

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS: MAY DRAFT

The study of electoral systems as a dependent variable is an issue, which has been treated very little in the literature. The questions, as Lijphart rightly points out, are: what are the causes of choosing different electoral systems? Some interesting answers have already been presented in the literature. In this way, Rogowski (Rogowski 1987) explains how the adoption of proportional representation (PR) electoral systems is more likely to happen in closed trade-dependent countries.

Some years before Rogowski wrote this article, Rokkan offered a first causal explanations to illustrate why European countries decided to change their electoral systems (Rokkan 1970) For Rokkan there were two main reasons to explain why electoral systems changed from majoritarian models to proportional representation models at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the first place, minority protection became an important issue. The second reason that Rokkan observes to explain the adoption of new electoral systems in European countries at the turn of the last century is the adoption of universal suffrage. There exist alternative mechanisms to those proposed by Rokkan that can explain in a different way the decision to change the electoral system. Boix based these mechanisms upon the calculus that governing elites make in order to preserve as much as possible their power.

The three studies that I have mentioned here try to provide valid mechanisms to explain the adoption of a specific kind of electoral system. The explanations of these studies are,

though, focused either on industrialized countries or in European countries. There is no explicit reference to cases of new democracies and the kinds of mechanisms that might explain the adoption of electoral systems there. One of the purposes of my research tries, precisely, to provide an explanation of those mechanisms that account for the differences in the selection of electoral systems regarding the inclusion of minorities in Central and Eastern Europe. By electoral system, I will refer here to all pieces of legislation aimed at the setting up of the rules required to organise competitive elections and establish political representation.

The selection of Central and Eastern Europe is attractive for at least two reasons. Firstly, because they are countries that can be classified as new democracies and still today are undertaking a process of institutional design. Secondly, because they are countries clearly marked by ethnic cleavages that may set out interesting questions regarding the design of the electoral system. Concretely, in Central and Eastern Europe we find evidence that pushes us to ask the following question: given that almost all these countries are characterized by the existence within their border of different ethnic minorities, why do some countries choose an electoral system that provides mechanism to incorporate these minority groups in the legislative or executive process and why other countries do not? The issue, then, is not only why one country choose a Majoritarian or a PR system but rather, why in some countries we find electoral system where minorities find more easily the access to political representation than in other.

I think that the electoral system is a key institution in any polity since it translates the votes obtained in elections into seats in the legislative chamber. The choice of electoral system

can effectively determine who is elected and which parties gain power. Thinking of countries where different groups must live together, we can infer the hypothesis that all groups will prefer an electoral system that allows them to have the greatest representation as possible.

A brief survey of the relationship between ethnic minorities and electoral systems in Central and Eastern Europe can illustrate the variations that exist in this respect among these countries. Attending at the degree of representation that electoral systems provide to minorities, we can classify the countries following four criteria¹. Firstly, we can identify those countries that are completely opposed to the representation of ethnic minorities. As examples, we find Albania and Bulgaria.

Secondly, we find countries that ignore the existence of ethnic minorities following very strictly the constitutional principles of equality before the law and the principle of no discrimination on ethnic or national grounds. This is the case of the Czech Republic. Under this criterion, we also find countries that have important ethnic minorities and have experienced strong nationalist movements. These countries have opted for reducing interethnic tensions in the electoral arena as a means to obviate a very important source of internal conflicts. Some examples are Slovakia, Ukraine, Macedonia, Belarus and above all Moldova.

¹ About this see, Carlos Flores Juberías, Cuadernos Constitucionales de la Cátedra Fadrique Furió Ceriol. Nums 26/27 1999

Thirdly, we find countries that back ethnic representation. This is considered as an intermediate strategy. It is half way between ignoring ethnic diversity when choosing an electoral system and guaranteeing ethnic minority representation in national parliaments. Poland, Hungary and Lithuania represent this position. Finally, there are some countries that fully guarantee ethnic minorities in national parliaments. There are constitutional precepts as well as electoral laws that expressly recognise ethnic minorities a minimum number of seats in the parliament as well as in local governments. Romania is an example of this.

It is also interesting to point out the high political instability of the governments in these countries and the difficulties that these countries have to find stable coalitions. This political instability, understood in terms of the incapacity of institutions to last in time, leads to another point that I would like to study in my research. By looking at industrialised democracies, we can see how their political stability depends in great deal in the stability of their institutions. Stability, again, is understood as the capacity to last in time. So, an institution is stable when it does not change substantially along time. In Central and Eastern Europe this does not seem to be the case at least in the case of electoral systems. Another hypothesis, then, could be inferred from here. In countries highly marked by strong ethnic cleavages the instauration of stable institutions- the electoral system, for example- is impossible *as long as all parties are not in the same situation in relation with that institution*².

² Please note the emphasis on the last part of the hypothesis. I would like to make clear that there are countries highly marked by ethnic or religious cleavages –the Netherlands- that do have stable institutions. But my point presents exactly a contrast with cases like this. In the Netherlands, institutions accommodate minorities including them in the decision-making process. This does not seem to be the case in Central and Eastern Europe.

My research has, therefore, a double purpose. On the one hand, it tries to account for the differences that explain why given similar ethnic heterogeneity among Central and Eastern European countries, there exist differences in their electoral systems regarding ethnic minorities. What are the reasons that explain such differences? What are the mechanisms that activate ethnic representation in national parliaments? On the other hand, the research tries to answer a more fundamental question. By looking for the reasons that tries to explain why some electoral systems have changed over time regarding this issue and why some other have not, we can ask whether it is possible to reach stable institutions –like the electoral system- in these countries.

Methodology

Since I am studying electoral systems, the unit of analysis of my research will be those countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The sample, therefore, will have a maximum of 26 countries. The number of countries that I use will depend upon the kind of analysis that I finally adopt. My idea is, however, to carry out a more quantitative analysis since I would like to take into consideration the higher number of countries as possible. Nevertheless, I realise that qualitative research must also be necessary in order to properly identify the mechanisms that will explain the questions at stakes. I also would like you to tell me about the possibility of using game theory in my approach.

The dependent variable is the electoral system. Because I use the access of ethnic minorities to political representation as an example to explain the differences in the election

of the electoral system, the definition of the dependent variable must circumscribe to these issues. Lijphart, following Rae, explains how differently electoral systems as a dependent variable can be understood (Lijphart 1985:7). The idea that I have in mind is to formalise the classification of the electoral systems in relation with the incorporation of ethnic minorities that I explained above. Thus, I would have a dependent nominal variable with four different categories with some variation among them as I showed in the previous pages.

To formalise the dependent variable I would use a combination of the following elements. Firstly, I would take into account the electoral formula and its repercussion in facilitating representation to ethnic minorities; concretely I would study the plurality and majority methods, the various forms of PR or semi-proportional methods. District magnitudes are also important elements to be taken into consideration. Here I would concentrate on the number of seats or representatives per district. Also important to define the different categories of the dependent variables are the size of the legislature- this obviously affects the degree of proportionality that an electoral system can achieve; suffrage restrictions and registration requirements; the ease of party and candidates access to the electoral process- e.g. candidate eligibility requirements, signature-gathering rules, bans on anti-system parties; and finally, special features for translating votes into outcomes- electoral thresholds in some PR systems. I think that by using these elements, I can get a very close approximation of the electoral situation in every country regarding how minorities get access to political representation and properly classify the countries in each category.

The main independent variables will be based on both how majority and minority groups behave in relation to these issues³. My main independent variables will derive from the mechanisms that will explain the possible differences among countries regarding electoral systems. I guess that Boix hypothesis will be tested and therefore, the evolution of the strength of those political parties representing the whole citizenship or the majoritarian group will be important. Also the strength of ethnic minorities political parties or organisations will be important. How the party system is organised or how fragmented the political spectrum will also be key variables. Minority size, geographical distribution or minorities relations and behaviours with other groups will have to be used as well. Institutional variables like federalism or degree of presidentialism are also key variables that may help me understand the issue at stake.

As I have explained, the purpose of my research is double. This has implications for the methodology. In the first place, I would like to study the current electoral systems and see how it accounts regarding political representation for ethnic minorities. Secondly, I would like to see how every electoral system has evolved since the first competitive election. I have decided to concentrate on current electoral systems to account for differences in order to avoid possible spurious relationships. I could have chosen the electoral system that was used when the first competitive election took place but then, I was in danger of obtaining results that maybe were produced by the transition itself and not by the interaction of the variables I am interested in. My intention is to start the analysis in the first competitive

³ By behaving, I mean the degree of political protest and rebellion that groups acquire. These degrees can be obtained from Gurr's *Minority at Risk* database.

election, as I said before, and then observe how the electoral system has evolved, if it has, in relation with minorities until the last general election I have information.

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