

Theme 9: Political Parties and Civil Society in Federal Countries

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Theme Template

1.) Introduction

Interest mediation between society and the political institutions of the state is one of the crucial elements of the democratic process. In democracies, citizens organize in order to express and defend their social and political interests. In making demands on the state and providing support for specific preferences, political organizations act as “input” agencies in the political systems. Political organizations may, however, also be involved in state decision-making and the implementation of public policies, thus acting as “output” agencies. In both ways, political organizations provide linkages between society and government.

Theme 9 of the Global Dialogue is concerned with political parties and civil society organizations as the most important intermediary groups in contemporary democracies. In focusing on federal democracies, we want to explore the specific conditions of interest mediation in compound policies in which political sovereignty and competencies are divided but also shared. The patterns of mutual interaction between political parties, civil society and federal institutions are at the centre of this theme. While federalism shapes the ways parties compete and organize, parties as central actors in parliaments and governments have a decisive impact on federal dynamics. In a similar vein, the structures and behavioural norms of civil society, which are in part influenced by federal institutions, will come to co-determine federal dynamics.

Looking at both perspectives within one study will allow to understand better the role of political parties and civil society in federal democracies. In this study, we are interested in the multi-level structures of electoral competition and the vertical linkages of polity-wide party organizations in federal systems as well as the processes of government formation and the coordination of public policies across territorial levels via party channels. With respect to civil society, we are interested in the organization and political impact of interest groups, voluntary associations and social movements in federal systems. We also want to raise the question whether or not a federal political culture is embedded in civil society and the party system.

Moreover, our comparative study will ask how recent challenges such as state transformation in the era of trans-national governance and the representative crisis of parties (i.e. the decline in party membership figures, electoral turnout and political trust) have affected the parties-federalism nexus. Are there processes of denationalization in party competition, which have led to stronger regional variation in general and substate elections? How do parties respond to such challenges? In which ways is civil society affected by transnational governance?

2.) General Questions

The Country Chapters, in which the Country Coordinators will reflect the discussions of the Country Dialogue Workshop (to be held during the second half of the year 2009), will follow the common theme template as developed below. However, each Country Chapter should also be informed by some general considerations, which each author will address at the appropriate places in his/her chapter. There are four general questions to bear in mind:

How important are political parties and civil society organizations for the actual working of the federal system? In which ways do they have an impact; what is their political role in federalism (e.g., as forces of national integration, regional pressures groups, as informal channels of intergovernmental bargaining, as mediators or agents of territorial conflict)?

What can we say about the dynamics of change? Is federal (de)centralization triggering the (de)centralization of party systems/party organizations and groups in civil society, or is the causal chain running the other way round? Do changes in party politics and civil society affect the guiding ideas, institutions and public policies of a federal system (even if there are no constitutional changes)?

What is the relation between parties and civil society? Is there a clear separation between the two types of political organization or are there elements of interlocking (ranging from patterns of dominance/subordination to mutual cooperation)? Is there competition between parties and civil society in the pursuit of political influence?

Are territorial conflicts and the future of the federation an important line of political conflict in your country? Who are the main political actors with respect to such cleavages? How important are (non-politywide) regionalist and ethno-nationalist parties and civil society organizations? In which ways are such cleavages accommodated within the federal system in strategies of territorial conflict management?

3.) Some Words on Terminology

Comparative research often has problems in agreeing on a common vocabulary and in identifying equivalence. For the purposes of this theme, we may want to work with a minimal definition of *political parties* as political organizations that compete in elections on a regular basis and maintain some form of internal structures (e.g., party executives, party conferences, membership branches). Following Alfred Stepan's usage, politywide parties are parties that organize and compete across the whole of the territory (or most of it), while non-politywide parties, which may or may not have an ethno-nationalist agenda, are restricted to specific regions.

We should keep a clear analytical distinction between party organizations and *party systems*. The latter refers to the patterns of interaction resulting from inter-party competition. Looking at the number of parties and the degree of cooperation and conflict between parties, we are interested in the systemic context in which individual parties develop their strategies in electoral and parliamentary arenas. Following on from that, when we speak of party (de)centralization, we should make clear whether we are referring to a process of internal restructuring of individual party organizations or systemic changes that affect the level of congruence between general and regional party systems.¹ Surely, these two things are not the same.

¹ We will also have to agree on a common vocabulary when speaking about the territorial levels of the federal systems. The Theme Coordinators suggest to avoid any interpretation on the claims for nationhood by national minority groups.

With respect to *civil society*, we propose to make a similar distinction between the system of civil society organizations and the territorial structures of individual organizations and associations within civil society. We suggest to employ a wide definition of civil society as a “set of self-organized intermediary groups” (P. Schmitter). Civil society comprises a diverse spectrum of voluntary associations, which are organizing around shared interests, objectives and values. This spectrum includes organizations and groups which strongly vary in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil society associations include, for example, trade unions, professional and business organizations, churches and clerical groups, advocacy groups in areas like the environment, equality and liberal freedom, and social movements.

4.) The Structure of the Country Chapters

The template provides a guide to the information that each country chapter should contain and thus should be addressed in the discussions of the Country Dialogue Workshop. If there is controversy on some issues in the national debate, the country chapters should identify the lines of difference. If the template raises questions not applicable to a particular country, omits important aspects of the theme or takes an unduly narrow perspective, please let the Theme Coordinators know.

The length of the individual country chapters should be around 10,000 words (ca. 30 pages). In following the structure given below, Sections I to III should give a brief overview of the country (as a yardstick: around 5-6 pages), Sections IV to VIII provide the empirical analysis in more detail, while Section IX gives room for discussion and conclusion.

Structure of the Country Chapters

Section I	Introduction: Politics & Society of the Country
Section II	General Aspects of the Party System
Section III	General Aspects of Civil Society
Section IV	Territorial Dynamics of Party Competition
Section V	Party Organizations in Federal Contexts
Section VI	Territorial Dynamics of Civil Society
Section VII	Civil Society Organizations in Federal Contexts
Section VIII	Impact of Parties and Civil Society on Federalism
Section IX	Conclusion: the Patterns of Mutual Interaction between Parties, Civil Society and Federal Institutions

Therefore, we may agree upon using the terms “federal level” and “general level” synonymously for the federation-wide (or polity-wide) level. In a similar vein, “substate level” and “regional level” (or the actual label used in your country, i.e. provinces, states, Länder, cantons, autonomous communities, etc.) could be used interchangeably for the constituent units of the federation.

SECTION I: Introduction – Politics & Society in the Country

1.1. The Polity

Briefly describe some key features of the political system. Among the issues to be addressed are:

- What are the major institutions of government? Is it a presidential, semi-presidential or parliamentary system of government?
- What kind of electoral system? Are there important differences in electoral formulas between different levels of government?
- Are instruments of direct democracy (e.g., referendums) important for political decision-making and federal dynamics?
- Is power at the federal level most typically exercised in single-party majority cabinets or is there multi-party coalition government? In Lijphart's terms, how majoritarian is politics at the centre (executive-parties dimension)?
- Are there institutional veto players constraining the power of the majority? Examples would include constitutional courts, second chambers, civil society groups, special constitutional protection of minorities and ethnic/linguistic groups. Give a brief indication of their political weight.
- What type of federalism? Is there a dual or functional division of powers (in legal theory and/or political practice)? What is the policy scope of the substate level? How many constituent units are there? Is there legal asymmetry in substate competencies? How much central interference is there in substate competencies (framework legislation, fiscal dependence)? How interdependent are the territorial levels? Are intergovernmental relations formalized and/or important for the accommodation of territorial interests?
- Is there a pluralist or a corporatist understanding of interest group representation? How strongly are interest groups involved in substate and federal (and supranational) decision-making networks? Are interest groups rather oriented towards polity-wide uniform policy solutions or towards decentralized policies? Are there differences in attitudes between interest groups in this respect?

1.2. Social and Economic Structures

- Is there a rather homogenous or heterogenous composition of society in terms of ethnicity, religion, language, culture, etc.? Are there significant differences across constituent units with respect to substate identity? Are such differences reflected in the territorial structures of the state and federal design? Are such differences mirrored in the party system?
- Is there a federal political culture? How would you describe the meaning of this term for the discussion in your country? Is public opinion in favour of federal diversity or is there a sense of pursuing "uniformity of living conditions"? Is elite opinion different from (mass) public opinion?

- Are there disparities in the economic development between constituent units? Have these economic differences been mobilized politically? Is federalism trying to reduce territorial inequalities in socio-economic standards; how is this working technically and what are the effects?

SECTION II: General Aspects of the Party System

Please describe briefly the general structures of party competition. You may focus in this part of the chapter on the federal party system (while the territorial dimension will be discussed more thoroughly in Section IV). We are particularly interested in changes over time and thus the critical junctures in the development of party systems. We suggest to look at, if appropriate, the period *from 1960 until today*. Among the points worth discussing may be:

- Have there been important changes to electoral behaviour since the 1960s? Is there evidence in your country for processes of dealignment or realignment? How salient are political mistrust and anti-party sentiments, what are its political consequences (e.g., decline in turnout; protest voting; success of populist parties)?
- How many relevant parties are there at federal level; what is the level of party system fragmentation? Have there been significant changes to the number of parties in recent decades? Have these changes in party system formats had an impact on federal dynamics?
- What are the major cleavages in the federal party system? Is there a high level of polarization with some parties perceived as being outside the “constitutional arch” and thus not invited to join government coalitions? Has there been a drive towards the “median voter” and thus centripetal competition, or have ideological differences become more pronounced over the last few decades?
- Is there a territorial dimension of politywide cleavages? Are regionalist or minority nationalist parties successful in general elections? Is there a constitutional debate about the future of the federation which has an important role in shaping national party competition?
- How flexible is the choice of coalition partners in government formation? Are there mutually hostile political blocs or is there a more open process of finding parliamentary majorities? Are there constitutional demands on coalition-building (e.g., power-sharing devices)?

SECTION III: General Aspects of Civil Society

In this section, we are looking for a brief description of the historical development and the current structures of civil society. Again, we suggest to take a national perspective here and to look at territorial aspects later on (Section VI). The major changes in the forms and behavioural norms of civil society organizations since the 1960s (or with democratic transition) should be addressed here. Among the points worth discussing may be:

- What constitutes the spectrum of civil society organizations in your country? What are the most important forms? Is there a predominance of large peak organizations or is the system

characterized by a plurality of smaller networks and loose associations? Is this also influenced by the federal structure of the country?

- Is there an overlap in organizational structures and personnel between parties and civil society? Are there structures of mutual representation, common membership bases or material support between them? If this is the case, what are the most important linkages here, who is left out or also seeks more autonomy?
- What are the sources of political influence for civil society? Is there a stable access to decision-making forums and/or powerful corporatist arrangements? Are there civil society organizations with strong material resources? How influential are these non-governmental actors in terms of agenda-setting, media coverage and public discourses?
- How important are power imbalances between the established and the non-established groups of civil society in academic and public discourses? Is there an active role of the state to strengthen “weaker voices”?
- Have there been changes over time in the organizational structures and behavioural norms of civil society? Has there been a move towards more non-conventional and less formalized forms of civic participation? What about the membership development of the more established interest groups (trade unions, business associations, farmers’ organizations)?
- Have there been significant changes to the involvement of women in civil society? Are there similar development for other groups, including younger people, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples?

SECTION IV: Territorial Dynamics of Party Competition

This section is intended to analyze the *degree of territorial symmetry* (or, congruence) of party competition: How similar are the processes and outcomes of party competition at various political levels in a federal system? In cases of symmetrical party competition, the same party alternatives are present across the territory; identical lines of political conflict and voting alignments are structuring politics at federal and substate levels. In asymmetrical competition, a different set of parties will be present in the different arenas and competition will revolve around different cleavages and issues. Hence, we will find a plurality of party systems with distinct logics within one federal polity. The degree of territorial symmetry in multi-level party competition can be studied by looking at the following questions²:

- *Electoral behaviour*: How (dis-)similar are patterns of voting in general and substate elections? Are there significant differences in turnout rates between the two sets of elections, what are the electoral consequences of this? Are there parties which are doing systematically better in substate elections; what kind of parties are these? Is there anti-government voting in substate elections (as predicted by second-order theory)? Is there individual survey data on voters’ motivation in regional elections? Do voters make a clear distinction between electoral levels and are led by different rationalities in state and substate elections (“dual voting”)?

² As we will here enter into a more in-depth analysis, it will probably not possible to trace development since the 1960s. We suggest to focus on the period since around 1990. This applies also to the following sections V to VII.

- *Party systems*: Are there identical party formations with similar electoral success at both levels? Do we find the same cleavage patterns and the same competitive dynamics (centripetal versus centrifugal tendencies) at both levels? Are territorial constitutional demands (e.g., enhanced autonomy, independence) salient issues at any of the multiple levels of party competition? How important is the representation of distinct regional interests and identities at any of the multiple levels of party competition? How do the regional branches of politywide parties cope with the challenge of minority nationalist (non-politywide) parties at the regional level?
- *Government formation*: How congruent are government formations across the territory? Are government formulas – single-party cabinets, grand and small coalitions, minority and majority governments – distributed even or unevenly between the levels? Is there “partisan harmony”, i.e. do we find similar party compositions in single-party cabinets or government coalitions, or is there “divided government”, with different sets of parties occupying the government benches at different levels? How important for the working of the federal system is partisan harmony or divided government?

SECTION V: Party Organizations in Federal Contexts

In this section, we take a closer look at the degree of *vertical integration* within parties that compete for power in multiple arenas. Being active at more than one territorial level, parties will have to develop some form of coordination. How strong are the formal and informal linkages between the central party level and the regional branches? With respect to internal power relations, is there hierarchical control by the national leadership, a multiplicity of territorial power centres or a more confederal structure of rather autonomous substate branches? In analogy to the study of federal system, we may ask how much shared-rule (i.e., the involvement of the substate branches in central party bodies) and how much self-rule (i.e., the autonomy of substate branches to regulate substate party affairs) there is inside the parties.

The degree of vertical integration can be studied according to the following criteria:

- *Territorial party structures*: What are the territorial structures of the major parties, are they matching the territorial design of the federal system? Is this also a consequence of the geographical design of electoral constituencies? Do the parties operate across territorial levels as one single organization with a common membership base, joint constituency units for both federal and substate party levels, the delegation from lower party units in party bodies (executives, conferences) of the higher level, etc.? What is the formal position of the substate branches in terms of statutory guarantees and structural autonomy? Are there legal requirements which affect territorial party structures? Is there corporate membership, group affiliation or elite representation of civil society organizations (e.g., trade unions) in political parties? What type of party is prevalent in your country (e.g., mass parties, catch-all parties, cadre parties)?
- *Party resources*: How are parties financed at different levels (state subsidies, membership fees, donations)? How are material resources – financial means and party staff – distributed among party levels? Are these resources shared or controlled by one level of party? Is there cross-level cooperation within the party bureaucracy or do both levels have their own separate apparatus? How important are external advisors and professional consultants for

running the party and organizing electoral campaigns? What are the consequences of professional expertise for the territorial power balances inside the parties?

- *Party activities*: Who is in control of vital party activities, such as candidate selection, electoral campaigning, programmatic development, policy direction and strategic choices in party competition (e.g., coalition strategies)? Is there cooperation between party levels in internal decision-making or is each level formally responsible for dealing with its own affairs? How much formal and informal intervention by the federal party is there with respect to vital party activities at the substate level? Do regional party branches have a say on politywide party matters? What happens in cases of conflict between party levels; which level has the formal right to prevail? How did this work out in practice, are there forums of territorial accommodation within the parties? If applicable, how important are affiliated organizations for intra-party processes?
- *Party elites*: How strong are the linkages between federal and substate party leaders? Is there a fusion of parliamentary leadership (party in public office) and party leadership (party in central office), or are the two wings of the party separate? Are substate leaders involved in central party bodies? Is there an impact of the federal party leadership on the selection of the regional party elite? How can we describe career patterns in federal systems? Do politicians link territorial levels by moving from arena to another over time, or by holding positions at different territorial levels at the same time (e.g., party leadership and/or government office at the substate level plus membership in the national party executive)?

SECTION VI: Territorial Dynamics of Civil Society

Turning to the systemic level of civil society, we may again employ the concept of *territorial symmetry*. How similar or dissimilar are organizational forms and behavioral norms at the substate level if compared to the politywide patterns? Are some regions distinct from the rest of the country with regard to civil society?

- Are civil society organizations politywide in character or do they stick to local and regional boundaries? Are the same organizations prevalent in all parts of the territory, or are there specific constellations at the substate level?
- Are there different forms of interest mediation at different territorial levels? Is, for example, the degree of corporatism higher or lower at the substate level? Are less formalized associations or non-conventional groups more common at the substate level, while the federal level is occupied by more formalized and bureaucratic (peak) organizations?
- Are there regional differences to the extent of civil society participation? Is “social capital” more developed in some places than in others, what makes the difference?
- How important are territorial demands (like cultural recognition, political autonomy, federal diversity or state sovereignty) for the organization of civil society? Is there a prevalence of economic and functional interest representation? How much room is there for post-materialist demands? In more general terms: what drives civil society?

SECTION VII: Civil Society Organizations in Federal Contexts

In analogy to the debate about party organization, we can ask how much *vertical integration* there is within civil society. This raises the question about internal power balances of civil society organizations and the mixture of shared-rule and self-rule that we see within the most important “self-organized voluntary groups” in your country.

- *Territorial structures*: Do internal structures of civil society organizations match the territorial order of the federation, i.e. are there distinct substate branches in the constituent units of the federal system? Is there a common membership base and a system of territorial delegation within civil society organizations? Is there a corporate affiliation of party members in civil society groups, for example, in trade unions?
- *Material resources*: Where do resources come from and how are distributed between federal level and regional branches (looking at financial means, working staff)? Are the resources neatly separated between territorial levels of civil society organizations, are they shared or controlled by one territorial level?
- *Internal decision-making processes*: Which level is in charge for which kind of activities? Are there decision-making bodies which bring together representatives of the different organizational levels? If yes, how important are these mechanisms of shared-rule? How much autonomy is there for the regional branches? Do we see central intervention in substate affairs within civil society organizations?
- *Elites*: Are there formal and informal linkages between central and substate leaders of the civil society organizations? Is there substate elite representation in central bodies? Are leading party actors involved in (e.g., mutual representation)? How can we describe typical career patterns in civil society organizations?

SECTION VIII: The Impact of Parties and Civil Society on Federalism

In this section, there will be a closer empirical look on the impact of parties and civil society on federalism. The country studies should evaluate how strongly parties and civil society organizations shape the operation and evolution of their federal system.

- In your country, are parties/civil society groups important for generating federal cohesion, i.e. providing channels for accommodating polity-wide and substate interests? Or is rather the case that parties/civil society groups accentuate territorial lines of conflict and strengthen centrifugal tendencies in federations? Is there a specific role for parties/civil society groups in territorial conflict management (e.g., by inter-party elite consensus in consociational settings)?
- Are there relevant parties which represent ethnic, religious, linguistic or cultural cleavages in society? What is their impact on federal dynamics?
- Is federalism or the constitutional future of the federation a contentious issue in party competition and public discourse? Who are the advocates in favour of the status quo and

who is representing federal change (in which direction)? How salient are territorial cleavages (vis-à-vis functional cleavages like class and religion)?

- How do parties and civil society groups manage territorial conflict within their own organization? Is there substantial autonomy of the constituent branches or hierarchical control by the politywide leadership? Are politywide parties/civil society groups perceived to be unitary organization with uniform policy profiles or is there room for internal variation?
- Do parties provide intergovernmental linkages? In which ways can parties be said to facilitate federal bargaining between the different levels of government? Are extra-parliamentary party bodies (like party executives) important for federal bargaining? (How) Do parties structure the working of second chambers (“party houses” versus “state houses”)? Are parties important for the functioning of intergovernmental bodies (e.g., First Ministers Conferences)?

SECTION IX: Conclusion: The Patterns of Mutual Interaction between Parties, Civil Society and Federal Institutions

This section is to summarize and discuss the empirical analysis. By way of conclusion, you may want to come back to the four general questions (see above). In addition, the following questions may be helpful:

- How would you describe the patterns of mutual interaction between parties, civil society and federal institutions in your country? In which ways have parties and civil society organizations affected the working of the federal system? What is the importance of these intermediary groups in your federation? In which ways has the federal system shaped party systems, party organizations and voluntary associations in civil society?
- Has there been significant change in the structures and operation of interest mediation over the last few decades? How would you describe these changes? In general, have these changes pointed towards a stronger or degree of centralization or decentralization in the working of the federal system? How is that to be explained?
- If there have been formal constitutional changes of the federal system over the last few decades, what has been the role and the response of parties and civil society organizations to these changes?
- Is there an impact of new forms of governance and state transformation? Has the transformation of the state - with authority moving upwards (global and continental integration), downwards (state decentralization) and sideways (deregulation, privatization) changed the traditional formats of interest mediation in your country? What have been the responses of parties, civil society organizations and the federal system to these challenges?