

ABSTRACT

IT'S NOT THE ECONOMY STUPID! STRUCTURAL DETERMINANTS OF THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF ETHNIC PARTIES

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The search for the causes and consequences of ethnic parties has for long been hindered by a lack of agreement of what constitutes an ethnic party. Drawing on a global typology of parties designed by Diamond and Gunther (2001) the paper will firstly classify effective (Sartori 2001) and significant (Taagepera 1999) parties in several African countries ensuring variance on the outcome variable (political party type). The paper distinguishes between five generic party types out of which two constitute ethnic party types while three constitute nonethnic types.

In a second step it will examine potential explanatory variables that can account for the rise of ethnic parties in some and non-ethnic parties in other countries. This constitutes the main part of the paper. The study pursues a qualitative small-n research design employing Mill's method of difference. It covers four African countries, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia and Nigeria. It will be argued that contrary to the often held assumption stark economic differences between groups cannot explain the formation of ethnically based parties. Also other factors such as democratic quality, electoral systems or path-dependence appear not to be linked to the spread of any particular party type. Instead countries in which ethnic fragmentation of politically significant groups is low and in which core ethnic groups exist the salience of ethnicity at the aggregate level of parties remains low. This finding is diametrically opposed to the predictions of conflict resolution scholars. In countries where this structural condition is not given politicians are forced to resort to non-democratic means in order to engineer non-ethnic parties.

Accordingly the quality of democracy in countries where ethnic fragmentation is high suffers either due to the effects of ethnic parties themselves or due to political intervention designed to avoid the ethnization of party politics.

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