

Hungry for power? Regional elites and the architecture of government

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Abstract

How can we better understand the architecture of government? Governmental structures are regularly altered by the dispersion of power upward and downward to supranational and subnational bodies. The preferences of citizens and élites in this regard are well documented at the national and EU levels. However, the preferences of *regional* élites remain somewhat of a black box. What are their preferences when it comes to the distribution of competences across the regional-national-EU triptych? This article pits three explanations against one another. They concern scale, identity, and institutional effects. These explanations are evaluated against a database containing information on over 1,300 regional élites in 68 regions and 12 countries. Overall, while scale and institutional logics do play a role, identity logics prevail. These findings support a strand of literature stressing the importance of community and attachment in shaping the structure of government beyond what scale and institutional logics predict.

1 | INTRODUCTION: REGIONS AND MULTI-TIER SYSTEMS

Political systems—as any human construct—evolve over time. Their institutional architecture is no exception. Scholars have identified different eras in the institutional evolution of

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democracies. The immediate post World War II period was characterized by state expansion and consolidation (Loughlin, 2007, pp. 387–389). However, the late 1970s have signaled an era of power dispersion, away from the core of the central state. Power has been dispersed “above” to international organizations (Hooghe et al., 2017; Knill & Bauer, 2016), “below” to regional and local tiers of government (Hooghe & Marks, 2016; Ladner, Keuffer, & Baldersheim, 2016), “sideways” to nonmajoritarian agencies such as regulatory agencies, courts, or independent central banks (Garriga, 2016; Jordana, Fernández-i-Marín, & Bianculli, 2018), and finally “diagonally” to citizens through instruments such as agenda initiatives, citizen initiatives, recalls, and popular referendums (Peters, 2016, 2018).

The advent and recurrence of power dispersion has led to two types of inquiries analyzing its causes and consequences. First an *institutionalist* approach exploring the formal dispersion of power. These studies have mapped the legal authority of different layers of government and administration (e.g., Dardanelli, 2018; Hooghe et al., 2017). They have strived to understand the formal, de jure architecture of government. Second a *preference* approach exploring what citizens and élites want when it comes to the institutional architecture of government across jurisdictional layers. Such studies have analyzed the preferences of citizens (Cerniglia & Pagani, 2009; Clark & Hellwig, 2012), of national élites from the economic, societal, and political realms (Hooghe, 2003; Müller, Jenny, & Ecker, 2012), and of central government and supranational élites (Beyers, 2005; Kassim et al., 2013). They have investigated the nature and shapers of the desired architecture of government.

Within this latter strand of research, little attention has been paid to *regional élites*. Knowledge about citizens and about national and supranational élites has deepened our understanding of the drivers of varying institutional architectures. Knowledge about regional élites—understood as elected politicians and top civil servants populating the level of government and administration between the local and the national tiers—has remained scarce. This article is a first step to address this knowledge-gap. Regional élite preferences regarding the desired institutional architecture of government are this article's dependent variable.

The existing knowledge-gap on this question is surprising. The regional level has been dramatically empowered in the past four decades. Occasionally abrupt, other times incremental, the growth in formal powers of regional authorities has been likened to a “quiet revolution” (Hooghe & Marks, 2016, p. 152). Some cases—such as Catalonia or Scotland—regularly grab media headlines. Oftentimes, however, regional authority has slowly morphed under the radar, away from the media and academic spotlight (Tatham & Mbaye, 2018, pp. 657–663). Either way, regions today play a growing role in our governance systems, be it on the policy, politics, or polity dimension. Over 40% of the European Union (EU) population lives in regions endowed with primary legislative powers (Tatham, 2018, p. 679). Nineteen out of 28 EU member states hold direct elections for regional assemblies (Schakel, 2018, p. 687). And regions have gradually gained policy competences in fields such as agriculture, education, immigration, planning, transport, or welfare (Adam & Hepburn, 2018; Vampa, 2016).

Not only have regions gained greater self-government, they have often also increased their formal influence in the co-determination of national and EU policies. Indeed, many regions in federal and regionalized countries—covering almost half of the EU's population—have expanded their influence beyond the immediate borders of their own territory. They exert growing “shared rule” at the national level (Hooghe & Marks, 2016, pp. 35–38, 44–57). Similarly, their formal authority on EU issues has grown both domestically and supranationally, sometimes resulting in remarkable incidents such as the Wallonia parliament holding up the signature process of the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (Tatham, 2018,

pp. 680–683). In other words, regions have become relevant players in their own territory, in the national territory as a whole, and supranationally at the EU level.

Considering the relevance of regional authorities, knowing more about the preferences of the élites populating them becomes important to further our understanding of how the architecture of government has evolved—and will evolve in the future. Indeed, these élites have not been passive in processes of decentralization and supranationalization. *Regional politicians* have both supported and sought to limit the European integration project, while also instrumentalizing it domestically for electoral gains (Hepburn, 2010). They have contributed to shape decentralization debates themselves (Masseti & Schakel, 2016; Toubeau & Massetti, 2013). Similarly, regional electoral outcomes have affected national and European election results, through various “spillover” and “feedback” mechanisms (Dinas & Foes, 2017; Schakel, 2018). *Regional bureaucrats* have been similarly active in these decentralization-supranationalization processes. They carry out lobbying activities through both national and supranational routes (Huwylar, Tatham, & Blatter, 2018), they mobilize on both financial and legislative issues (Donas, Fraussen, & Beyers, 2014), and seek to influence not only EU policies but also the institutional architecture of the EU itself (Keating, 2004). Even in their more mundane day-to-day work, these bureaucrats play a role in the implementation of EU projects and legislation within their territories (Fleurke & Willemse, 2007).

Of course, these trends should not be exaggerated. However, it is fair to say that regional élites play an active role in both decentralization and Europeanization processes. They matter in shaping debates and suggesting solutions. For example, regional élites are usually involved in the negotiation of new decentralization settlements. This holds for high profile cases such as Catalonia (revised Statute of Autonomy) or Scotland (post-Brexit renegotiation of competences) but also in lower-profile cases such as regional reforms in Denmark or Norway (Blom-Hansen, Christiansen, Fimreite, & Selle, 2011; Fimreite, 2017). Decentralization reforms do not take place in a vacuum but are affected and influenced by the preferences of politicians and bureaucrats, including those at the regional level itself. As argued by Toubeau and Massetti (2013, pp. 303–304), the drivers of territorial reform often originate from parties (both regionalist and state-wide) that occupy regional offices. They also originate from the existing regional governments themselves who “set the agenda by using intergovernmental channels of dialogue to put their demand for an alteration in the allocation of authority before the central government” (2013, p. 304). Similarly, these political and administrative élites have in the past played a role in voicing demands for EU-level changes, such as the creation of the Committee of the Regions, the expansion of the subsidiarity principle, or adopting a more regionalized approach to the European Semester (Bursens & De Blauwer, 2018, pp. 607–608; Keating, 2004).

Overall, little is known of regional élites’ preferences when it comes to the architecture of government. Do they have more supranational, national, or regional preferences in terms of competence allocation (i.e., who should be responsible for what)? This article provides a first cut at these questions. To do so, it carries out an exploratory survey of over 1,300 regional élites across different countries and regions. On that basis, it tests for three different explanations of the preferred distribution of competence across the regional-national-EU triptych. Analyses show that mainstream expectations related to scale and institutional logics are part of the explanation, but we also find that much leverage is gained by paying attention to community and attachment. These findings give support to “postfunctionalist” interpretations of the drivers of the architecture of government in multi-tier settings (Hooghe & Marks, 2009b, 2016; Keating, 2013).

The rest of the article is structured as follows. We first outline the three main explanations for multi-tier competence allocation. We then detail the data collection and analytical methods before presenting the main results. We conclude by highlighting the implications of our findings as well as some avenues for further research.

2 | THE DRIVERS OF DIFFERENTIAL COMPETENCE ALLOCATION

Three explanations have been particularly prominent to account for processes of upward and downward power dispersion. The first concerns scale effects. It is the idea that there is an underlying rationality in how governments evolve. Governmental structures would adapt to provide a more efficient or “pareto-optimal” distribution of competences across each tier, from the local to the global. Different public goods would be delivered at different territorial tiers to maximize efficiency and economies of scale while minimizing negative externalities. These scale effects would follow from size pressures—and especially demographic size. For each tier, the size of the jurisdiction would determine the optimal centralization/decentralization trade-off (see detailed overview in Hooghe & Marks, 2009a).

The terminology employed in relation to scale effects varies. They are sometimes labeled as “efficiency” or “functional” logics. However, the fundamental argument remains. As jurisdiction size increases, so do pressures to create and empower different tiers of government and administration. Qualitative and quantitative studies have provided much evidence of scale effects shaping the architecture of government, be it at the regional, national, or supranational levels (Alesina & Spolaore, 2003; Keating, 2013, pp. 48–72; Oates, 1999; Schakel, 2010).

Applied to the question of what shapes regional elite preferences when it comes to competence allocation along the regional-national-EU triptych, one can expect that the size of an elite's jurisdiction may shape her preferences. Elites from demographically larger jurisdictions will be hungrier for competences compared to those from smaller jurisdictions. Hence, the demographic size of one's regional and national jurisdictions (that of the EU is constant for all respondents) will affect the preferred distribution of competence.

H1 Scale logic—The greater the population size of a region or country, the greater the preference for competence attribution at that level.

H1a. The greater the population size of an elite's regional jurisdiction, the stronger the preference for regional empowerment (as opposed to national or supranational empowerment).

H1b. The greater the population size of an elite's national jurisdiction, the stronger the preference for national empowerment (as opposed to regional or supranational empowerment).

Clearly, scale effects are only one instance of functional pressures among others. For example, the nature, diversity, and openness of a jurisdiction's economy can also generate a variety of pressures shaping behaviors and attitudes. Similarly, the structuring of fiscal and welfare policies engenders its own set of pressures. However, none of these have had a demonstrated effect on the territorial architecture of government, in terms of the relative empowerment of the regional, national, or EU tier, which is our present research question.¹ We therefore focus the

analysis on size effects as these have been found to affect the *actual* structure of government (e.g., Alesina & Spolaore, 2003; Hooghe & Marks, 2009a, 2016) and may hence also affect its *desired* architecture.²

The second explanation is almost antithetical to the first. It has little to do with optimality, efficiency, or rational design. It has more to do with identity and community logics. These are to some extent fuzzier logics. They relate to feelings: feelings of belonging and of attachment. These feelings are very often nonexclusive and intersecting, reflecting the intricate nature of multiple notions of belonging. As Hooghe and Marks underline, “the world has never been divided into nonoverlapping, mutually exclusive, communities. Territorial communities exist at different scales, and often their edges are blurred (...). Patterns of social, economic, and political interaction almost never coincide and most persons consider themselves members of more than one territorial community” (2016, p. 18). Despite their sometimes-elusive nature, identity logics have proved important in shaping the structure of government. They may refer to ethnic, linguistic, historical, cultural, or even geographical factors, but they all translate into feelings of belonging and attachment, which in turn affect individual and group preferences.

Arguments about community, belonging, or attachment have been subsumed under varying labels such as center-periphery dynamics, persistent cultural differences, “minority nationalism,” and “territorial identity” (Brigevich, 2018; Rokkan & Urwin, 1983, p. 135; Röth & Kaiser, 2019; Zuber, 2011). They have been shown to affect governance preferences across various territorial tiers (Brigevich, 2016; Hooghe & Marks, 2016, pp. 122–150; Keating, 2013, pp. 74–90; Schakel, 2009, 2010).

Concerning regional élites, we expect that levels of attachment to a tier will shape competence attribution to that specific tier. Elites with a strong regional attachment will distribute more competences to that tier, while those with a strong national attachment will rather allocate competences to the national level, and those with a strong European attachment will attribute more competences to the EU. Following the same logic, we expect that regions considered as “minority nations” such as Scotland, Bavaria, or the Basque Country, will have an even greater preference for regional empowerment. Indeed, by virtue of their distinctiveness coupled to a nationalist sentiment (Brigevich, 2018, p. 646), these regions may provide a context conducive to greater governance ambitions.

H2 Identity logic—The greater the feeling of attachment to a given level, the greater the preference for competence attribution at that level.

H2a. The greater the feeling of attachment to the regional, national, or European level, the stronger the preference for the empowerment of that level.

H2b. Living in a minority nation increases the preference for regional empowerment (as opposed to national or EU empowerment).

The third explanation relates to institutional entrenchment, stickiness, and path dependence. It follows the idea that the status quo is a great shaper of preferences, also when it comes to institutional engineering. Indeed, one can anticipate that the existing level of competences and governance capacities will affect élite preferences. Elites would have preferences for greater or fewer competences in line with the powers that they already marshal, albeit with a +/- deviation. In other words, a region's institutionalized authority (a) in its own territory, (b) in its embedding country, and (c) the level of Europeanization of its different fields of activities may

all condition preferences for differential competence attribution across the regional-national-EU continuum.

And indeed, a body of work has suggested that existing institutional arrangements shape preferences for future or alternative institutional arrangements. For example, Siroky and Cuffe (2015) find that ethnic groups who have never experienced institutional autonomy are unlikely to mobilize for secession, while those currently experiencing autonomous arrangements are likelier to settle for the status quo. Similarly, if one compares expert judgments on the desirable allocation of competences across jurisdictions (see Schakel, 2010) with data on the actual allocation of competences (Council of Europe, 2018), they come across as strikingly similar (Hooghe & Marks, 2009a, p. 233, Figure 2). Hence, the existing institutional architecture visibly imprints preferences.³

Logically, apart from a few exceptions, most changes in the allocation of competences across territorial tiers tend to be incremental rather than abrupt (Hooghe et al., 2016; Tatham & Mbaye, 2018). In a detailed comparative study of the dynamics of decentralization and centralization, Dardanelli et al. found that “de/centralization proceeded mostly gradually. While frequency, as seen earlier, varied considerably, in all cases change took place primarily through low-magnitude steps. In the legislative dimension, for instance, more than 75 per cent of changes were of only one point (...). Single changes of a large magnitude, such as in employment relations in Canada or in civil and criminal law in Switzerland, were rare” (Dardanelli et al., 2018, p. 201). It follows that preexisting structures of government condition possible future developments be it terms of likelihood or desirability.

Regarding regional élites, we distinguish between three types of institutional situations. First, higher levels of self-government have sometimes encouraged requests for greater competences (Erk & Anderson, 2009; Massetti & Schakel, 2016). Second, a region's capacity for co-government at the national level has been found to quench desires for further competences or for emancipation from the domestic framework (López & Tatham, 2018; Tatham & Thau, 2014). Finally, Europeanization levels are indicative of the “daily practice” of Europe (Jacquot & Woll, 2004), and hence transnationalism and openness to further supranationalization (Deutsch, Merritt, Macridis, & Edinger, 1967; Kuhn, 2011).

H3 Institutional logic—The existing structure of authority affects preferences for competence attribution.

H3a. The greater the region's self-government authority, the stronger the preference for regional empowerment (as opposed to national or EU empowerment).

H3b. The greater the region's national co-government authority, the weaker the preference for regional or EU empowerment (as opposed to national empowerment).

H3c. Greater Europeanization levels increase preferences for EU empowerment (as opposed to regional or national empowerment).

Scale, identity, and institutional logics have dominated discussions about the architecture of government. However, numerous other factors may shape regional élite preferences for the empowerment of one tier over another. Although we do not discuss these rival explanations at any length, we do control for a few. Table 1 details a list of control variables which we introduce as robustness check. Their individual effect on competence attribution is reported in the supplementary material (Table S3). We detail these controls further in Section 3.2.

TABLE 1 Variables, data sources, measurement level, and descriptive statistics

	Variable	Data source	Level	<i>n</i>	Range	Mean (<i>SD</i>)
Competence attribution	Regional level	Survey (points)	Individual	1,499	0–9	2.19 (0.90)
	National level	Survey (points)	Individual	1,499	0–9	3.63 (1.01)
	EU level	Survey (points)	Individual	1,499	0–9	3.19 (0.98)
Scale logic	Regional pop.	Eurostat (10 M.)	Regional	1,503	0.02–1.78	0.26 (0.32)
	Country pop.	Eurostat (10 M.)	Country	1,503	0.84–8.18	4.22 (2.91)
Identity logic	Regional attach.	Survey	Individual	1,485	1–4	3.70 (0.55)
	Country attach.	Survey	Individual	1,485	1–4	3.62 (0.63)
	European attach.	Survey	Individual	1,483	1–4	3.23 (0.73)
	Minority nation	Brigevich (2012, 2018)	Regional	1,503	0–1	0.14 (0.35)
Institutional logic	Self-rule	Hooghe et al. (2016)	Regional	1,503	8–15	11.86 (2.86)
	Shared rule	Hooghe et al. (2016)	Regional	1,503	0–12	5.53 (5.24)
	Europeanization	Survey	Individual	1,445	1–3	2.54 (0.60)
Controls	Commission as gvt.	Survey	Individual	1,490	1–4	2.57 (0.94)
	M.S. main players	Survey	Individual	1,497	1–4	2.89 (0.90)
	Subsidiarity	Survey	Individual	1,490	1–4	3.21 (0.82)
	EU country benefits	Survey	Individual	1,497	1–4	3.40 (0.71)
	EU region benefits	Survey	Individual	1,501	1–4	3.40 (0.70)
	Year of birth	Survey	Individual	1,491	1938–1987	1961.60 (9.78)
	Female	Survey	Individual	1,497	0–1	0.30 (0.46)
	Politician	Survey	Individual	1,503	0–1	0.45 (0.50)
	Free-marketer	Survey	Individual	1,494	0–10	5.00 (2.45)
	Socially conservative	Survey	Individual	1,484	0–10	4.37 (2.60)
	Economics degree	Survey	Individual	1,498	0–1	0.19 (0.40)
	Law/P-A. degree	Survey	Individual	1,498	0–1	0.28 (0.45)
	N-S./engineer degree	Survey	Individual	1,498	0–1	0.20 (0.40)
	Job security (m)	Survey	Individual	1,503	0–1	0.25 (0.44)
	Close to home (m)	Survey	Individual	1,503	0–1	0.20 (0.40)
	Good salary (m)	Survey	Individual	1,503	0–1	0.16 (0.36)
	Good career Opp. (m)	Survey	Individual	1,503	0–1	0.29 (0.45)
	Interesting work (m)	Survey	Individual	1,503	0–1	0.80 (0.40)

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Variable	Data source	Level	n	Range	Mean (SD)
Desire dev. Reg. (m)	Survey	Individual	1,503	0–1	0.89 (0.31)
Regional QoG	Charron, Dijkstra, and Lapuente (2014)	Regional	1,503	–2.25–1.45	0.30 (0.98)
Regional unemp. Rate	Eurostat (percent.)	Regional	1,503	2.5–30.4	8.98 (5.46)
EU accession year	www.europa.eu	Regional	1,503	1957–2007	1983.96 (19.64)

Note: SD = standard deviation; pop. = population; M. = million; attach. = attachment; gvt. = government; M.S. = member state; P-A. = public administration; N-S. = natural sciences; m = motivation; dev. Reg. = develop the region; QoG = quality of government; unemp. = unemployment.

3 | DESIGN, DATA, AND METHODS

3.1 | Design

To explore regional elite preferences toward the attribution of competences along the regional-national-EU continuum, we set up a telephone survey of regional elites. These are here understood as both political and bureaucratic elites. Political elites are directly elected representatives sitting in the region's representative body. Administrative elites are senior civil servants holding a leadership position in the region's administration.

Interviewees were asked about how they would allocate competences across policy areas and tiers of government. Eighteen policy fields were considered. Each interviewee had a total of nine “contribution points” to distribute in each policy field. These points could be allocated to the regional, national, or EU tier. The wording of the question stressed that these contribution points also entail costs (funding), and that they imply both rights and duties. This means that respondents could spread rights and duties equally across tiers, such as three points for each, or asymmetrically so, such as all nine points to the region. The term “contribution points” was chosen as a contribution implies both authority and responsibility. We display the resulting points distributions in Figures 2 and 3 and report the survey question in the supplementary material (Table S2).

Our objective is to assess whether scale, identity, and institutional logics shape preferences *in general*. Much literature already highlights that the nature of the policy domain often affects the territorial level to which it is attributed (Clark & Hellwig, 2012; Hooghe, 2003; Hooghe & Marks, 2009a; Schakel, 2009, 2010). That waste collection or kindergartens are usually within the remit of lower-level tiers and that consumer protection, immigration, or foreign policy often end up at upper-level tiers is rather obvious. More interesting is to observe whether there are aggregate patterns of attribution when one asks an elite to distribute competence “points” across 18 given policy areas. Will certain elites skew their overall distribution in a given direction according to scale, identity, or institutional logics? Or will no discernible pattern emerge? We therefore summarize the 54 distributions that each individual elite proposed (18 policy areas*3 tiers) into 3 distributions (regional, national, EU, see Figure 3). The goal is to assess whether, given an identical set of policy domains, individual elites propose noticeably different levels of aggregate empowerment across the three tiers.

Over 1,300 regional élites were interviewed, with a coverage of 68 regions and 12 countries. The élites were randomly selected. For each region, 15 elected politicians and 15 senior bureaucrats were randomly selected for interview, with a back-up list of equivalent size. Interviews were carried over the phone in the language of the interviewee. Native speaker interviewers were hired for each relevant language. Regions were also randomly selected, except for (a) the criteria that the region of the country's capital city was avoided (with the exception of Berlin) and (b) the fact that most German *Länder* are covered (due to funding requirements—we model this through random intercepts, Section 3.3). Table S1 in the online supplementary material lists the regions covered.

Twelve countries were purposefully selected to provide variation in terms of date of accession and geographical location. These are Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Sweden, Spain, the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom, Romania, and Hungary. On average, about 125 individuals were interviewed per country and about 22 per region. The exception is the UK where only 12 interviews were carried out before the devolved governments vetoed the survey, with British civil servants working for the Scottish and Welsh governments being forbidden by their hierarchy from taking part. We have nonetheless kept the UK as part of the analysis on the basis that useful information can still be gained from the interviews carried out there. All models have been re-run dropping the 12 UK observations with no changes in terms of the overall findings. Ninety-five percentage of interviews were carried out in 2011, with 2% in 2010 and 3% in 2012. Interview data were coded in 2012 and 2013. Nonsurvey variables were gradually added over time from 2014 onward (e.g., Brigevich, 2018; Charron et al., 2014; Hooghe et al., 2016). Overall, 45% of interviewees are elected regional representatives (i.e., politicians). The 55% remaining are senior civil servants.

To capture scale pressures, we coded both a region and its embedding country's demographic weight (Eurostat data). To capture identity and feelings of belonging, we asked interviewees how attached they felt to their region, their country, and Europe on a four-point scale ranging from feeling “not at all attached” to “very attached.” We complemented this measure by coding whether the region corresponds to a “minority nation” following a typology created and documented by Brigevich (2012, 2018). To get a handle on institutional logics from the regional élite's standpoint, we coded three variables. The first two concern self-rule, understood as the region's authority in its own territory, and shared rule, understood as the region's authority in the country as a whole. Both items are coded following Hooghe et al. (2016). Europeanization is estimated through a survey question enquiring about the level of Europeanization of the respondent's own policy area on a three-point scale, ranging from “the EU does not play a role” to “the EU plays an important role.”

3.2 | Controls

Because preferences regarding the distribution of competences across governmental tiers in 18 policy fields may be affected by many other factors, we control for 8 other types of explanations. The first set of controls concerns élites' beliefs about the role of certain institutions and principles in the EU's system of governance. We enquired on a four-point scale whether “the European Commission should serve as a government to the EU” (“strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”), whether “the main players in the EU should be the member states—not the European Commission or the European Parliament” (same scale), and whether “Europe's

chance does not lie in increasing the influence of Brussels, but in the reinforcement of an effective self-administration at the most local level possible” (same scale).

The second type of controls concerns whether élites are positively predisposed to the EU in terms of the perceived benefits of membership to their region and their country. We asked them to assess the benefits that their country has drawn from its membership to the EU over the last 5 years on a four-point scale, ranging from “not beneficial at all” to “very beneficial.” We then repeated the question regarding the benefits their region has drawn from membership.

The third type of controls concerns demographics in terms of the age cohort (i.e., date of birth) and gender. The fourth type of controls distinguishes politicians from civil servants. The fifth type of controls regards élites' ideology on economic policy (0–10, from a greater role for government to a greater role for the free market) and on society and culture (0–10, from a more liberal to a more conservative socio-cultural view of the world). The sixth type of control concerns the respondents' educational background in terms of areas of study be it economics, law/public administration, or natural sciences/engineering (with “other areas” serving as reference category).

The seventh type of control concerns respondents' motivation for taking up a job as a regional politician or top-ranking regional civil servant. These ranged from valuing “job security,” wishing to work “closer to home,” having a “good salary,” the attraction of “good career opportunities,” the job covering an “interesting work domain,” or more specifically, a “desire to participate in the development of the region.” These choices were not mutually exclusive and respondents could hence indicate the array of factors which motivated them to work at the regional level.

Finally, we control for a set of contextual factors. These include the perception by citizens of the quality of government in the area in which they live, with an emphasis on corruption, impartial public services, and the rule of law (Charron et al., 2014). We also control for the region's unemployment rate (Eurostat), and the region's year of accession to the EU. The latter is only a quasi-country-level variable as there is within country variation the case of Germany with the West joining in 1957 and the East in 1990.⁴

3.3 | Methods

To analyze these data, we employ three-level random-intercept models. This is because we theoretically anticipate and empirically observe that observations are clustered within their region and embedding country. Calculation of the intraclass correlation indicates that between 22 and 25% of variation is attributable to country clustering and between 22 and 30% to regional clustering. Rather than opt for 67 regional dummies and 11 country dummies with a reference region and country, we employ multi-level models as these are more efficient and allow us to include regional and country level explanations too (Gelman & Hill, 2007).

We report data sources and descriptive statistics for all variables (Table 1) as well as correlations and scatter plots for all main variables (Figure 1). We also check for multicollinearity. In the parsimonious models, the average variance inflation factor (VIF) is at 1.99. The highest individual VIFs are 3.89 (shared rule), 3.61 (self-rule), and 2.29 (country population). For the full models with controls, the average VIF is at 1.71 with highest scores at 5.05 (self-rule), 4.68 (shared rule), and 3.03 (country population). These VIF levels are below recommended thresholds (Gujarati, 2003, p. 362).

4 | WHERE DOES THE HUNGER COME FROM? THE NUTRIENTS OF VARIATION

As displayed in Figure 2, there is much variation across the 18 policy areas covered. Only in the case of culture do regional élites prefer regional involvement to that of the state or the EU. Additionally, in health, unemployment, education, and police, regional élites have a desire for greater regional than EU involvement. The EU is, however, considered as the preferred level when it comes to the environment, consumer protection, agriculture, fisheries, foreign policy, immigration, asylum, and crime. The national level is preferred when it comes to health, fighting poverty and exclusion, unemployment, economic development, education, research and development, police, justice, and drugs. These distributions are in line with previous findings which had focused on EU competence allocation alone, on the national-EU trade-off, or the regional-national trade-off (Cerniglia & Pagani, 2009; Clark & Hellwig, 2012; Hooghe, 2003; Schakel, 2010).

Looking at the bigger picture, however, regional élites attribute most competence to the state level and least to the regional level, with the EU an intermediate position. Figure 3 represents the respective distributions. The dotted line indicates the grand average (logically situated at three points) and the thick lines represent local means, with the state mean at 3.6, the EU mean at 3.2, and the regional mean at 2.2. As reported in Figure 1, the largest trade-off is

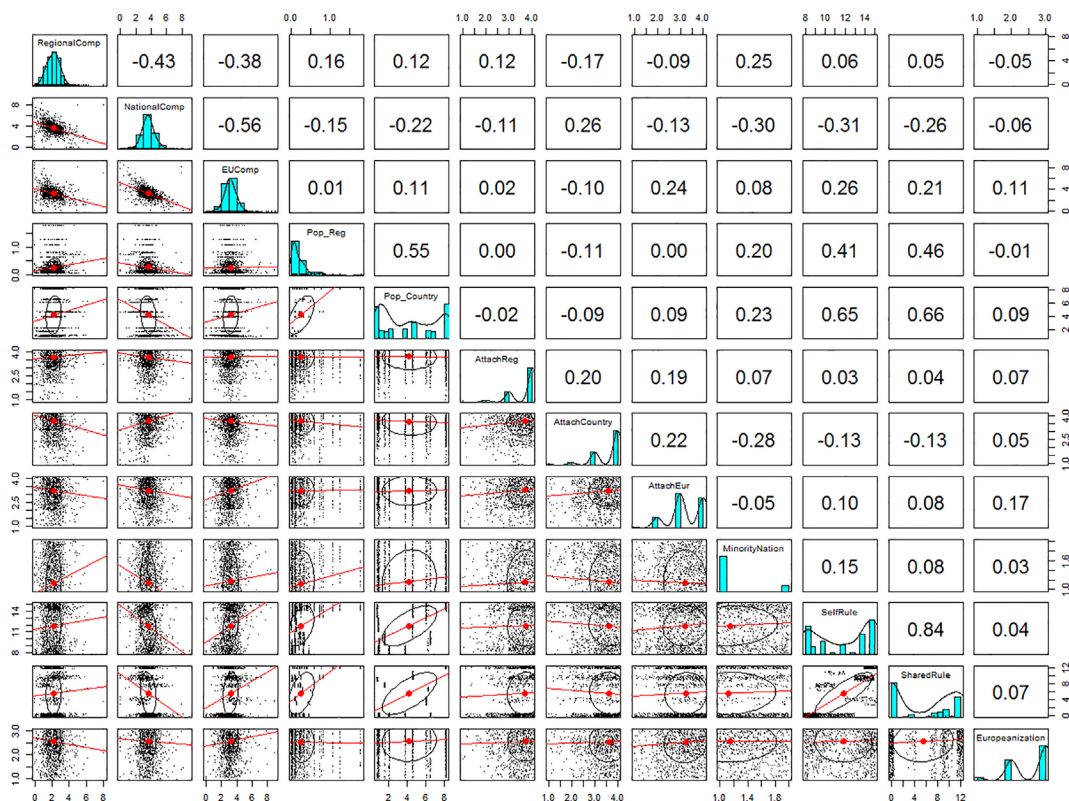


FIGURE 1 Correlation and scatter plot matrix.

Note: Bivariate scatter plots with confidence ellipses below the diagonal, histograms on the diagonal, and Pearson correlations above the diagonal. Controls not reported

between national and EU competence attribution ($r = -0.56$), while the weakest is between the EU and the regional tier ($r = -0.38$).

Figure 4 reports the findings from three-level random-intercept models of competence attribution. Each time, two models are reported. First a parsimonious model including only the variables of theoretical interest. Second, a model with an additional 22 control variables. The models are reported in table format in the supplementary material (Table S3).

4.1 | Scale

Overall, scale effects moderately affect regional élite preferences. National population size does not have a significant effect at any of the three tiers. The effect of regional population size is more marked. As functionalists would predict, regional demographic weight feeds hunger for competences at the regional tier itself. And indeed, the literature underscores that the size of a jurisdiction will drive variation regarding the width of its policy portfolio (Hooghe & Marks, 2009b; Oates, 1999; Schakel, 2010). The effect reported here is not large, but neither is it trivial. Regional competence across the 18 policy domains increases by about a third of a point (from a grand average of 2.2) for each additional 10 million inhabitants. In our sample, this would be the case for a regional élite being uprooted from an averagely populated region, such

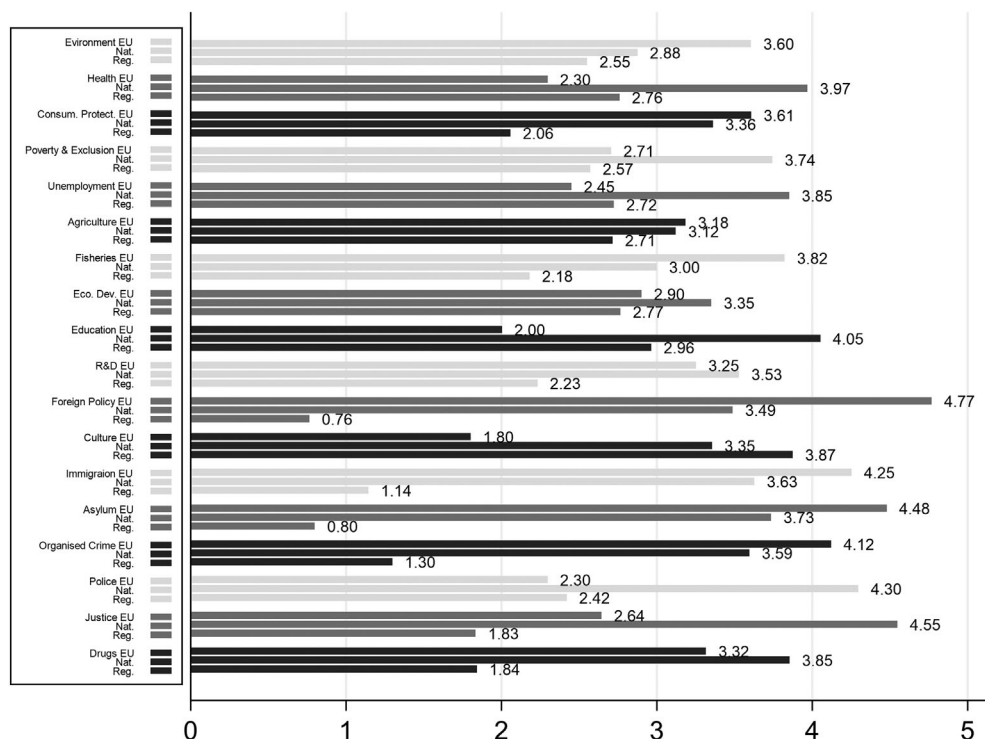


FIGURE 2 Three-tier distribution of competence across policy areas.

Note: Average distribution of points across 18 policy areas and three tiers of governance. EU = European Union; Nat = national tier; Reg = regional tier; Consum. Protect. = consumer protection; Eco. Dev. = economic development; R&D = research and development. $n = 1,499$

as the *Land* of Brandenburg (2.5 million inhabitants) and parachuted 400 km south to a large region such as Bavaria (12.5 million).

The effect is reversed at the EU level, indicating that élites in larger regions are more skeptical of EU empowerment. This finding is in line with arguments found in the literature that some of the larger regions have expressed some reticence toward EU empowerment, preferring a stricter implementation of the subsidiarity principle which would safeguard regional autonomy from the integration process (Jeffery, 2007, p. 11; Keating, 2004, pp. 200–201). This effect on EU competences should, however, be considered with some circumspection, as it is only present through suppression effects in the full model when the controls are factored in.

In sum, when it comes to shaping preferences, scale effects seem to be mostly at play concerning élites' own regional jurisdiction. There is some evidence that an élite's jurisdictional size may also shape her preferences further up in the system, at the EU tier. However, though the effect is of similar magnitude at that tier it is empirically less stable (i.e., of varying significance according to model specifications). In sum, there are good grounds to argue that scale pressures affect preferences within one's immediate surrounding but less so beyond.

4.2 | Institutions

Institutional logics play a greater role in the sense that they shape preferences over two governance tiers. Indeed, the effect of self-rule is particularly marked, as it decreases competence attribution to the national tier but increases it at the EU tier. The effects are of similar magnitude across the four models examining the national and EU tiers, ranging from 0.09 (EU,

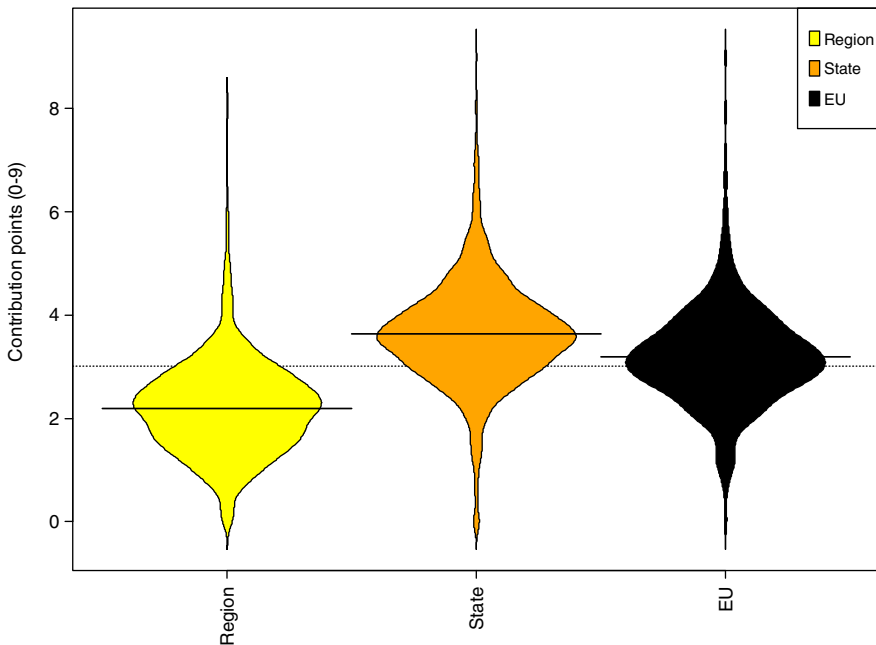


FIGURE 3 Distribution of competence at the regional, state, and EU tiers.

Note: Beanplots represent the distributions at the regional, state, and EU tiers, aggregated over 18 policy areas. Thick horizontal line represent means, thin dashed line represents the overall mean. $n = 1,499$

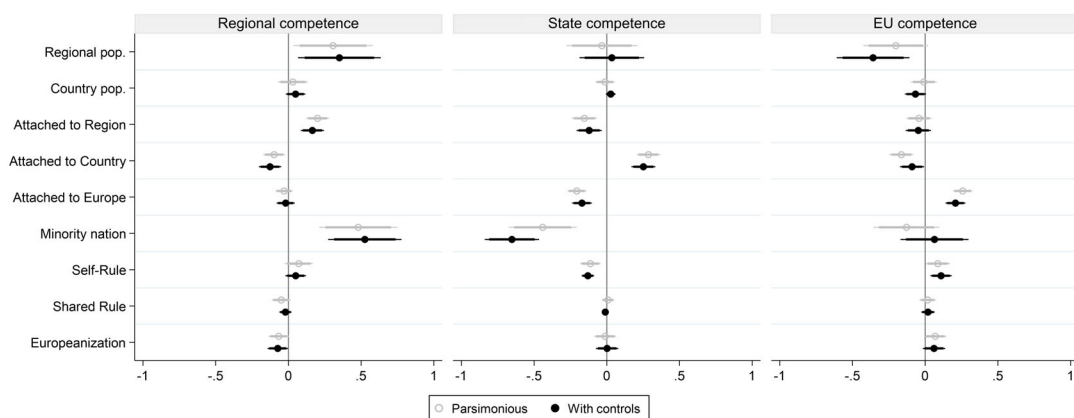


FIGURE 4 Competence attribution at the regional, state, and EU tiers.

Note: Three-level random-intercept models of the attribution of competence at the regional, state, and EU tiers. Unstandardized maximum likelihood estimates. Parsimonious models in gray, full models with controls in black. Controls not displayed. Extracted from models 1–6, see online Appendix for full Tables. Confidence intervals: 90–95%

parsimonious) to -0.13 (national, with controls). Considering that self-rule ranges from 8–15 in the current sample, an effect of ± 0.1 for each unit increase is not negligible on outcome variables averaging at 3.6 and 3.2, respectively. In our present sample, for example, an elite's distribution of points will decrease from 3.6 to 2.9 at the national tier and increase from 3.2 to 3.9 at the EU tier, as she moves from a self-rule context akin to that of Timiș, Romania (8 on self-rule), to Liguria, Italy (15 on self-rule). A discrepancy of one full competence point across 18 policy domains in favor of the EU vis-à-vis the national tier is certainly quite remarkable (i.e., 2.9 for the national tier vs. for 3.9 for the EU tier).

The negative effect of self-rule on national empowerment is in line with other empirical findings. Self-rule is about emancipation and autonomy from central government, so it is no surprise that self-rule is associated with a preference for disempowering the center (Hooghe & Marks, 2016; Massetti & Schakel, 2013). The positive effect of self-rule on EU empowerment is more unexpected. However, it is consonant with research highlighting that high self-rule regions have been more likely to embrace European integration by opening regional offices in Brussels (Donas & Beyers, 2013), staffing these offices more substantially (Tatham & Thau, 2014), expanding the size of the regulatory portfolio of these offices (Donas et al., 2014), and more broadly using a wider variety of interest representation channels to access the EU level (Huwyler et al., 2018). When presented with the trade-off, elites in self-rule regions tend to shift competences away from their state and toward the EU.

The lack of significance of shared rule and the instability of the Europeanization measure (only significant in Model 2) suggest that these factors are not essential to our understanding multi-tier competence attribution by regional elites. Undoubtedly, these factors affect the region-nation-EU triangle in many different ways, but less so when it comes to the specific competence attribution trade-off between those three tiers. It is quite possible that the Europeanization effect is drowned out across the 18 policy domains, while past research has highlighted both a “nationalizing” effect and a lack of effect of shared rule on EU-region issues (Donas & Beyers, 2013; Tatham & Thau, 2014).

4.3 | Identity

A more general explanation of preferences for multi-tier competence attribution is found in identity dynamics. Identity and place attachment are complex and multi-dimensional concepts (Raymond, Brown, & Weber, 2010). They range from questions of feeling of belonging all the way to broader place-based community markers such as connectedness, bonding, relatedness, and embeddedness. Within this context, place attachment is a prime driver of the sense of being part of a shared community (Antonsich & Holland, 2014; Devine-Wright, 2013; Hooghe & Marks, 2016, pp. 17–19).

And indeed, the *feeling of attachment* to the regional, national, and European scales comes across as a reliable shaper of preferences. But with a twist... or three. First, feelings of attachment shape preferences one level up or down, but no further. Regional attachment shapes regional and national preferences, but not European ones. European attachment, shapes European and national preferences, but not regional ones. Logically, national attachment plays a pivotal role: it affects all three tiers, with a stronger effect on the national tier itself.

Second, place attachment empowers the corresponding tier and disempowers the tiers placed in its immediate vicinity. Regional attachment results in greater competence attribution at that tier and less at the national tier. European attachment results in greater competence attribution at that tier and less at the national tier. National attachment results in greater competence at that tier and less at the below and above tiers.

Third, attachment has the strongest effect at the corresponding tier. Regional attachment affects regional competences most, European attachment affects European competences most, and national attachment affects national competences most.

The size of this attachment effect is not trivial. Looking at the more controlled setting of the full models, a three-point increase in regional attachment empowers that tier by almost half a competence point, from a sample average of 2.2 to a value of almost 2.7 while decreasing national empowerment from about 3.6 to 3.3. More strikingly, the same increase in national attachment empowers that tier by three-quarters of a point, from an average of 3.6 to almost 4.4, while decreasing regional and European competences to 1.8 and 2.9, respectively. Meanwhile, an identical increase in European attachment boosts that tier from an average of 3.2 to above 3.8 and decreases national competences down to about 3.1.

The effect of place attachment is remarkably robust. It is hardly altered by the introduction of a battery of individual-level controls taping into various preferences and beliefs. These regard the EU political system itself and the role and place of each tier on the regional-national-EU continuum. They crucially concern the Commission (the idea that the Commission should serve as the EU government), but also the member states themselves (that they should be the main players—as opposed to the Commission or the European Parliament). And the sub-national level itself (that Europe's future lies in the stricter application of the subsidiarity principle at the most local level possible—as opposed to increasing the influence of Brussels). Similarly, individual perceptions of the benefits derived from EU membership do not significantly alter attachment effects, even when broken down according to perceived benefits to one's region or country. Various other controls relating to ideological beliefs (market vs. state; liberalism vs. conservatism), and a series of socio-demographic indicators (ranging from education to sources of professional motivation) hardly affect the results. Place attachment, as an identity marker, seems to matter irrespective of an array of other individual preferences and beliefs.

The impact of these individual attachment measures is consistent with regional-level indicators of identity as illustrated by the rather strong effect of Brigeovich's (2012, 2018) "minority nation" indicator. Elites in "minority nations" empower their region by a full half point and disempower the national tier by almost two-thirds of a point. This effect is consistent with that of regional attachment. It is consonant with findings by other scholars using different measures of regional distinctiveness. Indeed, Hooghe and Marks (2016) find that stronger "territorial community" understood as prior statehood, linguistic distinctiveness, and peripherality from the center, accounts for much variation in regional authority, both cross-sectionally and over time (Hooghe & Marks, 2016, pp. 135, 140). In his qualitative work, Keating highlights how "territorial identity" has shaped rescaling processes at the meso level in Europe (Keating, 2013, pp. 18–9, 79–82). These processes have knock-on effects on party competition (concerning both state-wide and regionalist parties) all the way to systems of interest intermediation and the formation of territorial policy communities. In turn, they affect the structure and practice of government from the regional to the European levels (Keating, 2017a, 2017b).

4.4 | Illustrative cases

We illustrate those findings more concretely with three examples: the Swedish *län* of Kalmar, the Spanish *comunidad autónoma* of Catalonia, and the Czech *kraj* of Liberec. Figure 5 provides point predictions for each region and how these would vary according to different scenarios.

Elites in Kalmar score slightly lower than the sample average of 2.19 when it comes to regional empowerment (panel A). However, if its élites had the same lack of attachment to their country as Catalan élites, regional empowerment would increase from 2.01 to 2.30 (i.e., above the sample average). It would increase further to 2.83 if, additionally, Kalmar were to become a minority nation. Finally, Kalmar's élite would empower their region almost as much as their state—3.44 points—if they were attributed the large population of Nordrhein-Westfalen.

Elites in Catalonia are reticent to attribute competences to their state (panel B). This is due to ongoing disagreements regarding its 2006 Statute of Autonomy and claims to independence. They ascribe an average of 2.28 competence points to the state level, compared to a sample average of 3.6. However, if Catalonia had the self-rule of a Polish region, its weakened élites would be less reluctant to attribute competences to the state level (rise to 3.06). In addition, if these élites had sample-average values on the three attachment variables, state competences would rise to 3.55, that is, close to the sample average. An even more significant boost in state powers would occur if Catalonia ceased to be a minority nation (4.20 points). Interestingly, much of the Partido Popular's and Constitutional Court's opposition to the 2006 Statute of Autonomy centered around issues related to cultural heritage, the legal standing of the term "nation," and language policy—all markers of minority nationalism.

The Liberec *kraj* is slightly more miserly toward the EU than the sample average. At 2.9 competence points, its élites distribute fewer competences to Brussels than the average regional élite does (3.19). However, if its self-rule powers were to be upgraded to those of Liguria (Italy) they would become more generous, granting around 3.56 competence points. If its élites were, in addition, to feel as attached to Europe as their Italian colleagues of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, competence attribution would significantly increase to 3.79. Finally, if these same

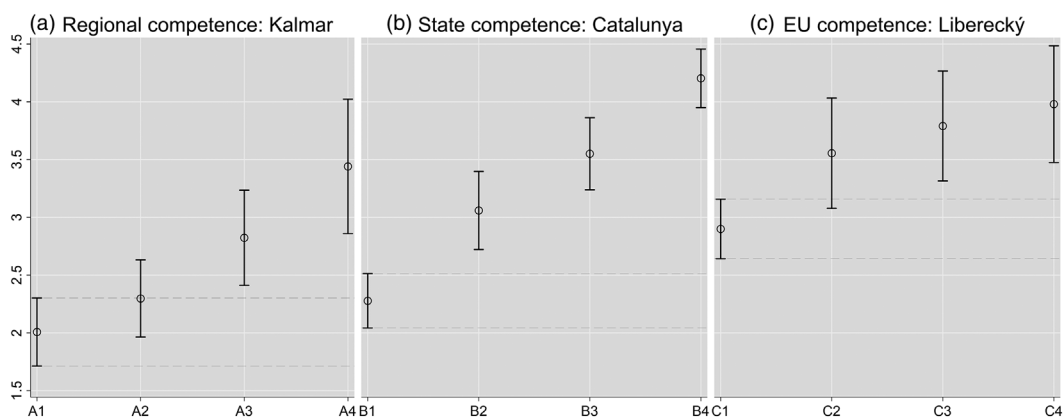


FIGURE 5 Model-based predictions of competence attribution for three illustrative cases.

Note: Predictive margins with 95% confidence intervals. Predictions are based on the full models with controls. Specified attributes are varied one at a time, all other variables held constant. Panel (a) displays regional competence attribution in the case of the Swedish *län* of Kalmar. A1 = model predictions when the explanatory variables take values for Kalmar. A2 = Kalmar values of country attachment are replaced with that for Catalonia, which are lower. A3 = in addition, Kalmar is designated as a minority nation. A4 = in addition, Kalmar is given the larger regional population of Nordrhein-Westfalen. Panel (b) displays state competence attribution in the case of the Spanish *comunidad autónoma* of Catalonia. B1 = model predictions for Catalonia. B2 = Catalonia attributed the lower self-rule values of a Polish region. B3 = in addition, attribution of sample-average values on the three attachment variables. B4 = in addition, Catalonia is no longer a minority nation. Panel (c) displays EU competence attribution in the case of the Czech *kraj* of Liberec. C1 = model predictions for Liberec. C2 = Liberec attributed the higher self-rule of Liguria. C3 = in addition, attributed the higher attachment to Europe of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol. C4 = in addition, attributed the lower country attachment of Catalonia

élites became as unattached to their country as their Catalan colleagues, shifts in competences to the EU would rise further to 3.98.

In sum, many paths lead to competence attribution. However, varying degrees of self-rule, population size, and—more importantly—mixes of attachment feelings and minority nationalism all help us better understand preferences toward more complex three-level architectures.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

This research is the first to explore the competence trade-off along the regional-national-EU continuum from the standpoint of *regional* élites. Based on a cross-national and cross-regional survey of directly elected politicians and top civil servants, it makes three arguments. First, regional élites, when asked about their preferred distribution of competences across 18 policy domains, tend to empower the national, over the EU, over the regional tier with the strongest trade-off between the national and the EU tiers, and the weakest trade-off between the EU and the regional tiers. Hence, although the distribution of competences is a zero-sum exercise, the ensuing tensions are unevenly distributed across the regional-national-EU triptych. Second, it finds support for explanations derived from scale and institutional logics. As functionalists

predict, jurisdictional size is a nourisher of aspirations for greater competences, while the existing institutional environment also conditions preferences. Third, it highlights that identity-based explanations are a crucial part of the story. Feelings of attachment are key to understand elite preferences toward the different tiers. Not only is their effect substantive, but it is also robust to the inclusion of a myriad of individual-level preference indicators, such as views on the role of the European Commission, of the member states, and of the principle of subsidiarity in the EU political system, or views about how much one's country and region have benefited from the EU. In other words, feelings of attachment matter even when key preferences and beliefs about multi-level governance are factored in.

Overall, these findings contribute to a growing body of evidence highlighting that identity and community logics are essential to understand the (existing and desired) architecture of government (Keating, 2017a, 2017b; Rokkan & Urwin, 1983). One can categorize these findings under the label of a "postfunctionalist theory of governance." The postfunctionalist approach recognizes that efficiency, functionality, path dependence, and institutional stickiness are all important to understand the evolution of governance structures. But it highlights that identity and community are of greater relevance still (Hooghe & Marks, 2009b, 2016).

This research could be further developed along a number of different lines of enquiry. For example, one may wish to explore variation across the 18 different policy domains or, alternatively, across various clusters or types of domains (Clark & Hellwig, 2012; Schakel, 2009, 2010). This would shift the research question from a more holistic approach (do certain factors affect competence distribution in general, across the board?) toward a more fine-grained exploration of competing dynamics possibly at play between contrasting families of policy domains. Another avenue would be to compare preferences either between different types of elites (e.g., regional vs. national vs. EU elites) or between elites and regular citizens (is there an elite-masses gap at the regional level too?). These issues have been studied regarding the triangular relation between citizens, national elites, and supranational elites (Hooghe, 2003; Müller et al., 2012), but never yet including regional elites. This would shift the research question toward issues of representation, preference congruence, and institutional-design responsiveness. A final avenue would be to replicate this study on the phenomenon of "sideways" delegation to different types of nonmajoritarian bodies such as regulatory agencies, courts, or independent central banks. While sideways dispersion has been studied in terms of its diffusion and consequences (Jordana et al., 2018; Peters, 2018), elite preferences for horizontal dispersion remain less well known.

For now, however, this article highlights that preferences regarding the distribution of competence across multi-tier systems are not idiosyncratic. Rather, several logics, including scale and institutional ones, shape them. More strikingly, identity logics play a crucial role. These logics have a holistic effect: they account for variation in preferences at a high level of abstraction (18 policy domains) and across the political-bureaucratic divide (directly elected politicians and top civil servants). If the existing, formal architecture of government can be described as "postfunctional," its preferred, imagined architecture can also be classified under the same label.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ A further issue is data availability at the regional level. While such economic, fiscal, and welfare measures are reliably available at the state level there is a dearth of such comparative data at the regional level.
- ² For a more elaborate discussion of scale effects and the regional economy, see Box S4 in the online Supplementary Material.
- ³ We do not here make more complex arguments about the primacy of “self-interest” versus “socialization” effects as driven by the existing institutional setup. These effects, though analytically distinct, tend to be tricky to disentangle empirically. Our argument is simpler: the existing institutional arrangements condition the preferences of the élites populating them.
- ⁴ We do not test for regionalist parties as this variable is collinear to the “minority nation” variable. We do not test for regional public opinion as the available public opinion data are not sampled at the regional level and existing regional-level survey data only cover part of the sample (see Henderson, Jeffery, & Wincott, 2013). We have additionally tested for regional structural funding (objective 1 funds). The variable is never significant.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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