

Ethnic party organizations in comparative perspective: the determinants of hegemony versus fragmentation

The main question the research aims to answer is why some ethnic groups align themselves as a block behind a hegemonic ethnic party (e.g. Hungarians in Romania and Slovakia, Germans in South Tyrol), while other communities are divided and multiple ethnic parties form (e.g. Catalans, Basques in Spain). A related question is when do ethnic party splits and mergers occur.

In order to answer this question, the first step is to construct an inventory of ethnic parties. The next step is to identify the elements of the political opportunity structure which leads to single/multiple ethnic party formation. This entails collecting and analyzing data about structural, institutional and agency-related variables. The structural variables refer to the characteristics of the ethnic groups (size, relative size, territorial concentration, the relative economic development of the region they inhabit, cleavages within the group etc.). The institutional elements of interest are the characteristics of the electoral system and of the party system of the country, the administrative organization of the state, as well as the degree of autonomy granted to the minority group. Finally, the number of ethnic parties may also be influenced by the goals of minority, and the behavior of majority and foreign/international actors (like kin states or international organizations).

The goal of the research is to construct a model with these elements and to test it on the data. First, a large-scale comparative analysis will be performed, followed by several in-depth case studies for both hegemonic ethnic parties and fragmented “ethnic party systems”.