

# Ethnic Politics, Regime Support and Conflict in Central and Eastern Europe

Julian Bernauer

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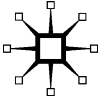
# Ethnic Politics, Regime Support and Conflict in Central and Eastern Europe

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First published 2015 by  
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-1-349-56006-6 ISBN 978-1-137-48169-6 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1057/9781137481696

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

*To Gwendolyn, Valentin and Johanna*

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# Acknowledgements

This book was mainly developed between 2008 and 2011 during my time at the University of Konstanz. I thank Professor Peter Selb (University of Konstanz) and Professor Thomas Bräuninger (University of Mannheim) for their excellent scholarly mentoring. The Heinrich Böll Foundation (Berlin) has facilitated the work both in financial and non-material terms with a scholarship granted between April 2009 and December 2011. There are numerous other people from whose expertise and support I have greatly benefited while working on this book, and without detracting from any of the others, I like to thank in particular Daniel Bochsler and Adrian Vatter.

Chapter 3 is partially based on material reprinted from *Electoral Studies* 30(4): Julian Bernauer and Daniel Bochsler, 'Electoral Entry and Success of Ethnic Minority Parties in Central and Eastern Europe: A Hierarchical Selection Model', pp. 738–755 (2011), with the permission of Elsevier and Daniel Bochsler.

Dissertation at the University of Konstanz (original title: "Descriptive Parliamentary Representation of Ethnic Minorities in Central and Eastern Europe. A Quantitative-Comparative Analysis of Determinants and Consequences"). Examination date: 20 April 2012. Referees: Prof Dr Peter Selb and Prof Dr Thomas Bräuninger.

# 1

## Partisan-Descriptive Ethnic Minority Representation

Does the organization of politics along ethnic lines do more good or more harm? Scholars have long debated this seemingly simple question (Lijphart, 1977; Horowitz, 1985) without reaching a final answer. Case-wise evidence can support either side. While for instance power-sharing ‘consociational’ democracy and ‘politics of accommodation’ at the elite level (Lehmbruch, 1967; Lijphart, 1968, 1977; Steiner, 1974) have served some plural western European countries such as the Netherlands or Switzerland well, Belgium has recently experienced difficulties. In central and eastern Europe, the most extensive, externally enforced models of balancing power between ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina or Kosovo have not yielded the expected pacifying effects (Kasapovic, 2005; Taylor, 2005). In most of the ethnically diverse central and eastern European countries studied in this book, no such ‘consociational’ (or an alternative ‘centripetal’, see Horowitz, 1985) model of ethnic integration has been implemented, but the same question whether the inclusion of groups increases or decreases the stability of these systems remains of interest. While Turks in Bulgaria are well integrated in political, social, and economic terms, the same is not true for Roma communities in many countries, and the possible parliamentary representation of Russians in Estonia has neither taken off nor helped much.

This book analyses the empirical political situation of ethnic minority groups in central and eastern Europe, which implies a research focus involving two basic corner stones: the dominating electoral rule in the region is proportional representation, and (partly as a consequence) ethnic minority parties are widespread agents of group representation. Hence, a test of the performance of proportional representation via ethnic parties in terms of ethnic integration is provided. The results

of the empirical analysis then partially answer the big question of the benign or malign character of descriptive representation regarding political stability.

Central and eastern Europe is well suited for testing a 'proportionalist' vision of ethnic accommodation for a number of reasons. First of all, the region is highly ethnically diverse and has a history of ethnic conflict (Brubaker, 1996). Also, while the countries studied in this book either use proportional representation or mixed electoral systems (Shvetsova, 1999; Tiemann, 2006), electoral thresholds vary widely enough to test the influence of electoral rules on representation; there are many cases of ethnic minorities without their own ethnic parties or ethnic representation; and in some cases descriptive representation has been associated with stability and in others with conflict (Birnir, 2007, p. 3). Taking these observations together, the puzzling question is not only whether and when descriptive representation does more good or harm, but also why only some, and which, groups are exactly represented descriptively. This calls for contextual or group-level explanations, in particular as for example the vote shares obtained by ethnic minority parties are only partially explained by their population shares (see Figure 1.1). Hence, in addition to testing the consequences of descriptive representation for ethnic conflict, parts of the book are dedicated to the explanation of levels of ethnic-partisan representation.

To give a few stylized examples of the logic of the research in the book, consider the cases of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria, the Hungarian minority in Romania, and the Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia. These ethnic minority groups show success and failure of partisan-descriptive representation respectively and the consequences for political stability. The Turkish minority in Bulgaria is mainly represented in a partisan-descriptive way by the 'Movement for Rights and Freedom' (MRF). The ethnic group faced discrimination and anti-Turkish activities such as campaigns for name changes from Turkish to Bulgarian or bans on the Turkish language and customs under Communist rule (Birnir, 2007, p. 131; Bugajski, 2002, p. 810; Warhola and Boteva, 2003). In the Post-Communist era, the party was remarkably successful in mobilizing its voters and gaining parliamentary as well as repeatedly executive representation despite a nominal ban on ethnic parties in Bulgaria (Birnir, 2007, pp. 130–6; Riedel, 2010, pp. 690, 700). The MRF even assumed the flexible and pivotal role of 'king-maker' not unlike the German liberal party ('Freie Demokratische Partei'; Birnir, 2007, p. 130; Warhola and Boteva, 2003). Discounting some recent allegations of corruption (Riedel, 2010, p. 700), the case of the MRF representing its constituency in government (Birnir, 2007, p. 136) demonstrates the success of the

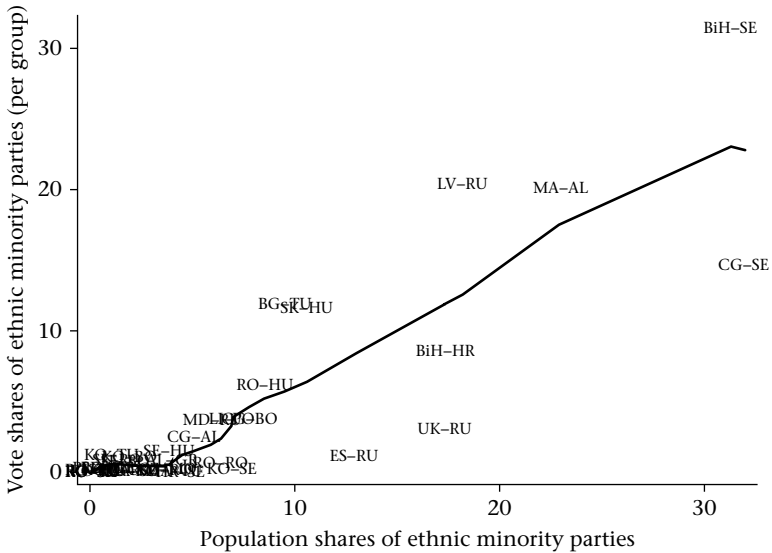


Figure 1.1 Relative group size and group-level vote share of ethnic parties for 39 ethnic minority groups

Note: Local regression line displayed. Discernible groups: BiH-SE = Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, LV-RU = Russians in Latvia, MA-AL = Albanians in Macedonia, CG-SE = Serbs in Montenegro, BG-TU = Turks in Bulgaria, SK-HU = Hungarians in the Slovak Republic, BiH-HR = Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, RO-HU = Hungarians in Romania, UK-RU = Russians in Ukraine, CG-AL = Albanians in Montenegro, SE-HU = Hungarians in Serbia, ES-RU = Russians in Estonia, RO-RO = Roma in Romania, KO-SE = Serbs in Kosovo.

'Bulgarian ethnic model' of accommodation and participation as proclaimed by the MRF's long-time leader Ahmed Doğan (Riedel, 2010, p. 700). More generally stated, this shows the potential of ethnic politics to stabilize a political system and to be analysed through the theoretical lenses of general political science (Birnic, 2007), which is also at the centre of attention in this book. Similarly, the Hungarian ethnic minority party 'Hungarian Democratic Forum' (UDMR) in Romania demonstrates how inclusion in the executive can reduce antagonisms between ethnic groups (Birnic, 2007, pp. 119–30). Hungarians in Romania suffered from discrimination before and blame-shifting for the dire economic situation on behalf of the government shortly after the end of Communism, and claims of autonomy were the response at times, which have been moderated by access to power (Birnic, 2007, pp. 119–24). Notably, the two cases discussed also show that simple representation

in parliament does not necessarily suffice to satisfy minority demands, unlike participation in the executive branch.

Other examples tell less successful stories for different reasons. Russians in Latvia and Estonia were members of the dominant group during Soviet times and, in particular in Latvia (Schmidt, 2010, pp. 128–30), have been struggling with issues of status, language and citizenship since the independence of the state. Although a good share of Russians in Latvia are non-citizens (Schmidt, 2010, p. 128), still around 20 per cent of those eligible to vote are ethnic Russians, while this number is slightly lower in the Estonian case. In the Latvian case, Russians are regularly represented in parliament (Schmidt, 2010, p. 156), for instance with the two ethnic parties ‘For Human Rights in a United Latvia’ (PCTVL) and ‘Harmony Centre’ (SC) in 2006 jointly obtaining a vote share very proportional to the population share. On the other hand, Russians in Estonia have failed to coordinate successfully into a strong ethnic party (Bugajski, 2002, p. 77; Lagerspetz and Maier, 2010, p. 90). While the group gained representation in parliament in 1995 with the ethnic electoral coalition ‘Our Home is Estonia’, it has more recently failed to clear the electoral hurdles, potentially also due to a vanishing salience of ethnic issues (Lagerspetz and Maier, 2010, p. 90). Hence, the partisan-descriptive representation even of large ethnic groups can fail for varying reasons, and in both cases the groups have not gained participation in the executive.

A few cases fit less neatly into the framework of this book, which pursues a systematic analysis of the determinants and consequences of partisan-descriptive representation. In many countries, Roma communities constitute a special ethnic minority without a true homeland (Fearon, 2003, p. 201) and are often subject to discrimination, suffer from socio-economic deprivation and generally ‘exist perennially on the margins of societies’ (Barany, 2002, p. 1). The political fractionalization of the groups (for instance in Hungary, see Bugajski, 2002, p. 365) and fundamental issues related to their socio-economic status such as the buying of votes<sup>1</sup> suggest that the mechanisms of partisan-descriptive representation might well fail. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, deep ethnic divisions resulted from war and ‘ethnic cleansing’ in the 1990s, and the externally imposed, quasi-consociational (Kasapovic, 2005) constitution apparently does not suffice to overcome the tensions (Richter and Gavrić, 2010). In Ukraine, halfway into the civil war in 2014, antagonism in terms of ‘Ukrainian’ and ‘Russian’ ethnicity is part of the problem.<sup>2</sup> But the conflict is surely far more complex, involving a lack of democratic consolidation including the party system and corruption

issues (Bos, 2010, pp. 561, 565), economic aspects as well as the role of Russia as an external actor and the kin state of 'ethnic' Russians. Ukraine is also an example where ethnic identity is not clear-cut (Wydra, 2013) but partisan preferences of ethnic groups can be observed (Bernauer, 2013).

Moving beyond single cases, this book is dedicated to the systematic analysis of ethnic politics, representation and conflict, focusing on the descriptive representation of ethnic minorities in central and eastern Europe. It contributes by using state-of-the-art comparative political theory and methodology and shows that ethnic politics is less atypical than suggested at times, as general analytical lenses on voter behaviour, party competition, political attitudes and protest can be applied to the research field, and that there is some reason for cautious (and conditional) optimism that proportional, descriptive-partisan representation can contribute to the resolution of ethnic conflict. The research is guided by three strongly related research questions:

1. Which factors influence electoral entry and success of ethnic minority parties and the levels of ethnic groups' partisan-descriptive representation in parliament?
2. Is there an effect of partisan-descriptive parliamentary representation on the regime support of ethnic minorities, and more precisely on individual levels of satisfaction with democracy?
3. Does partisan-descriptive representation in parliament and the executive impact on the protest behaviour of ethnic minority groups?

To be sure, the results of this study on central and eastern Europe might be extended to some, but not all, other regions and contexts. They mainly refer to settings of proportional representation, descriptive representation via ethnic parties, and emerging democracies. Other contexts, for example with different modes of representation, have their own logic (Bird et al., 2010; Ruedin, 2013). Where the main vehicles of ethnic representation are individual members of mainstream parties (Wüst, 2006) or ethno-federalism (Boix, 1999), proportional representation could potentially be substituted.

## **1.1 Ethnic identity and descriptive representation**

This book studies the partisan-descriptive representation of ethnic minorities in central and eastern Europe.<sup>3</sup> The region constitutes an ideal laboratory for the research questions at hand, given the shared