spread of party network of local and regional organisations and concentration of party members across a territory, but also of their direct engagement with communities, and of their abilities to transpose this organisational presence and engagement into a source for electoral mobilisation on national elections. Hence, the diversity of electoral geographies underpinning the electoral performances of European RLPs seems a product of the diverse ways these

parties made use of their organisational capabilities to filter the effects of the social context and political structures. The following conclusion of this work discusses its theoretical implications and the potential research directions that can build upon these insights.

## Chapter 8 Conclusion

### 1. Introduction

This study investigated which factors best explain the electoral geographies of European radical left parties at national elections since 1990. For the purposes of this research, electoral geography was conceptualised as the pattern of territorial distribution in the electoral support of a European radical left party (RLP) at a national election. These patterns represent an assessment on the extent to which the vote shares of a European RLP are similar between electoral units. This research question was formulated in the context of the diversity of territorial patterns in electoral support for European RLPs that underpin the improved electoral performances of European RLPs since 1990 across the continent. Existing research on these parties offers rather piecemeal insights in this respect, whereas the literatures on the spatial distribution of electoral performance paid limited attention to the study of individual parties or party families. Hence, the main purpose of this study was to provide a systematic investigation into the sources of electoral geography for an individual party family in its own right. This is important in light of the socio-economic and political developments in Europe since the end of the Cold War. These saw the growing detachment of voters from their association with political parties, as well as the increasing transfer of power from national to sub- and supra-national authorities. From that perspective, the diversity of electoral geographies among European RLPs is indicative of the effects of these developments on that party family.

The approach of this thesis was to study different types of electoral geographies among European RLPs which are characterised by similar electoral performances and organisational experiences. Whereas previous studies on the electoral geographies of parties and party systems were largely quantitative, this thesis focused on the experiences and expertise of party officials and independent researchers, highlighting the relevance of the particular place-based social contexts (H1), political structures (H2), and organisational capabilities (H3). This concluding chapter summarises the main empirical findings of the study in relation to the research question and further explicates the original contribution and theoretical implications of this work. Finally, a

brief discussion of the limitations of this study highlights what future research can do to build upon its insights.

## 2. Summary of main findings

This study focused on the cases of The Left (Die Linke, Germany), the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM, the Czech Republic), and the Socialist Party (SP, the Netherlands). While these parties share similar levels of electoral performance and, broadly, organisational experiences, their electoral geographies differ noticeably, capturing the diversity of territorial distributions of electoral support for European RLPs since 1990. This research derives four main findings from the experiences of the three parties between 1990 and 2017.

First, in terms of the research question, the data suggest that all three alternative explanations are confirmed. Chapter 4 confirmed that differences between electoral units in their historic legacies of mass mobilisation and socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions matter, highlighting the relevance of social context for the electoral geographies of European RLPs since 1990. Chapter 5 pointed out that the level of regional authority and the intensity of competition with a major centre-left opponent are important aspects of political structure which influenced territorial patterns of electoral support for European RLPs after the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Chapter 6 highlighted the territorial outreach of the party network of regional and party organisations and the concentration of party members between electoral units as important organisational capabilities which account for the varying territorial distribution of electoral support for the three cases since 1990.

Second, this work also revealed a number of factors from the three explanations whose expected influence could not be confirmed, or was rejected. In terms of the former (non-confirmed hypotheses), the evidence from Chapter 5 did not confirm any of the expectations around electoral rules, since neither the number of electoral units, the district magnitude, the level of malapportionment nor the differences in the effective thresholds account for the particular territorial distribution of electoral support for the three cases during the entire timeframe. Similarly, although the system of regional governance influences the territorial balance of electoral support, the level of participation in regional

politics across a country and parties' electoral performance at regional elections are not reliable indicators for the electoral geographies of the European radical left. These factors depend on particular party choices and a given party's ability to use these for electoral mobilisation at national elections, thus highlighting their rather limited impact. Also, competition from small progressive or anti-political establishment parties influences the electoral geographies of European RLPs depending on their ideological profiles. Chapter 6 revealed that the linkages between European RLPs with the wider radical left subculture matter generally for building-up electoral support, rather than for direct electoral mobilisation. Regarding hypotheses it was possible to outright reject, this thesis rejected the hypotheses related to the potentially different salience of electoral topics across electoral units and to the influence of the candidate selection procedures, as the cases contained no convincing evidence supporting them.

Third, the evidence on the three cases also pointed to the context in which these factors matter for the electoral geography of a European RLP. Chapter 4 revealed that the territorial distribution of electoral support for a European RLP is a product of various factors, relevant both between and during national elections. The social context makes an important contribution to electoral geography between elections. The main reason for this is that the place-specific differences between electoral units in their historical legacies and their socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions have a significant influence on voters' electoral preferences and the ability of parties to build up electoral support. During elections, however, these factors have limited explanatory power, since campaigns are conducted on a common national agenda which disregards to a large extent the place-specific particularities of each electoral unit. This temporal difference highlights that, while regional contexts (i.e. the regional socio-economic and socio-cultural environment) matter more for a party's chance to build up support between elections, it is the overall national environment that accounts for the extent to which parties are able to mobilise that support at national elections. Another important finding is the influence of social context, political structures, and organisational capabilities on one other. In this respect Chapter 5 revealed that the influence of political structures depends on the particular party choices whether to use them for their electoral geography and on the particular organisational resources to pursue their goals.

Fourth, a discussion in Chapter 7 used the contexts of these factors to highlight the dynamics surrounding the emergence of the electoral geography of European RLPs. The main finding in this respect was that the organisational capabilities of the three parties play a significant role, since they can filter and, hence, channel the effects of the social context and political structures in accordance with their party goals and electoral strategy. In other words, while social context and political structures create the conditions for the emergence of electoral geography, the organisational capabilities of the parties are an important tool for them to exploit these conditions and shape electoral geography to their own electoral advantage. In this respect Chapter 7 revealed that, while the impact of social context varies between and during elections and between national and sub-national levels, the organisational outreach of a party and its membership concentration across electoral units is important for parties in addressing the diverse social contexts across a country. Furthermore, these organisational factors provide European RLPs with important resources to handle the effects of political structures; in particular their ability to make use of their involvement in regional politics to build up electoral support prior to elections, as well as facing and, potentially, benefiting from the intensity of competition with their centre-left opponents. Hence, in relation to the diversity of electoral geographies of European RLPs, the tentative analysis in Chapter 7 highlighted that from a party perspective (organisational presence aside), direct engagement with communities across electoral units and the party's ability to transpose its territorial presence and direct engagement potentially explains this diversity.

## 3. Original contribution

These findings make four original contributions. First and foremost, this thesis highlighted that party organisation matters for research on the electoral performance of political parties. Particularly, its contribution to understandings of the electoral geography of parties highlights the significance of organisational capabilities across electoral units for building up and maximising electoral support at national elections. This goes against the main insights from the literature on party change. A general assumption in that literature is that political parties react to external inputs (Harmel and Janda, 1994). What this thesis shows is that parties can be proactive in shaping their own electoral

geographies through their own resources and opportunities. Their organisational goals play an important role in determining the ways they do so. In doing so, party organisation provides an important context in which the influence of internal party factors on its overall electoral performance can be understood.

Second, this thesis makes an important contribution to the literature on European RLPs. As highlighted in the introduction, the study on these parties recognises explicitly and implicitly the importance of geography in understanding their electoral and governmental record. While previous studies recognised this importance in their research on, for example, the overall electoral performance of European RLPs (Bull and Heywood, 1994), this thesis instead looked into the electoral geographies of these parties on its own. In doing so, this research represents one of the few works on European RLPs that systematically explores their electoral geographies. Furthermore, it is one of the few works which looks into these parties through the theoretical lens of the literature on electoral geography, on party and party system nationalisation, and on territorial politics. In that way, this thesis complements existing studies of European RLPs which focus mainly on compositional explanations, offering a contextual perspective to understand the dynamics around European RLPs since 1990. As noted in Chapter 1, such a contextual perspective can be important in driving forward research on these parties.

Third, the insights of this work contribute to the contemporary research agenda on European RLPs. Recent reviews on the literature on these parties highlighted the need to better understand their party organisations, among other factors (March, 2011, p. 211, 2017, p. 24; March and Keith, 2016b, p. 2). This work contributed in this respect by highlighting the important role of the party organisation for the electoral geographies of European RLPs. Also, the thesis offered an important theoretical basis from which to understand how party organisations influence electoral geographies, given the importance of organisational presence, direct engagement with communities and the ability of parties to translate this presence and engagement into a source of electoral mobilisation at national elections. While these factors may sound broad and vague, they provide the initial outline of a framework which could be applied and tested in future works on the electoral geographies of small and anti-political establishment parties.

Fourth, this work contributes to the literatures on electoral geography, party nationalisation, party system nationalisation and territorial politics. By exploring the sources for the electoral geographies of European RLPs this work provided a test on their theoretical insights at a party level. In this respect, the thesis confirmed that political parties can be significant place-based institutions that may influence voting behaviour, as stipulated in existing works on electoral geography (e.g. Agnew, 2002; Agnew and Shin, 2019). In regard to the research on party nationalisation and party system nationalisation, this thesis questioned the direct relevance of the electoral system for the territorial distribution of electoral support, in contrast to the existing theoretical foundations of that strand of research. Finally, in terms of territorial politics, this thesis highlighted that small parties, in the example of three European RLPs, can have similar organisational responses to shifts of administrative authority such as those of major parties. In particular, small parties seem to accommodate any administrative changes of authority by changing their organisational structures.

The wider significance of these findings is twofold. First, it emphasises the importance of party resources for the build-up and mobilisation of electoral support across a country. This is relevant for the literature on anti-political establishment parties in general - and on European RLPs in particular - because it moves away from the debate on the importance of their ideologies for electoral performance (Mudde, 2007; March, 2011) by drawing attention to the role of their organisational abilities and resources in reaching out to their potential electorate in the first place. Such capabilities are crucial for their organisational and electoral fortunes. Even if these parties have a hypothetically perfect ideology that could sway voters en masse, they could still fail to do so if they do not have the organisational resources to spread that message. Hence, the research on the electoral geographies of European RLPs provides a clear example on the ways in which anti-political establishment parties try, succeed, and fail on a practical level to appeal to voters in different socio-economic environments across a country.

Second, the findings of this study inform wider debates on the role of structural influences versus actors' actions for a particular outcome. As this thesis revealed, structural conditions can restrict the electoral potential of political parties, yet political parties may overcome these limitations through

their resources. In this respect, while to a very large extent these resources are a product of the external circumstances, it is up to the parties themselves to apply them in a way that allows them to pursue their goals. Hence, the findings reveal that the external conditions are as influential as political parties' organisational capabilities allow them to be on their electoral fortunes.

## 4. Theoretical implications

The main findings and their original contribution have four major theoretical implications. First, the thesis highlights the significant contribution of a party's organisational capabilities on its electoral performance. Given that the electoral result at national elections can be perceived as an aggregation of the electoral support across electoral units, the role of organisational capabilities to filter the effects of social contexts and political structures can be linked to its impact on the overall electoral performance of a party. Particularly, such a role provides important context in explaining why parties may perform better or worse than expected in light of particular socio-economic and political circumstances. Hence, the contribution of party organisation to the electoral geography of a party may reveal an important explanation for its overall electoral results which factors present at the national level may not account for.

Second, the significance of organisational capabilities for the electoral geography of a party suggests that their impact on electoral performance should be looked at separately from that on the party's programmatic offer. This is particularly relevant for the studies of European radical right and radical left parties, recent works on which emphasised the interaction between political demand and supply as a useful framework (Müller-Rommel, 1993; Carter, 2005). While such a framework recognises the importance of the party organisation as part of the internal party supply, little work has been done on the extent to which party organisation aids ideological and programmatic supply. In this context, an alternative explanation for the electoral performance of these parties can be made where their electoral performance is not a matter of how they ideologically and programmatically accommodate the socio-economic and political demand of a country. Instead, it can be understood rather as a matter of what these parties actually do organisationally to reach out to potential voters. The importance of that perspective has been identified in recent works

on radical right parties which highlighted the significance of party organisation for their adaptation and endurance in political and party systems across Europe (Heinisch and Mazzoleni, 2016).

Third, the filtering functions of party organisation for the effects of social context and political structures have important implications for the study of party and party system nationalisation. Existing works highlighted the importance of party size for the particular territorial distribution of electoral performance (Morgenstern, Polga-Hecimovich and Siavelis, 2014), recognising the active contribution of political parties. The insights of this thesis build upon this insight and suggest the need to include factors from the party organisation instead of party size. The latter may conceal the extent to which parties are capable of channelling the external socio-economic and political circumstances in their favour. As this work has revealed, similar electoral performances may be underpinned by different electoral geographies and, therefore, party size does not seem to provide a reliable indication for the active input of political parties on the territorial distribution of their electoral support.

Fourth, the main insights of this work also point toward a possible explanation for the electoral and political weakness of left-wing parties in Europe. Contemporary research explains this development mainly on the basis of ideological changes among these parties (Ladrech and Marlière, 1999; Keating and McCrone, 2013), their policy choices (Bonoli and Powell, 2003; March and Keith, 2016a) and their recent experiences of government participation (Lavelle, 2008; Merkel *et al.*, 2008; Olsen, Koß and Hough, 2010). While these studies offer important insights into the central role of their programmatic and policy offers, this work instead highlights the organisational roots for this weakness. In particular, the findings of this thesis suggest that left-wing parties fail to reach out and engage with communities across their countries. In other words, rather than being a matter of their alleged abandonment of left-wing ideals and an unfavourable government record, as argued by the vacuum thesis for example (Hudson, 2000, 2012), left-wing parties across Europe may be weak because they physically distanced themselves from their potential and current voters. In such a context, their lack of organisational engagement has been exploited by their political opponents. Broadening this perspective to the electoral trajectories of the European left, this thesis suggests that the electoral fortunes of these

parties are a matter of an improved presence in and engagement across communities, as well as their ability to convert their participation in local and regional politics into support at national elections. Thus, this thesis echoes calls for these parties to get back to their roots. Organisationally this would mean a return to their mass party organisational profile (Panebianco, 1988) in times of a growing detachment of political parties from society and entanglement with the state (Katz and Mair, 1995).

## 5. Limitations and further research agenda

Despite the significant theoretical implications of its original contribution, this thesis is not without its theoretical, methodological, and empirical limitations. These, however, offer a rich potential research agenda which could expand on the insights of this work. Four of them are worth discussing at the end of this concluding chapter. First and foremost, this study focused exclusively on the electoral geographies of European RLPs, while making very tentative linkages to the study of their overall electoral performance. In this respect, this thesis may have benefited from making clearer references to the impact of electoral geography on the overall electoral performance of European RLPs. Yet, such connections are difficult to make, given that research on their electoral performance and their electoral geographies have different objects of study (as discussed in Chapter 1). While intuitively it makes sense to relate, for example, a growing territorial balance of electoral support to improved electoral performance, this thesis is reluctant to make this inference. As the choice of case studies shows, similar levels of electoral performance are underpinned by different electoral geographies. This suggests rather weak links between the two. Yet, given that parties operate at different geographical scales, as evident in the literature on multi-level party politics (Swenden and Maddens, 2009b; Detterbeck, 2012), it is important that future work focuses on the role of their organisational capabilities across electoral units for their overall electoral performances.

Second, the theoretical basis of the framework used in this work may need further sophistication. In particular, what this research has not explored in much detail is how RLPs use and manage the effects of the socio-economic and political environment across a territory. In this respect, the thesis makes the

implicit assumption that parties pursue vote-maximising goals. Yet, this is not necessarily the case for all RLPs, especially because a large part of this party family is instead interested in organisational survival. A future study may explore how different party goals influence the organisational actions of RLPs and their electoral geographies. Another direction of research may relate to some of the more minor insights from the current thesis. For example, while this work indicated that support from a radical left subculture and involvement in regional politics are not necessary elements of the organisational efforts of European RLPs, it is important to observe which factors condition the decision to use these opportunities. As this work suggests, this requires an investigation of internal party life. This is particularly important, given the influence of potentially divergent goals of regional and national party level organisations on the choice of whether and how to transform their involvement in regional politics into an electoral asset at national elections. Overall, future works may explore in more detail the ways parties build their electoral potential between elections and the ways they mobilise it.

Third, methodologically, this work used the electoral constituency at a regional level as a geographical unit, which may not necessarily reveal the total influence of the social context, political structures, and, most importantly, the organisational capabilities of parties on the territorial distribution of electoral support. Numerous interviews conducted for this research implied that investigation of the local context may be even better illuminate the sources of electoral support for European RLPs across a territory. While this is a valid point, there are methodological concerns related to the transferability of local insights, for example, which necessitated a more cautious approach in this study. Yet, local perspectives may offer an important basis for future works as well. Considering rising academic interest in the process of metropolitanisation i.e. the emergence of specific metropolitan voting behaviour (Sellers *et al.*, 2013), an exploration on the electoral geography of European RLPs from a local perspective could be the next major study which links to this one.

Fourth, and related to this point, a local-level territorial perspective may also accommodate a move towards large-N research that can avoid the methodological issues related to the small-N approach of this thesis. While the experiences of the three parties in this study may not be completely

representative for the entire European radical left party family, they nevertheless served a vital qualitative purpose in testing existing theories before exploring new ones. In this context, studying other cases through the theoretical framework of this thesis may reveal other theoretical insights related to the relevance of the three hypotheses. Finally, this study limited itself to the study of political parties and considered their internal perspective on the sources for the territorial distribution of their electoral support. Future studies on the topic may also involve more diverse external perspectives from other stakeholders, including representatives from the wider radical left subculture across Europe. That way the electoral geographies of European RLPs can be viewed from even more objectively.

## 6. Final remarks

A final remark relates to the research question of this work. It sought to understand the origins of the electoral geographies of European RLPs since 1990 in order to explain the noticeable diversity of territorial patterns of electoral support within this party family. This thesis offered an answer, stressing the central role of their organisational capabilities for filtering the effects of the different social contexts and political structures across electoral units. In particular, the territorial outreach of the organisational network of a European RLP and the concentration of its members across electoral units provide the party with important resources to manage and use the external socio-economic and political circumstances according to its party goals. As this thesis pointed out, the party organisation is able to do so through its direct engagement with communities between and during elections, and its ability to translate its sub-national presence and engagement to the countrywide character of electoral competition at national elections. Hence, the diversity of electoral geographies of European RLPs can be explained by the diversity of organisational capabilities these parties have at their disposal. Overall, this thesis not only provides a significant contribution to a variety of academic literature but also an important theoretical perspective that can be explored further.

# Appendix

## List of cited interviews

| | |
|---|---|
| Interview CZ_A | Independent researcher, 26 May 2017, Brno CZ |
| Interview CZ_B | Independent researcher, 23 May 2017, Prague CZ |
| Interview CZ_C | Independent researcher, 23 May 2017, Prague CZ |
| Interview CZ_D | Independent researcher, 25 May 2017, Brno CZ |
| Interview CZ_E | KSČM party official, 22 May 2017, Prague CZ |
| Interview CZ_F | KSČM party official, 24 May 2017, Ústí nad Labem CZ |
| Interview CZ_G | KSČM party official, 23 May 2017, Prague CZ |
| Interview CZ_H | Independent researcher, 23 May 2017, Prague CZ |
| Interview CZ_I | Independent researcher, 25 May 2017, Brno CZ |
| Interview DE_A | Independent researcher, 23 February 2017, Berlin DE |
| Interview DE_B | Die Linke party official, 28 February 2017, Düsseldorf DE |
| Interview DE_C | Die Linke party official, 1 March 2017, Augsburg DE |
| Interview DE_D | Independent researcher, 22 February 2017, Berlin DE |
| Interview DE_E | Die Linke party official, 24 February 2017, Berlin DE |
| Interview DE_F | Die Linke party official, 21 February 2017, Berlin DE |
| Interview DE_G | Independent researcher, 3 March 2017, Dresden DE |
| Interview DE_H | Independent researcher, 23 February 2017, Berlin DE |
| Interview DE_I | Die Linke party official, 3 March 2017, Dresden DE |
| Interview DE_J | Independent researcher, 22 February 2017, Berlin DE |
| Interview DE_K | Independent researcher, 22 February 2017, Berlin DE |
| Interview DE_L | Die Linke party official, 28 February 2017, Düsseldorf DE |
| Interview NL_A | SP party official, 25 September 2017, Ede NL |
| Interview NL_B | SP party official, 28 September 2017, Enschede NL |
| Interview NL_C | SP party official, 27 September 2017, Utrecht NL |
| Interview NL_D | SP party official, 26 September 2017, Hengelo NL |
| Interview NL_E | Independent researcher, 28 September, Utrecht NL |
| Interview NL_F | SP party official, 27 September 2017, The Hague NL |
| Interview NL_G | SP party official, 26 September 2017, Amsterdam NL |
| Interview NL_H | SP party official, 29 September 2017, Groningen NL |

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