

Rubén Ruiz Rufino

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The fall of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe last decade has brought to the academic arena interesting issues and debates concerning how new polities should be organised. Among these issues institutional design appears as a very attractive one to me. The transition from non-democratic regimes towards democratic regimes posits interesting questions that are even more attractive when we consider the ethnic heterogeneity that these countries have. These two issues, institutional design and ethnic heterogeneity, are precisely the main interests of my research. Concretely, I am interested in seeing the effects of institutions in the stability of these new created democratic regimes. In order to narrow the idea of institutions, I would like to concentrate only upon one political institution: the electoral system. I have decided to study this institution because, following Schumpeter, elections are the most important key to understand democracy. One of the key institutions when transiting towards democracy is precisely how elections, and therefore political representation, are going to work. The electoral system will tell us what are the criteria for the candidates to be elected, the criteria to form political parties or how parliamentary seats will be distributed. Since elections mirror political representation, by looking at all these issues we will have an idea about how is the interaction between this institution and ethnic minorities.

The hypothesis that I have in mind, and that I would like to test in my research is the following. We can understand institutions as long run equilibria that are difficult to be changed once they are adopted –think for example in the U.S. electoral system. Democratic stability might depend precisely on issues like this one: the more difficult institutions are to be changed, the smaller the uncertainty about future political outcomes citizens will have. If we can conceive institutions as instruments that are very difficult to be changed, and if we accept that democratic stability requires some degree of certainty about future political outcomes, then we can find a problem in central and eastern European countries. In Russia, Albania or Romania we can see how these institutions have changed several times

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concerning the representation of ethnic minorities. What kind of explanations can we find to understand this continuous changes? What are the roles that minorities are playing in these changes? Can we infer from here that only in more homogeneous countries we can expect durable institutions? Are the institutions of these democracies the result of concrete political opportunities that may change in the near future? Can democratic stability be reached in that way? Furthermore, if we observe that in some cases the changing institutions are pluralist in the *Lijphartian* sense, may not be the case that the distinction drawn by Lijphart loose validity in these cases?

These are questions that can be conceived by just having a look at the institutional situation of central and eastern Europe. How I would like to answer them is the main purpose of my thesis. My hypothesis is that institutional changes will be more frequent in those countries where the distribution of forces between the different ethnic groups is more or less balanced or where minorities are very well organised and represent the key to form governments. If I provide an answer to this questions, I think I could enrich the existing body of the literature that is lacking a study about the impact of minorities in the election and durability of political institutions. I think that minorities must not be underestimated and their importance to understand political processes is paramount. It is for this reason that a serious study about the behaviour of minorities in these countries is very much needed, and I think that observing their reactions towards institutions like the electoral system can help very much.

Minority behaviour is then, the main independent variable of this research, being durability of institutions the dependent variable. I have not thought very much about the methodological design to carry out my research. I only have some ideas about how I could study this topic, however, I am sceptic about them and I hope you help me as much as possible here. I think that a rational choice approach could be helpful to understand these issues given the nature of the problem. We have clear actors, outcomes and preferences. I think that approaching the problem from this perspective could be a good idea. I also think that some qualitative work is unavoidable in order to understand exactly the minorities of

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the countries that I will finally choose. But since I would like to choose as many countries as possible, I would also like to use some statistical analysis.

In general, I would like you to tell me about the feasibility of my hypothesis, the reasoning behind them and whether the election of the electoral system is a right to study what I wish. I also would like to you to help me choosing the countries, this is where I am having more troubles and since many of you come from this part of Europe, I expect you to help me in this aspect of my research.