

Hegemony or Competition? The Determinants and Organizational Consequences of the Number of Parties Representing National Minorities

Abstract

The research aims to answer two main questions. First, it addresses the puzzle 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). The second question refers to the consequences of the hegemony/division on the organizational features of these minority parties.

In order to answer these questions, 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 the nature of the groups (size, relative size, territorial concentration), and the institutional arrangements of the host countries (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). However, agency-related variables may also have an impact of the number of ethnic parties, as for instance the conflicts between leaders, factionalism within the ethnic group or alliances with political actors from the kin-state. A related question is when do ethnic party splits and mergers occur.

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”. These case studies will also address the second question, referring to the organizational consequences of hegemony/division. This will be performed drawing on the literature about party organizations, and will also require comparisons with the mainstream (majority parties) from the respective systems.

Introduction: the topic and the research question

This research is about the parties which claim to represent ethnic or national minorities, and aims to investigate the determinants of the formation of such parties, and the organizational aspects of these parties. It seeks to answer two main questions. First, it addresses the following puzzle: why does it happen that certain ethnic groups or national minorities are represented by a single party¹, while others display political pluralism and competition within, even to the point of ethnic party systems²? This means that the primary

¹ Like the Hungarians in Romania until 2008, the Hungarians from Slovakia since 1998, the Germans from South Tyrol, the Swedish-speaking minority from Finland, the Turkish minority from Bulgaria etc.

² Like the Basques and the Catalans in Spain, but also the Hungarians in Serbia or the Hungarians in Slovakia until 1998 etc.

concern is not whether a minority forms a party of its own or not, but rather that if a minority will form a party, then will it form only one, or more? The second question is a follow-up for the first, and seeks to explore the consequences of hegemony/pluralism on the organizational aspects of this party family.

Regarding the first question, a series of variables will be considered which may impact the political unity or fragmentation of ethnic groups. Some of these are related to the groups themselves (like size, geographical concentration, cleavages within the group), others to the institutional arrangements of the countries (primarily the electoral system, regulations referring to parties and the distribution of power between the different administrative levels in the state).

In relation to the second question, the aim is to compare the party organizations of hegemonic and competitive ethnic parties along a series of characteristics. Of course, this also requires assessing whether there is something specific about the organizational features of minority parties at all, when compared to the mainstream parties from the systems.

The relevance of the research is given by the fact that relatively little attention is devoted to these issues when it comes to ethnic minorities. Most of the time national minorities are considered to be compact, homogeneous groups, and the electoral basis of the ethnic parties the most stable within a particular party system. Although some authors tackle the problem of multiple parties for the same minority (e.g. Bochler 2006a), the topic remains underresearched. On the other hand, while the general literature about party formation will provide useful insights for the problem, it does not pay enough attention to the special context of ethnic groups and ethnic parties. The same applies to the organizational aspects, as most of the literature about ethnic parties concentrates on their role regarding interethnic relations and/or ethnic conflict, that is, approaches ethnic parties from the perspective of security and stability (e.g. Horowitz 1985, Birnir 2006) and neglects organizational aspects.

Ethnic groups and ethnic parties

Definition of ethnic parties

Numerous definitions are in use for ethnic or ethnoregionalist parties in the literature, and adopting one for a particular research will also help delimit the scope conditions.

Perhaps the best-known definition is the one coined by Donald Horowitz (1985: 291): “an ethnically based party derives its support overwhelmingly from an identifiable ethnic group (or clusters of ethnic groups) and serves the interests of that group.” Unfortunately this definition is too broad, as numerical inferiority of the groups is not a requirement. However, I don’t want to treat majority parties as ethnic parties, nor do I want to deal with cases where there is no clear ethnic majority, as it would be the case in some multi-ethnic societies like Belgium or Bosnia-Herzegovina, which implemented some sort of consociational designs. Instead, I am interested in those situations where some ethnic groups form a clear majority of the population, yet there are significant other national minorities too.

Another frequently encountered concept is that of “ethnoregionalist” parties. These definitions entail the condition that the party belongs to a minority, representing an ethnic minority and/or a distinct region. For instance, Huri Türsan’s definition considers that ethnoregionalist parties are “based on the two common denominators that unite them: (1) a sub-national territorial border and (2) an exclusive group identity.” (Türsan 1998: 5). The problem with this definition is that national minorities need not be concentrated in a particular region. Another definition is provided by Ferdinand Müller-Rommel (1998: 19): “[E]thnoregionalist parties are defined as referring to the efforts of geographically concentrated peripheral minorities which challenge the working order and sometimes even the democratic order of a nation-state by demanding recognition of their cultural identity.” Again, regional concentration is a requirement, moreover, the parties’ demands are set to a rather high standard. In a similar manner, for Lieven de Winter “the defining characteristic of

ethnoregionalist parties' programmes is undoubtedly their demand for political reorganization of the existing national power structure, for some kind of self-'government'." (Winter 1998: 204). The problem with these definitions is that some ethnic minorities may have less serious demands against the state. Some may be satisfied with securing some affirmative action or language rights for the members of the community, without aiming for autonomy, federalization or secession.

Finally, a definition that comes closer to the focus of my paper is given by Szász, (2003: 144). According to him, ethnoregionalist parties are primarily concerned with the "expression, recognition and protection of a distinct, ascriptive cultural identity and of the ensuing interests shared by the ascriptive minority group, including the accentuated development of the region inhabited by the groups' members."

For the purposes of this paper I adopt this definition, however, with a minor modification. The modified part is the last element of the definition: "*which may include* the accentuated development of the region inhabited by the groups' members". The proposed reformulation is more inclusive: it is no longer necessary that the party aims for differential regional development, however, the possibility is not excluded. In the remainder of the paper I will use the terms "parties of national minorities" and "ethnic parties" interchangeably, but regardless of formulation I will have in mind parties which stand for a national or ethnic group which is clearly a minority, and the parties must put forward some sort of demands on behalf of that minority. However, I do not require that these demands be of any intensity, neither that they be related in any sense to territory.

Ethnic groups and ethnic parties

As Derek Urwin puts it, we intuitively claim to know which groups are ethnic and which are not. Although this intuition is complicated by the fact that ethnicity is highly

malleable and its salience highly responsive to the political context (Urwin, 1983: 225-226), delimiting the potential electorates of ethnic parties (on the basis of criteria like group identity or the territory they inhabit) is still more straightforward than in the case of “mainstream parties”. Consequently it is reasonable to state that ethnic parties appeal primarily to certain visible, well-delimited subsets of society, at least when compared to the electorates of other parties. Moreover, the possibility of ethnic parties to target new segments of the electorate to increase their votes is much more limited than that of the mainstream parties, which can find it reasonable to forgo the votes of a particular segment of society if a larger gain can be expected from another segment. For ethnic parties losing the support of co-ethnics can hardly be compensated by votes coming from members of other ethnic groups.³ (Urwin 1983: 232-235).

Despite the fact that ethnic parties usually gather their support from the members of the ethnic group which they stand for, so their boundaries are exclusive group boundaries (Türsan 1998: 6), ethnicity does not necessarily displace all other group differences (class, religion, region), nor is it a guarantee for unconditional group solidarity. Some parties may or may not try to secure the support of the whole community (or at least the votes of as many members of the group as possible). Some may try but do not succeed. If they try, it follows that they will attempt to be broadly aggregative across the segments of society (Urwin 1983: 232-235). If they do not try, they may aim to represent only a certain segment. But it may also be the case that a single party is simply unable to aggregate all the interests of the different segments of the ethnic community. The latter possibilities will lead to multiple ethnic parties competing for the limited pool of ethnic votes.

Daniel Bochsler argues that multiple ethnic parties may be desirable because of the dangers posed by a single ethnic party going radical, but one can also say that the plurality of

³ This is true notwithstanding the fact that an ethnic party may receive votes from individuals who are not members of the group. Anyway, while an ethnic party need not emphasize ethnicity in its campaigns, it would be absurd to expect that it could appeal primarily to voters belonging to other ethnic groups.

political options which is taken for granted for the majority is denied to the minority. Bochsler believes that multiple minority parties may form due to the following reasons: (1) the country's cleavage system may rest not only on ethnic divides, but also on other cleavages that cross-cut the ethnic one, and members of ethnic group may not be interested in voting for an unitary minority party. (2) minority voters may be divided regarding the ethnic cleavage: some may prefer radical, others more moderate solutions. (Bochsler 2006a: 14-15). To the reasons listed above one might add other possibilities. There may exist personal conflicts between minority leaders. Moreover, international factors may have an impact, most importantly the existence of different allies among the political actors from the kin-state of the minority (as in the case of the Hungarian minorities from Romania and Serbia). Or the source of division within the ethnic group may be the legacy of the past: in the interwar period most of the Central and Eastern European countries had much larger national minorities than nowadays, and were characterized by parallel party systems for each ethnic group (Berglund et al 2004: 20-21).

Determinants of minority party formation

Ferdinand Müller-Rommel (1998) writes that the electoral success of ethnic parties depends on their capability to mobilize political resources, which may be external or internal to the group. External resources refer to access to the political system (electoral system, party laws), the stability of political alignments and the presence of influential allies. Internal resources on the other hand include leadership, organization and group solidarity (lack of factionalism).

In a similar manner, Daniel Bochsler (2006a, 2006b) examines the joint effect of the characteristics of ethnic groups and the electoral rules on the prospects of ethnic party formation. Regarding the group, the two most important variables are its size and its

geographical concentration. From the elements of the electoral system he considers the electoral formula (plurality/majority vs. proportional representation), the magnitude of the districts and the existence of national thresholds. Additional factors are the existence of special electoral rules for minorities (like reserved seats) and possible bans on ethnic parties.

Single Member Districts (SMDs) only allow representation for geographically concentrated ethnic minorities. Similarly, PR with a small district magnitude also creates effective thresholds within the districts which can pose serious problems for small and scattered minorities in the absence of a second, higher tier of the electoral system which would pool the votes cast all over the districts. On the other hand, the existence of national thresholds poses problems regardless of concentration, here only the size of the minority matters. Of course, special seats help minorities, while bans usually hurt them, fortunately they are not always applied, or are applied only selectively for some of the minorities (Bochsler 2006b: 7-10).

Bochsler also addresses the issue of political pluralism within a minority, that is, the conditions which are favorable to the formation of multiple parties for the same group. He argues that under SMDs minority pluralism is only possible if the group has an overwhelming majority in some districts, otherwise the split may lead to the victory of a majority party. Similarly, the existence of national thresholds may lead to the splitting of the vote, leaving all competitors outside the parliament. Not even the special electoral rules encourage pluralism, as most of the time only one seat is reserved to each minority, or even if there are more, such seats, the cases when more parties of the same minority get elected are rather rare empirically. Special rules facilitate the representation of multiple parties if more seats are set aside for the same minority, and the deputies are elected by PR (Bochsler 2006a: 15-16).

The problems identified by Bochslers about splitting the vote among more ethnic competitors and ending up without representation are referred to by Gary Cox (1999) as

coordination problems. While the features of the groups and the institutional system are objective variables, the problem of coordination introduces the actors, and their perceptions and priorities. Cox distinguishes between two types of coordination problems: the first arises in the local districts, the other refers to the coordination across the districts, between the different candidates or lists competing in the different local districts. The latter coordination problem may happen if a minority has more, not contiguous regional strongholds, and is important if there are national thresholds. The former type would occur whenever there are more competitors than seats that can be won by the potential votes available, and can have negative consequences regardless of the type of the electoral system. Cox proves that with M seats in a district, the number of serious competitors will be $M+1$ (a special case of this is Duverger's law, with SMDs leading to two parties). However, this will be the case only if three assumptions are met. For simplicity, the assumptions are presented for single member districts with two parties, and in one of the parties there are two potential candidates. However, it is possible to generalize to other electoral settings too. In list PR systems the two parties may stand for the left and the right, but in our case the party facing the coordination dilemma may stand for the minority group.

- 1) Everyone agrees that there are only two competitors with realistic chances to win. Or, with more seats, this means that the winner of the first $M-1$ seats can be foreseen and there is consensus about this.
- 2) the potential candidates of party A realize that their party will win the seat only if coordinates, otherwise party B will win. If one or both of the candidates believes that party A can win even if both of them enter, there will be multiple entries regardless of A's nomination.
- 3) both candidates care the most about the outcome of the current election, and not about securing long-term dominance within the party or future election outcomes. In the latter

cases the game become a multiple-shot affair, and in repeated games one of the most frequent strategies is to be tough in early rounds. By battling in the first round each faction demonstrates its patience and commitment (Cox 1999: 150-152).

While these assumptions refer here to the prospects of winning seats in districts, they could be adapted also for the issue of the national threshold. If the ethnic competitors fail to coordinate, they may split the vote that is necessary to reach the threshold.

The work of Cox points out that coordination failures may occur because candidates and parties underestimate their opponents' chances to win, because of the insufficient understanding of the electoral rules, but also because they do not want to coordinate (that is, the first two assumptions are met, but the third is not). This is the case when representation is subordinated to other goals that are deemed more important. This may occur for instance when there are very strong conflicts between leaders.

However, not all politics are conducted at the national level. Consequently it is not enough to account for the national electoral rules, also the other electoral arenas must be considered. In local or regional politics the chances of gaining representation can be much better for minority parties, especially if the groups are regionally concentrated and/or constitute the majority in certain administrative units. It may be that pluralism is limited to the local or regional level, while national elections are contested under umbrella organizations or electoral alliances. But it also may happen that because of their perceived strength at the local level some minority parties will become less ready for compromise, and will aim to secure their dominance. The existence of regional governments (federal units, autonomous regions) and the powers allocated by the state to these administrative units may influence the internal political life of minority groups. Consequently this aspect of the country's institutions must also be incorporated into the analysis.

In summary, an analysis of multiple minority party formation must take into account all three aspects discussed above: the characteristics of the group (size, territorial concentration, social stratification), the institutional framework (electoral system, regulations about parties, the existence of sub-national levels of government), and the interests of the leaders, their readiness to cooperate or to compete.

Organizational aspects

Müller-Rommel considers that an open and flexible party organization with high possibilities for participation on all levels of the hierarchy should enhance the mobilization of members and followers. (Müller-Rommel 1998: 24-25). Nevertheless, the empirical evidence is not conclusive about the organizational characteristics of minority parties. The results of Lieven de Winter's comparative research⁴ show that there are very few distinctive organizational aspects which would clearly differentiate ethnic parties from other party families. Perhaps the most straightforwardly distinct feature of ethnic parties is leadership. Most ethnic parties were led for a very long period of time by a single charismatic leader, often one of the founding fathers of the party. After the demise of this leader power was often transferred to an oligarchy or became dispersed among different organs, layers or personalities within the party. Why ethnic parties are more prone to charismatic leadership is explained by the fact that the ideology of the party is often blurred, which follows from their catch-all character, from the need for a message which would be equally well-received in different social strata. However, no clear pattern could be discerned regarding the concentration of leadership when compared to other party families (Winter 1998: 222-226).

⁴ Winter compared twelve ethnoregionalist parties from five western European countries, among others on the dimensions of leadership, participation opportunities to members, organizational centralization and factionalism. The countries were Belgium, the UK, Spain, France (Corsica) and Italy. However, his case selection is somewhat debatable: one of the most important ethnic parties from western Europe, the Swedish People's Party (*Svenska Folkpartiet*) from Finland was not included, while it is doubtful whether the *Lega Nord* from Italy, which was included, has anything to do with ethnicity, despite its regionalist character.

The second specific feature of ethnic parties was their high propensity to factionalism, which obviously followed from their broadly aggregative nature. (Winter 1998: 228).

On other aspects (party organization, emphasis on membership, rights of members to participate in decision-making, organizational centralization and hierarchy) ethnic parties did not display a distinctive pattern which would have differentiated them from other party families, instead considerable variation within the group could be witnessed.

Unfortunately, Winter's analysis failed to explain why this is so, as he did not attempt to come up with a model which would integrate the structural, institutional and agency-related factors which may impact party organizations. The size and the territorial concentration of the ethnic groups, the presence/absence of political pluralism within the ethnic community, the nature of the electoral system and of the regulations on political parties, as well as the goals of the parties may all have an impact on the organizational features of ethnic parties. Consequently Winter's findings should not dissuade us from dealing with the research questions asked in the beginning. Moreover, as I pinpointed in footnote 4, Winter's case selection was not unproblematic, and, what is especially important for my research, no cases from CEE were analyzed. What is especially important is that no attempt was made to compare hegemonic with competitive minority parties.

Outline of research design

The analysis will have two main steps. In the first step I will conduct a large-N comparative analysis, including all the cases that I can gather data on. In the second step I will select a few of the better-documented cases and conduct in-depth cases studies on these.

Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis of the study will be the ethnic group for the first research question (hegemony or competition), and the ethnic party regarding the second question (consequences

on party organization). Most of the states include more than one national minority, consequently there will be more cases selected from the same country. However, the different countries are characterized by varying structural and institutional settings, so despite the fact that the country is not the unit of analysis, some independent variables will refer to the country level.

A problem that has to be tackled stems from the fact that the number of political parties representing a particular ethnic group may change, some may disappear and new one may emerge. This calls for a longitudinal analysis, and has the consequence that a single minority group may be present as more than one case, depending on the changes in the independent variables. So more precisely the unit of analysis will be the ethnic group at a certain point in time. The time-frame of the analysis has still to be settled.

Scope conditions

Because the universe of ethnic politics is very broad, and ethnic political organizations can be encountered all over the world, it is necessary to delimit the scope of the study. A first scope condition is that the countries from which minority parties will be selected must be at least electoral democracies, because it makes no sense to talk about parties in the absence of elections. A second limitation has already been mentioned in the section about the definitions of ethnic parties. This scope condition is related to the relative strength of the ethnic groups: I will only deal with cases when there is a clear majority in the country.⁵ Similarly, I will have to set a lower threshold for the ethnic groups too. There would be more alternatives to accomplish this. An option is to select all those groups that displayed any sort of political activity. As the question is not whether the groups will form parties, but rather that how many parties they form, the use of this criterion is not problematic. Another option would be to

⁵ Though I am not sure about this. The alternative would be to keep the relative size of groups as a variable, and even a hypothesis can be formulated, that in countries with a more balanced ethnic composition the probability of having parallel ethnic party systems is higher.

exclude those minority parties which are able to get represented only because of the existence of reserved seats for minorities.

Finally, I am also not interested in ethnic parties which do not exclude the use of violence (which have (para)military wings, engage in terrorist attacks etc.), though their presence may indicate the existence of an important cleavage within the minority group. In other words, I don't want to deal with "subversive" parties, only with competitive ones.

Independent variables

As indicated in the literature review, three kinds of variables have to be considered: those related to the characteristics of the groups, institutional and agency-related. The first category entails the size of the minority, meaning its relative share of the population at large and in the region where the activity of the parties is concentrated, and their territorial concentration/dispersion. While the measurement of size is straightforward, capturing concentration may require some sort of index or indicator.

Institutional variables include the characteristics of the electoral system, the requirements for party formation and the vertical power distribution of the state. Regarding the electoral system, the interesting elements are the existence of a thresholds⁶ (applied for parties of minorities), the electoral formula (plurality/majority or PR⁷), and the special institutional arrangements like the different types of reserved seats.⁸

⁶ Thresholds should be understood here in a broader sense, referring not only to the parliamentary threshold, but also to the conditions that parties must fulfill in order to be able to field candidates or lists at elections, as sometimes these conditions can be met more difficultly by minorities.

⁷ Mixed systems will require careful analysis in order to decide which is the more important component. At the same time mixed systems are usually providing the best of the two worlds for the minorities, because of their alternative thresholds: concentrated minorities may benefit from the fact that winning in one SMD may be enough, while dispersed groups may gain representation by meeting the national threshold. There are, however, exceptions. The new Romanian mixed system for instance contains a threshold of 5% or victory in 6 SMDs, which does not enhance the chances for the representation of the minorities, and strongly discourages multiple ethnic parties.

⁸ I am not sure about this either. The alternative would be to treat the existence of reserved seats as a scope condition and to exclude those minority organizations from the analysis which gain representation due to such special arrangements.

The agency-related factors will require a mapping of the divisions and conflicts within the ethnic groups. The bases of these divides may be structural (cleavages cross-cutting the ethnic cleavage, which may be regional, class-related or other), but they can also stem from personal conflicts of interests between leaders. The history of these divisions has to be traced, and this will involve the analysis of factionalism within the parties, as well as the party splinters or purges (Janda 1980). Another aspect that must be considered here is the existence of long-lasting alliances between minority and majority actors, as well as the existence of strong ties between minority politicians and political parties from the kin-state of the minority, if such a state exists.

All these aspects will be measured at multiple points in time, as all of them may change. Even the size of a minority may change,⁹ but changes in the electoral legislation of a particular country will occur more frequently than this, not to mention the relationships between minority leaders or their goals.

Dependent variables

Regarding the first research question the dependent variable is straightforward: it will be a dichotomous one, indicating the presence or absence of multiple political parties for the same minority. However, some criterion must be applied to differentiate between relevant and fringe political organizations. A threshold of relevance can be set, for instance securing a certain proportion of the votes of the minority group, or a certain number of local offices.

The second aim of the research, namely the organizational differences between the minority parties will require a much more complex operationalization. Here I will rely on the indicators developed in two comprehensive comparative efforts for the study of party organizations: the *International Comparative Political Parties Project* (Janda 1980, Janda & King 1985), and the comparative project on party organizations in western democracies

⁹ Perhaps the most infamous example for this is the dramatic decrease of the number of the Serb population in Croatia following the Yugoslav wars and ethnic cleansing.

coordinated by Richard Katz and Peter Mair (Katz & Mair 1992, Mair 1994). The organizational aspects in the ICPPP are grouped into four dimensions: organizational complexity, involvement of membership, cohesion (factionalism) and concentration of power. Katz and Mair assess the parties on different dimensions: the electoral and governmental record of the party, the size and structure of membership organization (qualifications, rights and obligations of members, the number of basic units of the membership organization), the number of party staff, the balance of power between the party in central office, public office and the membership organizations, and the structure of the parties' finances (state subventions vs. membership fees and other contributions). I am not sure yet which out of these numerous indicators I will employ, this depends on the data I can get. However, this will only be done for the few parties which will be selected for case studies.

The analysis of party organization must proceed on two levels: that of the formal and of the actual organizational practices (the latter being often informal). Analyzing the first is easier: party statutes and data about the organizations suffices for this, and these sources are also relatively easy to obtain (though there might be problems in obtaining older party documents and statistics about membership etc.). Although there may be considerable discrepancy between the official story contained in the documents and the actual practice, a longitudinal analysis may make more out of the official documents, as it is reasonable to expect that changes in statutes will sometimes reflect a consecration of patterns of behavior which were previously practiced informally (Mair 1994: 6-8).

The actual organizational practices will be more difficult to decipher. It will be reconstructed from press materials, sources from inside the parties and finally interviews with party people. To a certain degree the analysis of personnel overlap between different organs or faces of the party may also be helpful for the mapping of the actual power distribution (Biezen, 2005).

Case selection and methods

While the purpose is to construct a database that is as comprehensive as possible, I am aware that it will be impossible to gather data about the whole population of minority parties in the world. However, the minimum is to compile such a dataset about the western world, as well as about Central and South-Eastern Europe (and possible some FSU countries). As mentioned above, the analysis will have two main steps. In the first step I will conduct a comparative analysis, while in the second step I will select a few cases and perform in-depth case studies. The case selection for this second step will be done in such manner that the selected cases must contain instances where there is a single ethnic party and also cases where there are multiple minority parties.

Though not entirely clear at the moment, the first step of the analysis will be performed using statistical methods and/or QCA, while the in-depth case studies may involve process tracing (of the development of the parties in light of the institutional and other changes). The research will also require interviewing party people, at least for the case studies.

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