

The South Tyrolean Party System

Introduction

South Tyrol has inspired numerous in-depth analyses, mostly describing the functioning of the legal and institutional framework of the autonomous province, its adoptability in similar minority conflicts, or the history of its coming into being, with special regards to violence applied, and the role Austria as a kin-state played in the process.¹ The distribution of financial competencies is a highly discussed topic as well, witnessing increased scientific and political attention since the economic crisis started to unfold in 2008. The party system of the province, however, is a subject that has received a more modest attention compared to the aforementioned issues. The following study professes to be a humble contribution to this topic.

The rise Europe has been witnessing in the popularity of parties exhibiting a secessionist agenda makes it particularly topical to cast a glance on the party system of South Tyrol. The current economic crisis has provided new arguments for, and fueled a substantial growth in the popularity of secessionist parties in numerous regions, including Catalonia, the Basque Country, Flanders, or Scotland. South Tyrol, as well as the rest of Italy, has been struck by the financial crisis, still one can see only moderate changes in the popularity of secessionist political groups, compared to pro-autonomy parties. It appears that the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano resiliently keeps on revolving around an anti-secessionist political core, centripetally drawing the vast majority of the votes towards a central force that is committed to the further development of the autonomous competencies of the province. This dominant force is the main governing party of the history of the province, the South Tyrolean People's Party (*Südtiroler Volkspartei*, hereinafter *SVP*). Despite its decreasing popularity, SVP is far from losing the dominant position of the provincial party system. Despite witnessing similar economic tribulations as other regions of Europe, it seems that South Tyrolean party politics keeps on revolving much more around the development

¹ The Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, concluded on 10 September 1919, awarded the southern half (with South Tyrol, and Trentino) of the former Tyrolean crownland to Italy, while the northern and eastern parts remained with the newly formed First Republic of Austria.

of the autonomous arrangement rather than around questions of secession.

In order to solve this scientific puzzle the study aims to explore the dynamics of the party-political discourse, the political cleavages that define the interaction between the parties, as well as the background of the shifts in popularity of the main political parties. First, I draw up the electoral system along with the political mechanisms it creates, and refer to the legal provisions of the autonomy statute that are relevant to the party political circumstances. Then, I provide a brief history of the provincial party system, mentioning amongst others the influence that party political developments on the national level had on the province, and the pluralisation of the ethno-political party palette. This section is followed by drawing up the cleavages that divide the parties, and all the relevant issues bound to be addressed by the parties due to these cleavages. The analysis pays special attention to the dominant political actor of the province, SVP, and it also mentions the plausible trends in future party political developments.

Electoral system

Before the amendment of the Italian Constitution in 2001, the Regional Council (*Consiglio Regionale della Regione Autonoma Trentino-Alto Adige / Regionalrat der Autonomen Region Trentino-Südtirol*) was elected first, whose representatives then automatically became members of their respective provincial parliaments.² Since 2001 the process has been going the other way around. Citizens first elect the 35 members of the provincial legislative bodies (the Provincial Council of Trento / *Consiglio della Provincia Autonoma di Trento*, and the Provincial Council of Bolzano / *Südtiroler Landtag*), who then by dint of this office also become members of the Regional Council.

The Provincial Council of Bolzano/Bozen is elected in an open list proportional representation system, in one round of voting where the whole province forms one constituency.³ Favorable for smaller parties, the system has no electoral threshold and has a *compen-*

² *Regionalgesetz vom 8. August 1983, Nr. 7 - Ordinerter Text der Regionalgesetze über die Wahl des Regionalrates*, available: http://elezioni.provincia.bz.it/downloads/testo_coordinato_regionale.pdf, accessed 2014.01.27.

³ For more information on the election, functioning, and dissolution of the Legislative Council see: Bonell, Lukas - Winkler Ivo: *Südtirols Autonomie*. Bozen/Bolzano: Südtiroler Landesregierung - Karo Druck KG. 2010. pp.27-43.

*satory mechanism.*⁴ As an important tool for protecting the ethnic minorities of the province, active suffrage was granted only to those Italian citizens over 18 years of age who resided in the Region for an uninterrupted period of four years, counted from the date of the official announcement of the Election Day.⁵ The same rules applied to passive suffrage as well till the Regional Council adopted Regional Law No. 9 of 1989. According to this amendment, in order to be entitled to passive suffrage one only needs to have a residence in one of the communes of the region on the day the elections are officially announced.

Every constituent can choose one of the competing party-lists, and within this selected list one can cast up to four preferential votes for the candidates. These preferential votes will then determine the exact order in which candidates of a given list can receive mandates from the elections. The distribution of seats among the party-lists is decided upon the largest remainder method: the total number of valid votes gained by all the lists is divided with the total number of available seats (in this case 35) plus two. The so-established corrected electoral quota, also known as the Imperiali quota (hereinafter “q”), is then used to divide the number of votes won by each party, to decide the distribution of the mandates. If this process has the result that the total sum of mandates won by all the parties exceeds the 35 available seats, than a new “q” will be established by reducing the electoral divisor (total number of available seats plus two) by one unit (from 37 to 36). If this process is successful and there are still seats available, then the fractional remainders produced by the aforementioned quota, are set in descending order and the parties with the largest remainders are each given an additional mandate until all the seats are allocated. This is the point where the compensational mechanism is applied: those parties that received fewer votes than the “q” number are entitled to take part in this division as well. If the remainders are equal by two parties the mandate will go to the one that gained more votes. In case the total number of votes gained by the two parties is equal as well the mandate will be decided via drawing.

The new electoral law adopted on 8th May, 2013 did not change the bases of the electoral system described above, it did however introduce some minor changes. Art. 5 of this law stipulates that one

⁴ Decision No. 356/1998 of the Italian Constitutional Court, declared that an electoral threshold in the Regional Council elections would be discriminative with regards to minority political representation.

⁵ Art 25 (2), Autonomy Statute (hereinafter ASt)

sex may not represent more than two-thirds of the candidates on any party lists. It also provides the opportunity for Italian citizens who have their residence in South Tyrol but are – either permanently or temporarily – living outside the province to cast their votes by post. Canvassing expenses were also specified; they cannot surpass 40.000 Euro per candidate.

The constitutional reform of 2001 made it possible to directly elect the heads of the governments of the Regions having special statute (which in the case of Trentino/South Tyrol applies for both provincial governments). South Tyrol is the only province in Italy that has not made use of this opportunity. Consequently, the Governor is still elected by the Provincial Council with the absolute majority of its members, by secret ballot. The mentioned new electoral law of 2013 also made some changes with regard to the executive power. It maximizes the number of government members in eight, not counting the Governor. A representative cannot become member of the government if he or she filled such a position in the preceding three legislative cycles or for 15 years consecutively. The government can only be replaced through a constructive vote of no confidence against the Governor or the whole government, voted for by the majority of the members of the legislature.

The rules of active suffrage are not the only ones building in provisions regarding the protection of the ethnic balance of the political system. Article 50 of the Autonomy Statute stipulates that the composition of the Provincial Government of Bolzano/Bozen must reflect the numerical strength of the linguistic groups as represented in the Provincial Parliament.⁶ Due to the small number of the Ladin community, paragraph three of the same Article also states that the Ladin linguistic group may be given representation in the Provincial Government, even with derogation from proportional representation.⁷ Given the fact that the local parties mostly represent clearly distinguishable linguistic blocks, this article had the effect that the provincial executive branch has always been composed of coalition governments. The leader of these administrations since 1948 is the dominant party of the political system, the SVP.⁸

⁶ Similar safeguarding mechanisms exist with regard to the local-municipal bodies, as set out by Art. 61-65, ASt.

⁷ In addition to this, the 2013 electoral law sets out that the composition of the government has also to reflect the gender proportion of the Legislature.

⁸ As opposed to this achievement it is worthwhile to note that, due to the differences in political culture, there has not been one Italian government since the end of World War II that managed to serve out a full legislative period. Silvio Berlusconi came closest to achieving a full term with his 1410 days in office between 2001 and 2005.

In German speaking polities it is customary to have a sole dominant political organization (like ÖVP in Tirol, or CSU in Bavaria).⁹ Due to the dominance of the German speaking community, the same rule applies to South Tyrol. Between 1948 and 1993, SVP governed for 45 years together with the Christian conservative Christian Democracy (*Democrazia Cristiana* – DC) party. During this nearly 5 decade long interval, there were only 9 seats in the executive branch which went to a third party (mostly from the socialist (PSI) or social-democratic (PSDI) parties). SVP, on the other hand, received 134 seats from a total of 187 which meant a 71,65% large governmental representation. This dominant position was reinforced after 1993 when DC vanished from the party system due to the *Mani pulite* scandal (see later). Between 1993 and 2013 out of 50 government positions only 13 were filled by other party than SVP, which meant a governmental representation up to 74% for the People's Party. In the current legislative cycle this dominance is more tangible than ever. 7 of the 8 governmental seats are being filled by members of SVP (87,5%) although they won only 45,7% of the votes, and 48,5% of the seats in the Legislation. Due to the fact that the composition of the provincial government has to reflect the numerical strength of the linguistic groups as represented in the Provincial Parliament, the more German speaking members the Parliament has, the more seats will be provided for the dominant actor of the party-system, the SVP (see Table 1). The new electoral law further contributes to the strengthening of this position by maximizing government members in 8, plus the Governor.¹⁰ Besides cumulating the election result of the dominant party, the system also ensures the participation of the Italian and Ladin minorities in the decision-making process of the local executive branch. Without the linguistic quota, there would not have been an incentive for SVP to build coalition governments, which could have resulted in the formation of single-party majority governments between 1948 and 2008, excluding Italians from the executive branch.¹¹

⁹ See: Nick, Rainer - Pelinka, Anton: *Österreichs politische Landschaft*. Innsbruck: Haymon Verlag. 1993, and Zehetmair, Hans: *Das deutsche Parteiensystem: Perspektiven für das 21. Jahrhundert*. München: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. 2005

¹⁰ Formerly the number of government members never decreased below 10, with the average number for the 1948 - 2013 period being 12,5.

¹¹ 2008 was the first year in the past 5 decades where SVP was not able to win the absolute majority of the votes.

Table 1. *Linguistic groups in the South Tyrolean Legislative Council as established by the 2013 provincial elections*

German linguistic group		Italian linguistic group		Ladin linguistic group	
SVP	17	Partito Democratico – Demokratische Partei	2	SVP	1
Die Freiheitlichen	6	Grüne Fraktion – Gruppo Verde – Grupa Vërda	1		
Südtiroler Freiheit	3	Lega Nord, Forza Alto Adige, Team Autonomie	1		
Grüne Fraktion – Gruppo Verde – Grupa Vërda	2	L'Alto Adige nel cuore	1		
Bürger Union, Ladins Dolomites, Wir Südtiroler	1				
Movimento 5 Stelle – 5 Sterne Bewegung – Moviment 5 Steiles	1				
	29		5		1

Source: <http://www.landtag-bz.org/de/abgeordnete/fraktionen-a.asp>, accessed: 2014.02.05.

History and dynamics of the party system

At the time of its creation SVP was an anti-fascist umbrella organization for the German speaking community of South-Tyrol. It was established in 1945 by ten „*Dableiber*” and four „*Optants*”.¹² The first term was used to describe those citizens who chose to stay in Italy during the Mussolini-era, and the latter one to describe those who opted for the proposition of the Third Reich and thus moved to Germany. In the fifties the party experienced a series of internal strifes between rural-agrarian-Christian conservative and the more moderate and urbanized members, which led the then chairman of the party, Silvius Magnago, an iconic figure of the South Tyrolean autonomy movement, to develop a more concentrated party structure and at the same time to transform SVP into a catch-all party. These reforms included the creation of various platforms within the party (platforms for youngsters, women, or for workers), and the integration of the Ladin community of the province. This latter one was conducted by providing the opportunity to nominate Ladin SVP-candidates in the constituencies inhabited by Ladins (in *Pustertal*

¹² Holzer, Anton: *Die Südtiroler Volkspartei*. Thaur-Tirol: Kulturverlag. 1991.

and *Bozen*), as well as to name a Ladin speaking vice chairman for the party. Since then SVP can be described as an ethno-regional catch-all party, representing the German and Ladin speaking groups regardless of their social statuses.¹³ It is harder to classify the party with regard to its ideology.¹⁴ It can accurately be characterized as a right wing, Christian conservative party taken into account that they pledge themselves to Christian-humanistic social ideals in their Fundamental Programme;¹⁵ or that their MEP works within the Group of the European People's Party. However, it is also true that the same Fundamental Programme enshrines that the party is open to social democrats “not representing class struggle dogmatism”, and that SVP proved to be coalitionable with left-wing Italian parties – such as *Partito Democratico* currently – several times before.¹⁶

The way through which the province has managed to ensure its autonomous competencies has been a bumpy one and had its bearings on the party-system.¹⁷ Although the 1948 Constitution of Italy already foresaw the special status of South Tyrol according to the Gruber-de Gasperi Agreement concluded in 1946, it was not until 1972 that the entry into force of the second Autonomy Statute ensured these competencies on the provincial and not on the regional level.¹⁸ It then took an additional 20 years – and the proactive contribution of Austria as a protecting power (*Schutzmacht Österreich*), as well as that of the United Nations – to implement the provisions of the Autonomy Statute. Until the reaching of this point (referred to as “Dispute settlement” / *Streitbeilegung*) there was a strong incentive

¹³ Later on in 1993 Ladins established a party on their own under the name: Ladins (renamed: Ladins Dolomites in 2008), which merged with smaller German speaking parties before the 2013 provincial elections.

¹⁴ For a useful summary concerning the difficulties of categorizing ethno-regional parties see: Chandra, Kanchan.: What is an ethnic party? *Party Politics. Volume 17, Nr.2.* March 2011. Sussex: Sage publications. 2011. pp.151-169.

¹⁵ An ideal also enshrined in the Statute of the Party, available at: <http://www.svpvahn.org/Parteistatut%20-%202012.pdf>, accessed: 2014.02.14

¹⁶ Südtiroler Volkspartei: *Das neue Programm der Südtiroler Volkspartei, Beschlossen von der Landesversammlung am 8. Mai 1993.* Meran/Marano: SVP, available: <http://www.svp.eu/smartedit/documents/download/grundsatzprogramm.pdf>, accessed: 2014.09.22.

¹⁷ See: Dabis, Attila: A Dél-Tiroli Felszabadítási Bizottság (BAS). *Pro Minoritate* 2012. Nyár pp.81-93.

¹⁸ The Treaty of Paris or the Gruber-De Gasperi agreement (named after the foreign minister of Austria of that time (Karl Gruber) and the prime minister of Italy (Alicide De Gasperi)), is the origo of the South Tyrolean autonomy. It ensures the most basic rights such as proportional representation in the public offices, or linguistic rights. It also provides the international legal entrenchment of the South Tyrolean autonomy.

for the local German and Ladin speaking communities to maintain a unified representation, in order to make it clear who the Italian governments should be negotiating an autonomy arrangement with. By the end of this implementation period, however, the more relaxed political atmosphere gave rise to political ferment within the SVP.¹⁹

The first German rival party was the Union for South Tyrol (*Union für Südtirol – UfS*), established in 1989, by Alfons Benedikter and Eva Klotz (who at that time was already a representative for the South Tyrolean Homeland Association – *Südtiroler Heimatbund*).²⁰ UfS successfully managed to siphon votes from the right-wing supporters of SVP. Parallel with this, Ladins created their own party as well, reducing the Ladin-speaking voter base of SVP. These developments were clearly reflected in the election results (see Table 2). While SVP obtained 60,38 % of the votes in the 1988 elections, its support melted to 52,04 by 1993. UfS won 4,8 %, and another German party, the Freedom Party (*Freiheitlichen*) gained 6,06 %, while the newly established Ladin formation won 1,97%. SVP lost 8,34 % of its voters in these four years, while newly emerging smaller parties (including also the Greens and Lega Nord) gained almost 23% of the votes.

The decline of the SVP base has been continuing ever since. In 2008, for the first time in its history, the party failed to win the absolute majority of the votes, although the mathematical transformation method of the electoral system still provided a narrow majority for them with regard to the mandates in the legislature. In the 2013 elections even this position was lost when SVP won only 17 seats from the total 35. In absolute numbers the 2013 election result was the fourth worse in the history of the party (with only 131.236 votes). Only the three first elections that followed World War II brought lower results, at a time when the German speaking community counted 100.000 persons fewer than in 2013. These results are being further exacerbated from election to election by the decline of voter participation. The turnout of the elections has been declining since the nineties, which can be understood as a consequence of the more relaxed atmosphere that commenced after the South Tyrol dispute was settled between Austria and Italy before the UN in 1992. The

¹⁹ It should be noted that the sixties was largely shaped by the violent struggle for the secession of the province, led by the South Tyrolean Liberation Committee (*Befreiungsausschuß Südtirol*). For a detailed description of this period see: Golowitzsch, Helmut: *Für die Heimat kein Opfer zu schwer. Folter – Tod – Erniedrigung; Südtirol 1961–1969*. Bozen/Bolzano: Kienesberger E. 2009.

²⁰ *Heimatbund* was an advocacy group for the perpetrators of the bomb attacks carried out by the German minority in the sixties.

92,1% turnout witnessed in 1988 decreased to 89,5% in 1993, kept on decreasing in 1998 to 85,7%, then to 82,3% in 2003, 80,1% in 2008, reaching the bottom at 77,7% in 2013.

If we take a look at the Italian parties of the provincial party system, we find the local formations of the national parties and smaller regional parties. Strongly influenced by the bipolar logic of the Cold War era, there was a centripetal competition among Italian parties during the First Italian Republic.²¹ This phenomenon was motivated by the fact that the second most popular party nationwide was the Italian Communist Party (*Partito dei Comunisti Italiani* – PCI) that obtained 19-35% of the votes from election to election between 1946 and 1987. As a result, Italian national governments were either coalition governments of the party Christian Democracy (DC) and one or more of the smaller centrist or left-wing parties, mostly including the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), or single-party DC minority governments. This constellation was perfectly mirrored in the South Tyrolean party politics as well. SVP governed the province in coalition with DC, the latter receiving three to five seats in the executive branch. Additionally, one or two governmental seats were given to the smaller social-democratic parties (except in the second, third and fourth legislative period). It was the early nineties which brought a change in this structure on the national, and by extension, on the provincial level as well. The *Mani pulite* (Italian for “clean hands”) inquiry – a judicial investigation into pervasive political corruption (referred to as *Tangentopoli* a.k.a. “Bribesville”) – resulted in the disappearance of the main parties and most of the political elite of the country.²² Considering its effects on the Italian political forces, the *Mani pulite* scandal can be understood as an analogy of the *Streitbeilegung* (the settlement of the dispute of the South Tyrolean question before the UN) for the German speaking polity of the province.

²¹ Fusaro, Carlo: Party System Developments and Electoral legislation in Italy (1948-2009). *Bulletin of Italian Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 1. Glasgow: University of Glasgow. 2009. pp.49-68.

²² These being: Christian Democracy (*Democrazia Cristiana* - DC), Italian Socialist Party (*Partito Socialista Italiano* – PSI), Italian Democratic Socialist Party (*Partito Socialista Democratico Italiano* – PSDI), Italian Liberal Party (*Partito Liberale Italiano* - PLI)

Table 2. *Results of the South Tyrolean provincial elections (1948-2013)*

Results of the South Tyrolean provincial elections (1948-2013)												
Party	1948		1952		1956		1960		1964		1968	
	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats
Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP)	107.249 (67,6%)	13	112.602 (64,76%)	15	124.165 (64,40%)	15	132.351 (63,86%)	15	134.188 (61,27%)	16	137.982 (60,69%)	16
Die Freiheitlichen	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Verdi Grüne Vërc, in 2008 common list with Liste Cíviche	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Südtiroler Freiheit (STF)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Union für Südtirol (UFS), from 2011: BürgerUnion	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ladins, from 2008: Ladins Dolomites	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lega Nord Südtirol (LN), in 2013 common list with Team Auton. & Forza Alto Adige	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unitalia Movimento per l'Alto Adige	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Democrazia Cristiana (DC), from 2002: Casini UDC	17.096 (10,78%)	2	23.864 (13,72%)	3	27.676 (14,35%)	3	30.277 (14,61%)	3	29.596 (13,52%)	3	32.734 (14,40%)	4
Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), from 1995: Alleanza Nazionale (AN)	4.662 (2,94%)	1	8.371 (4,78%)	1	11.607 (6,02%)	1	14.687 (7,09%)	1	13.615 (6,22%)	1	11.059 (4,86%)	1
Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI)	7.925 (4,99%)	1	9.996 (5,75%)	1	10.826 (5,62%)	1	12.217 (5,90%)	1	11.780 (5,38%)	1	16.328 (7,18%)	2
Italiano Sociale Democratico Partito (PSDI)	-	-	6.013 (3,46%)	1	7.774 (4,03%)	1	7.544 (3,64%)	1	8.369 (3,82%)	1	-	-
Partito Liberale Italiano (PLI)	-	-	3.455 (1,99%)	-	1.669 (0,78%)	-	2.839 (1,37%)	-	5.413 (2,47%)	1	5.872 (2,58%)	1
Partito Repubblicano Italiano (PRI)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	733 (0,35%)	-	2.733 (1,20%)	-	-
Kommunistische Partei Italiens (KPI)/ Partito dei Comunisti Italiani (PCI)	6.281 (3,96%)	1	5.335 (3,07%)	1	4.203 (2,18%)	1	6.514 (3,14%)	1	8.051 (3,68%)	1	13.569 (5,97%)	1
Partito Democratico (PD)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other	15.434 (9,73%)	2	4.238 (2,47%)	-	4.875 (2,62%)	-	3.656 (0,39%)	-	7.253 (3,29%)	1	7.072 (3,12%)	-
Sum	158.647 (100%)	20	173.874 (100%)	22	192.795 (100%)	22	210.085 (100%)	22	218.998 (100%)	25	227.349 (100%)	25

Source: Source: <http://www.landtag-bz.org/de/wahlen/ergebnisse-landtagswahlen-archiv.asp>, accessed: 2014.09.22.

1973																	
1973		1978		1983		1988		1993		1998		2003		2008		2013	
Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats
132.186 (56,42%)	20	163.468 (61,27%)	21	170.125 (59,44%)	22	184.717 (60,38%)	22	160.186 (52,04%)	19	171.820 (56,6%)	21	167.353 (55,6%)	21	146.555 (48,1%)	18	131.236 (45,7%)	17
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	18.669 (6,06%)	2	7.543 (2,5%)	1	15.121 (5 %)	2	43.615 (14,3%)	5	51.510 (17,9%)	6
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	21.293 (6,92%)	2	19.696 (6,5%)	2	23.708 (7,9%)	3	17.745 (5,8%)	2	25.070 (8,7%)	3
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14.888 (4,9%)	2	20.743 (7,2%)	3
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14.777 (4,80%)	2	19.607 (5,5%)	2	20.554 (6,8%)	2	7.048 (2,3%)	1	6.065 (2,1%)	1
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.058 (1,97%)	1	11.028 (3,6%)	1	4.112 (1,4%)	-	3.334 (1,1%)	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9.115 (2,96%)	1	2.606 (0,9%)	-	1.626 (0,5%)	-	6.413 (2,1%)	1	7.120 (2,5%)	1
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5.419 (1,8%)	1	4.499 (1,5%)	1	5.689 (1,9%)	1	4.831 (1,7%)	-
32.990 (14,08%)	5	28.800 (10,79%)	4	27.341 (9,55%)	3	27.748 (9,07%)	3	Part Pop. common list: 13.622 (4,43%)	2	-	-	-	-	3.792 (1,2%)	-	-	-
9.431 (4,02%)	1	7.782 (2,92%)	1	16.829 (5,88%)	2	31.491 (10,29%)	4	35.833 (11,64%)	4	29.287 (9,7%)	3	25.382 (8,4%)	3	merged into PdL 25.297 (8,3%)	3	-	-
13.214 (5,64%)	2	8.944 (3,35%)	1	11.207 (3,91%)	1	12.332 (4,03%)	1	3.847 (1,25%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8.059 (3,44%)	1	6.120 (2,29%)	1	3.643 (1,27%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2.806 (1,20%)	-	2.924 (1,10%)	-	2.178 (0,76%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3.234 (1,38%)	-	2.868 (1,07%)	-	5.890 (2,06%)	1	3.289 (1,08%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
13.343 (5,69%)	2	18.776 (7,04%)	3	16.079 (5,61%)	2	9.214 (3,01%)	1	-	-	-	-	2.614 (0,9%)	-	1.262 (0,4%)	-	730 (0,3%)	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	18.139 (6%)	2	19.210 (6,7%)	2
19.039 (8,13%)	3	26.166 (10,17%)	3	32.929 (11,32%)	4	37.115 (12,14%)	4	24.438 (7,93%)	3	36.583 (12,9%)	4	35.781 (12%)	4	10.838 (3,6%)	-	20.495 (7,2%)	2
234.302 (100%)	34	266.848 (100%)	34	286.221 (100%)	35	305.906 (100%)	35	307.838 (100%)	35	303.589 (100%)	35	300.750 (100%)	35	304.615 (100%)	35	287.010 (100%)	35

After the investigations, numerous new Italian organizations started to rise, merge and split, making Italian party politics more complex and pluralistic. The five elections of the “post-*Mani pulite*” era were coined by the high volatility of the votes and an Italian party palette much more diverse than the German one.²³ The provincial elections of these twenty years saw an average of 8,6 Italian parties per election, as opposed to the 3,4 German parties.²⁴ Even if one counts all other parties potentially capable of siphoning votes from SVP (for example mixed parties like Verdi Grüne, or the separate Ladin party), this number still grows only to 5,6. Regarding the volatility of Italian parties, it is a telling data that there were only 4 parties capable of taking part on at least more than half of the elections in this 20 year period: the far-right National Alliance (*Alleanza Nazionale* – AN, called *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI) before 1995); a local splinter party of AN: Unitalia – Movement for South Tyrol (*Unitalia – Movimento per l’Alto Adige*); the far-left Italian Communist Party (*Partito dei Comunisti Italiani* – PCI); and the North League (*Lega Nord*). Demographic decline of the local Italian community on the one hand, and diminishing electoral participation and the pluralisation of the Italian parties on the other where the major factors resulting in the drop of the number of Italian representatives from 8 in 2008 to 5 in 2013.

Last but not least, an important party political development of the province was the establishment of a green party as an alternative for the two major voting blocks in 1978. The party first ran under the name New Left (*Neu Linke*), which was altered to Verdi-Grüne-Verc in 1993. This eco-social party is the only one which dedicates itself to connecting the linguistic groups of the province, and thus establishes its candidate-list in respect of ethnic balance. Since the nineties they have managed to win two or three mandates per election, making them a relevant actor of the political landscape.

²³ Electoral volatility seeks to capture the stability of the electorate’s preferences across elections. See: Pedersen, Mogens N.: Changing Patterns of Electoral Volatility in European Party Systems 1948–1977: Explorations in Explanation, in: H. Daalder - P. Mair (eds): *Western European Party Systems. Continuity and Change*. London: Sage. 1983. pp.29-66.

²⁴ Own calculations according the data of the provincial elections between 1948 and 2008

Cleavages

In the light of the original cleavage-theory, established by Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, the dominant cleavage of the South Tyrolean party system is the center-periphery dichotomy, dividing the electorate into Italian and German speaking voting blocs.²⁵ Given the fact that both blocks are equally religious (mostly Catholic), the state-church cleavage, which otherwise has a major relevance in Italian politics, is a marginal factor in the provincial party system. Although there are some minor exclusions, German speaking electors tend to give their votes – both at the municipal and the provincial elections – to German parties, while Italian electors tend to give their votes to Italian parties. Inspecting the territorial distribution of the votes this tendency can be verified. The smaller and the closer a settlement is to the Austrian border, the larger is the number of German speaking inhabitants of that settlement, thus the more likely its electorate cast their votes to German parties.

A salient example is that of Martells' (a village in the *Vinschgau* area), which is the most homogenous settlement of the province, with 100% of its less than 1000 inhabitants being German speaking.²⁶ The 2013 provincial elections brought the following results in this village: 61,2% – SVP; 26,4% – *Freiheitlichen*; 7,9% – *Südtiroler Freiheit*, 2,7% – *Verdi – Grüne – Verc – Sel*; 6,5 % – *Bündnis Bürger Union – Ladins Dolomites – Wir Südtiroler*. The four contesting Italian parties, on the other hand (*PD, Forza Alto Adige – Lega Nord – Team Autonomie, Unitalia, and La Destra Minniti*), received only 5 votes from the total 556, which make up little more than 1%.²⁷ Results of the local elections were even more unambiguous, as both in 2005 and in 2010 SVP received 100% of the valid votes.²⁸ The same trend becomes visible when we take a look at the Italian side of the political spec-

²⁵ Lipset, Seymour Martin - Rokkan, Stein: *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*. New York: Free Press. 1967; Lipset, Seymour Martin - Rokkan, Stein: *Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments*. In: Peter Mair (ed.): *The West European Party System*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990. pp.91-111.; Karvonen, Lauri - Kuhnle, Stein (eds.): *Party Systems and Voter Alignments Revisited*. London: Routledge. 2000.

²⁶ ASTAT: *Volkszählung 2011, Berechnung des Bestandes der drei Sprachgruppen in der Autonomen Provinz Bozen- Südtirol / Censimento della popolazione 2011 Determinazione della consistenza dei tre gruppi linguistici della Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano-Alto Adige*. Bozen/Bolzano: Landesinstitut für Statistik/ Istituto provinciale di statistica. 2012.

²⁷ For the regional differences in the 2013 provincial election results, see: http://www.provinz.bz.it/vote/landtag2013/results/muni_ld_vg.htm, accessed: 2014.03.05.

²⁸ For the results of the municipal elections see: <http://www.gemeindewahlen.bz.it/>, accessed: 2014.03.05.

trum. Italians mostly inhabit the urban areas and the plain southern parts of the province. “The most Italian” settlement is the provincial capital, Bolzano. According to the 2011 census, only 25,52% is German speaking, as opposed to 73,8% being Italian, with the Ladin population representing only 0,68%.²⁹ In this district German parties obtained only 29% of the votes (22,2% went to SVP, 4,4% to *Freiheitlichen*, 2% to *Südtiroler Freiheit* and 0,4% to *Bündnis Bürger Union – Ladins Dolomites – Wir Südtiroler*), while Italian ones received 59,6%.³⁰ During the municipal elections 21.5% of the citizens’ voted for Silvio Berlusconi’s PdL (*IL Popolo della Libertá* – People of Freedom), 17.2% to PD, and only 19.6% to SVP. German secessionist parties were, unsurprisingly, almost invisible in these results (*Freiheitlichen* obtained 1,4%, while *Südtiroler Freiheit* 0,5% of the votes). The mayor of Bolzano has always come from the Italian community. Even within specific parts of the city, the picture of ethnic party preferences is tangible. In the voting sections of the *Don Bosco* quarter (an Italian quarter, located in the westernmost part of the city) SVP struggles to reach at least 15% of the votes in average (Presseamt der Autonomen Provinz Bozen 2013). While the same proportion in *Gries*, an overwhelmingly German speaking part of the city that used to be a separate suburban settlement, is above 40%.

The above described ethnic cleavage between German speaking and Italian parties is the one mostly defining the party system, however, with the pluralization of the ethno-regional party palette another cleavage has arisen: the attitude towards self-governance. The peculiarity of this cleavage is that it polarizes the German speaking block far more intensively than the Italian one. The only Italian party engaging in this topic is Lega Nord whose agenda indeed has had a salient role in resurging the regional dimension of Italian party politics (south v. north, central state v. federalism) after the importance of cold war bipolarity faded. The program of Lega envisages transforming Italy into a federalist state. As a matter of fact, in 1996 the former leader of Lega Nord, Umberto Bossi unilaterally

²⁹ ASTAT: *Die Ergebnisse der Volkszählung in Italien - Bevölkerungsstruktur und Erhebungsverfahren in der Autonomen Provinz Bozen – Südtirol | L'Italia del Censimento - Struttura demografica e processo di rilevazione nella Provincia autonoma di Bolzano - Alto Adige*. Rom/Roma: Nationalinstitut für Statistik – ISTAT / Istituto nazionale di statistica – ISTAT. 2013a.

³⁰ Verdi - Grüne - Verc – Sel received 11,4% of the votes in Bozen/Bolzano (5.166 votes), which made them the third most popular party in the capital of the province.

declared that Padania is an independent and sovereign federal republic.³¹ The declaration has of course never been implemented.³²

Different attitudes towards self-governance were always present in the political discourse of South Tyrol, although until the early nineties they divided the internal party structure of SVP, or they took shape in organizations less susceptible for activities that remain within the sphere of the organized political arena (such organizations were the already mentioned South Tyrolean Liberation Committee / *Befreiungsausschuss Südtirol – BAS*, responsible for the bomb attacks conducted in the sixties, or the South Tyrolean Safeguard Association / *Südtirol Schützenbund*).³³ With the formation of the new German parties this cleavage has become external. On one side of this cleavage one can find SVP and the Greens, while on the other side the secessionist parties in favor of establishing a new state (*Freistaat*) and/or reuniting with the kin-state Austria. This side of the cleavage contains the Freedom Party / *Freiheitlichen*, South Tyrolean Freedom / *Südtiroler Freiheit – STF*, and the Civic Union / *Bürgerunion* (formerly Union for South Tyrol / *Union für Südtirol – UfS*).

SVP tends to characterize itself as “The” Autonomy party referring to the fact that they were the sole representative organization for the German speaking community of South Tyrol during the period coined by the struggle for territorial autonomy. Throughout the decades this also meant that membership in the SVP was strongly linked with positions in the executive branch. This position has not changed, and SVP keeps on identifying itself with ideas regarding the further development of the autonomy. For this reason they have elaborated the so- called “Full autonomy” (*Vollautonomie*) concept.³⁴ This concept envisages that the province takes over the primary jurisdiction over every field that is currently secondary. The South Tyrolean Autonomy statute sets a complex system of jurisdic-

³¹ Padania practically refers to the richer northern parts of Italy, mostly identical with the Po valley. The full name of the party itself refers to this territory: *Lega Nord per l’Indipendenza Della Padania* (Northern League for the Independence of Padania). For the Padanian Declaration of Independence See: <http://www.giovanipadani.leganord.org/dichiarazione.asp>, accessed: 2014.03.06.

³² These kind of initiatives are not unprecedented in Italy. The party *Indipendenza Veneta*, for example organized a legally non- binding online referendum between the 16th and 21st of March, 2014 on the secession of Veneto from Italy, the EU, and for withdrawal from NATO.

³³ An organization originally founded by Andreas Hofer to protect Tyrol against the troops of Napoleon, nowadays having a secessionist agenda.

³⁴ For more information on the *Vollautonomie* concept visit: <http://www.svp.eu/de/themen/vollautonomie/>, accessed: 2014.03.18.

tion divided between the central state, the region and the province, including also shared competencies of these levels. Primary jurisdiction refers to those fields where the province has exclusive decision-making competencies.³⁵ Secondary jurisdiction refers to fields where the state sets the general framework in which the province is allowed to establish detailed regulations.³⁶ This latter group of competencies includes subjects like the management of the regional police forces, education in elementary and secondary schools, public utilities, and sanitation. In addition to taking full jurisdiction over these fields, SVP wishes to terminate the still existing Regional Council – because the party considers it to be an obsolete institution – and most importantly, implement full fiscal autonomy in the province (*Finanzhoheit* as they call it). Similarly to the Basque model, South Tyrol would be granted the right to levy and collect all local taxes, and negotiate a specific sum needed to be paid for the central government so that it would be able to carry out the competencies it still exercises in the province.

The Greens also support the further development of autonomy and oppose the concept of secession as a non-desirable alternative. They consider the present autonomy arrangement, however, as an “SVP-autonomy”, and support the establishment of a third statute through a wide autonomy convent, which would ensure a better co-existence between the ethnic groups of the province.

The economic crisis increases the number of those voters opting for more radical changes than the ones mentioned above. According to the last elections, secessionist parties represented the opinion of almost 1/3 of the total electorate. The most popular among these parties is the Freedom Party. The Freedom Party went as far as to elaborate the future constitution of a South Tyrolean Free State.³⁷ This draft is a mix of currently existing provisions of the autonomy statute and newly inserted preferences of the party. Thus, the Free State envisaged by the Freedom Party would also have ethnic quotas in the government, rotating presidency in the legislature,³⁸ linguistic equality between Germans and Italians, special status for the Ladin

³⁵ These competencies are listed in Article 117 paragraph 4 of the Italian constitution, and in Article 8 ASt.

³⁶ Listed in Article 9 ASt.

³⁷ For this draft visit the homepage of the party: http://www.die-freiheitlichen.com/images/stories/_downloads/layout_d_140x170_druck.pdf, accessed: 2014.03.19.

³⁸ The South Tyrolean legislature is headed in the first 30 months of the parliamentary term by a German speaker, with either an Italian or Ladin vice-president, and in the second 30 months by an Italian speaker with either a German or Ladin vice-president.

culture, as well as the same electoral system. Instead of a Governor, however, here we find a directly elected Prime Minister who can only be removed through a constructive vote of no confidence. All these provisions are set in a Christian conservative framework, where marriage would receive special protection from the state, children need to be thought at schools to neighborly love, patriotism, and moral responsibility, and ethics and religious education would be a part of the national curricula. Another characteristic of this party is its anti-immigration sentiment. As one of the richest parts of the country South Tyrol inevitably attracts foreign immigrants. According to the census data of 2011 there are 45.932 foreign immigrants in the province (approximately one-third of these people live in Bolzano/Bozen), which is more than twice the rate of the indigenous Ladin community, and it is constantly growing (see Table 3).³⁹ The number of foreign residents tripled in the past two decades, which shows the lively nature of this new challenge to the province.

The second most popular secessionist organization is the South Tyrolean Freedom, a splinter party emanating from UfS in 2007. The leader of the party is Eva Klotz, daughter of Jörg Klotz, former leader of the South Tyrolean Liberation Committee. The party is popular particularly among youngsters. The average age of the party's members is 36 years, more than 50% of its members are under 30, and members younger than 18 represent almost 20%.⁴⁰ The main goal of the party is the reunification of South Tyrol with Austria via referendum. For this purpose they organized a legally non-binding self-determination referendum in 2013, where 92,17% of the participating 61.189 citizens voted in favor of South Tyrol exercising her right to self-determination. (SVP had called for the boycott of the referendum).⁴¹ The party exhibits a similar approach with regard to European affairs, which is why they have participated in organizing a European citizens' initiative aimed at recognizing the right to self-determination as a fundamental human right.⁴² The initiative was not registered by the European Commission.

Last, but not least, the decreasingly popular Civic Union, whose predecessor UfS was the first contender party to SVP, is also on the side of reuniting South Tyrol with North-and East Tyrol. Further-

³⁹ ASTAT: *Südtirol in Zahlen / Alto Adige in cifre*. Bozen/Bolzano: Landesinstitut für Statistik/ Istituto provinciale di statistica. 2013b.

⁴⁰ Source: <http://www.stol.it/Artikel/Politik-im-Ueberblick/Lokal/Suedtiroler-Freiheit-will-auch-in-Oesterreich-politische-Bewegung-werden>, accessed: 2014.03.21.

⁴¹ Source: <http://www.nationalia.info/en/news/1733>, accessed: 2014.03.21.

⁴² For the homepage of the initiative visit: <https://www.europeancitizensdecide.eu/petition.php>, accessed: 2014.03.21.

more, they protest against the Italian toponyms invented by the fascist oppressor, *Ettore Tolomei*, and claim that every settlement should bear its original German and Ladin name. They also wish to remove the victory monument in Bolzano/Bozen that was erected during the *Mussolini*-era, celebrating the occupation of Tyrol.⁴³

Table 3. *Population of South Tyrol according to linguistic groups (1880-2011)*

Year	German	Italian	Ladin	Other	Total
<i>In absolute numbers</i>					
1880	186 087	6884	8822	3513	205 306
1890	187 100	9369	8954	4862	210 285
1900	197 822	8916	8907	7149	222 794
1910	223 913	7339	9429	10 770	251 451
1921	193 271	27 048	9910	24 506	254 735
1961	232 717	128 271	12 594	281	373 863
1971	260 351	137 759	15 456	475	414 041
1981	279 544	123 695	17 736	9593	430 568
1991	287 503	116 914	18 434	17 657	440 507
2001	296 461	113 494	18 736	34 308	462 999
2011	314 604	118 120	20 548	51 795	505 067
<i>In percentage</i>					
1880	90,6	3,4	4,3	1,7	100,0
1890	89,0	4,5	4,3	2,3	100,0
1900	88,8	4,0	4,0	3,2	100,0
1910	89,0	2,9	3,8	4,3	100,0
1921	75,9	10,6	3,9	9,6	100,0
1961	62,2	34,3	3,4	0,1	100,0
1971	62,9	33,3	3,7	0,1	100,0
1981	64,9	28,7	4,1	2,2	100,0
1991	65,3	26,5	4,2	4,0	100,0
2001	64,0	24,5	4,0	7,4	100,0
2011	62,3	23,4	4,1	10,3	100,0

Source: ASTAT (2013b): *Südtirol in Zahlen*, op. cit. p. 20.

⁴³ In 2002 the City Council of Bolzano/Bozen tried to rename this square from the current Victory square to Freedom square, but the local Italian right wing forces initiated a local referendum, successfully hindering this plan.

Conclusions

Trying to summarize the characteristics of the South Tyrolean party system one can state the following. South Tyrol has a party system with ethnicity-related voter preferences, and an additional cleavage regarding the self-governance of the province. The dominant actor of the party system is the ethno-regional catch-all party, SVP, leading the local government since the end of World War II. The party political developments of the past decades have been posing substantial threats to the popularity of SVP, which can be expected to further decrease in a modest rate. The biggest threats to the electoral achievement of SVP are the decline in voter participation, the pluralization of the ethno-regional party palette, and the deepening of the economic crisis. This latter factor is prone to step to the fore if the party continues to fail to negotiate a new autonomy arrangement for the province in the long run. The open list proportional representation electoral system, having no threshold, endorses party fragmentation, which affects Italian parties much more than German ones. In addition, the demographic decline of the local Italian community and the plummeting electoral participation are all factors which predict that the number of Italian members of the Provincial Council will stagnate or decrease in the future. A slight increase is only plausible with the concentration of the Italian parties.

While there are fundamental differences between the aforementioned blocks, most visibly in political culture, a common challenge for all the parties of the province is how to integrate the preferences of the immigrant population. Given the rapidly increasing number of foreign residents, the parties more capable of channeling these votes towards themselves can expect to gain serious electoral leverage in the future. In this process, secessionist parties are not likely to take a leading role due to their anti-immigration agendas. The main goal for these smaller parties in the future will rather be to absorb more German votes from SVP, and the main strategic challenge will be how to move closer to governmental positions. Despite the fact that almost one-third of the votes came in support of secessionist parties during the last provincial elections, none of these organizations are likely to move into the government in the near future. SVP is in fact loosing electoral confidence, but its support is not declining rapidly. The economy of the province has been burdened by worsening indicators, which are often regional spill-over effects of the economic woes of the national budget, still the economic crisis has not stricken South Tyrol as hard as other parts of the country.⁴⁴ Economic

⁴⁴ A vivid example is when Moody's downgraded the creditworthiness of South Tyrol from A1 to A3 on the 17th of June 2012, only because they did likewise in the case of

deterioration has been unfolding with smaller amplitude due to the fiscal levers provided by the autonomy arrangement.⁴⁵ This ensures an effective argument for SVP in supporting the further development of this arrangement in the framework of the *Vollautonomie* concept.

Beside this main reason, it is important to add that the already mentioned Article 50 of the autonomy statute, in a way, safeguards the dominant position of SVP. This article creates a coalition-compulsion with Italian parties, who are not coalitionable with organizations having a secessionist agenda. The sole exception under this rule could be Lega Nord, however, it never managed to send more than one representative into the provincial legislation even at the peak of its popularity. As a matter of fact, between 1998 and 2008 they did not manage to send representatives to the legislation at all. The same situation applies to the Greens. Although they are a party with a cross-cutting membership with regard to linguistic groups (currently they provide one of the 5 Italian members of the legislation), they strictly oppose secession and are on the side of further developing the autonomy of the province. An additional obstacle is that secessionist parties are not united in their pursuits. Some prefer to establish a Free State, while others wish a reunion with the kin-state Austria.

In historical terms, the two most important developments affecting the party system have been the *Mani pulite* scandal and the pluralisation of the ethno-regional party palette since the nineties. This latter one keeps on increasing its relevance ever since, which is why we are likely to witness the intensification of the secession debate in the future. In this respect, Italy and South Tyrol fit in the European trend shaped by the increasing activity of secessionist movements – a trend being fueled mostly by the economic problems of the EU and its member states, respectively. Even if the strengthening of the secessionist parties brings forth the increasing relevance of the self-governance cleavage in the province of South Tyrol, this cleavage is not likely to become the pivotal subject of the political discourse in the medium- and long term, as it is in Scotland or Catalonia.

the host country shortly before as well. Source: „*Diese Herabstufung verdienen wir uns nicht*”. Dolomiten 130 Jahrgang, Nr. 162 von 2012-07-18, p. 18.

⁴⁵ For more information on the connections between the Statute of autonomy and the economic performance of the Province see: Dabis, Attila: Dél-Tirol autonómiastatútuma, in: *Magyar Kisebbség* 3-4. szám. Kolozsvár/Cluj Napoca: Jakabffy Elemér Alapítvány. 2012. pp. 43-95.