
On the political economy of minority rights.

Three ways to manipulate a minority: goals, rules, and border poles

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Abstract

Language rights for speakers of minority languages are analyzed as well-defined policy measures that are implemented in given jurisdictions. For the implementation of such rights in some countries, certain rules concerning the number and geographical distribution of the speakers of a minority language have to be fulfilled. We discuss, how a policy maker with a given attitude towards the minority can manipulate the policy to further his or her goals.

We first provide a normative background for this type of language policy, a benchmark, analyzing language policy on the basis of welfare economics, first discussing why language policy is but one type of public policy, then defining and discussing the benefit or “demand” side assuming that benefits are basically proportional to the number of beneficiaries of the planning measure. We then argue that the costs of a planning measure can be described as a function of two variables “number of beneficiaries” and “size of area of application”. This lets us analyze planning measures in a two-dimensional model fully characterized by the number of beneficiaries and their geographical distribution in the jurisdiction under consideration. Finally, we characterize the optimal size and extension of the jurisdictions where the language rights are to be implemented.

It is then shown, how the policy maker can manipulate the goals of the policy, the implementation rules, as well as the borders of the jurisdictions in order to achieve her or his political goals when they differ from the cost-benefit optimum.

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