

Minority Rules: Electoral Systems, Decentralization, & Ethnoregional Party Success, by David Lublin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 552 pp., £68.00, hardback, £23.99 paperback.

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Minority Rules by David Lublin is comparative political science at its best. The literature on ethnoregional party success is permeated by a long-standing debate on the impact of electoral institutions and regional authority. The main question is whether majoritarian or proportional electoral systems and decentralization impair or bolster ethnoregional parties. Lublin sets out to explore the effect of both electoral institutions and decentralization and two key characteristics make the book a landmark study. First, the analyses rest on a vast data collection and magnificent coding work of an immense number of ethnoregional parties. Lublin assembled the electoral results for ethnoregional party strength in national elections in more than 80 democratic countries from all regions of the globe from 1990 through 2012. A second forte of *Minority Rules* is the mixed methods approach, whereby the results of multivariate regression models are supplemented with a vast number of detailed individual case descriptions to illuminate causal mechanisms.

The main argument and finding concerning electoral institutions presented in *Minority Rules* is that it is not the size of the ethnic group that matters. More important is whether individual group members tend to be concentrated in areas where the group can experience success given the institutional setup of the electoral system. In other words, an interaction between the electoral system and ethnic geography significantly increases the explanatory power of the models predicting vote shares for ethnoregional parties. Ethnoregional parties will only be successful when they constitute electorally relevant groups. Ethnoregional parties competing in countries with plurality rule need to be able to garner a majority of the vote in a constituency; and in countries with proportional rule ethnoregional parties need to overcome the threshold –which may be defined by law or implied by constituency magnitude– in the regions where they participate in elections.

With regard to decentralization Lublin argues and finds that decentralization does not have an effect on ethnoregional party success. What makes his argument very convincing is that the non-impact of decentralization is thoroughly explored in countries where ethnoregional tensions preceded decentralization (ethnically decentralized) and countries which decentralized for other reasons (non-ethnically decentralized). This comparison allows for disentangling the reciprocal causal link between decentralization and ethnoregional party strength. The empirical evidence presented in *Minority Rules* forcefully shows that decentralization does not strengthen or weaken ethnoregional parties in both ethnically and non-ethnically decentralized countries. This is not to say that there is no effect. On the

contrary, an in-depth case study of Italy and Spain demonstrates that decentralization increases ethnoregional party support in some regions but decreases it in other regions. Lublin therefore concludes that decentralization has no systematic effect. This finding obviously raises the question how we may account for the varying impacts of decentralization. I will come back to this question below.

The book is full of other interesting findings on the effects of various electoral rules such as communal lists, reserved seats, apportionment, boundary delimitation, and electoral bans on regional parties or legal requirements for parties to present candidate lists in a specified number of districts. Regarding decentralization Lublin presents a particularly fascinating finding: Ethnoregional parties are stronger in ethnically decentralized countries where regional governments select the members of an upper house (see also Brancati 2008). This suggests a differential impact of self-rule –the authority exercised by a region over citizens in its territory– and shared rule –the authority exercised by a region over citizens in the country as a whole– (Elazar 1987) and begs for more research into the effects of types of decentralization on the electoral success of ethnoregional parties.

A valuable contribution of the book is to include a focus on the region, which leads to the development of innovative and interesting hypotheses. For example, minority group members who live in regions where they comprise a regional minority may fear that supporting an ethnoregional party may lead to their exclusion from influence in their region even though they may be able to get their own candidates elected into parliament because they form a majority in a number of constituencies. In other words, ethnoregional parties will only thrive in majoritarian electoral systems when they form a ‘double majority’, that is a majority in a majority of the constituencies. A regional level focus appeals to the agenda propagated by the critics of ‘methodological nationalism’, who claim that a national level outlook is driving the development of our theories and data collections, which precludes an analysis and understanding of important political processes that take place at the regional scale (Jeffery and Wincott 2010). *Minority Rules* presents strong theoretical claims and a wealth of empirical findings which substantiate the critique made to methodological nationalism and thereby strongly encourages the political science community to systematically theorize and empirically analyze political processes at the regional level.

In this light it is a pity that Lublin does not include ethnoregional party electoral success in regional elections except for the in-depth case studies on Italy and Spain. This is understandable given the magnitude of the data collection effort which the inclusion of subnational elections would entail; but it would have allowed for additional analyses on differentiated or conditional effects of decentralization. For example, decentralization may have no impact on national election results but it may boost ethnoregional parties at the regional level. Lublin shows that this is not the case for the ethnically decentralized countries of Italy and Spain but this effect may appear in non-ethnically decentralized countries such France, the Netherlands and Sweden. Other differential effects of decentralization could occur at the party level. For instance, Lublin observes that decentralization strengthens ethnoregional parties in some regions but weakens them in others. Ethnoregional parties that precede the introduction of regional elections may be weakened, whereas those that are established afterwards could be strengthened by decentralization. Ethnoregional parties often already competed in national elections before

the establishment of regional elections in the special statute regions in Italy and the historical *comunidades autónomas* in Spain but many were established after the first regional elections had been held in the ordinary regions in Italy and the non-historical *comunidades autónomas* in Spain. Incorporating regional elections would also allow for an empirical assessment of a springboard effect hypothesized by Brancati (2008), which expects ethnoregional party success in the regional electoral arena to spill over into the national electoral arena and *vice versa*.

These points do not constitute a critique but rather lead up to an invitation to continue the empirical investigation of the conditional impact of decentralization on ethnoregional party strength. *Minority Rules* convincingly shows that decentralization does not have an impact on ethnoregional party vote shares in national elections; and thereby the book is a momentous study that concludes a very salient academic and policy debate. However, *Minority Rules* also provides for sufficient cause to open up new research agendas on the impact of various types of decentralization on ethnoregional party strength in regional elections and on different kind of parties.

References

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