

Abstract

This thesis' topic is The Irish party system and its changes in the last 25 years with a focus on the role of Sinn Féin. While Sinn Féin was the largest party in the first Irish parliament at the beginning of the 20th century, the rest of the century the party remained minor. Its strong ties to the Irish Republican Army kept the party from gaining official recognition both from the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom, since the party contests in both parts of the island of Ireland. The connection to IRA together with the policy of abstentionism, which the party practiced until 1986 in the Republic and until 1998 to the Northern Ireland Assembly, put the party on the edge of the interest of both scholars and voters. However, after the peace process in Northern Ireland, the situation changed rapidly, at least in the case of voters. Today, only twenty years after the process ended, Sinn Féin is the second largest (and the largest nationalist) party in the Northern Ireland assembly and the third biggest in the Dáil (the lower house of the Irish parliament), succeeding the Labour party at this position. And while the voters support for the party grows, most of the scholars still consider to be only a political wing of the IRA or a minor party.

The descriptive part of this thesis narrates the history of Sinn Féin and IRA (PIRA respectively) and their connection and also introduces the relevant political parties in the Irish party system during the last 25 years. The theoretical part interprets the typologies of party system by Maurice Duverger, Jean Blondel, Giovanni Sartori and Peter Mair; the theory of the left-right scale and the Manifesto Project Database – a database containing party election manifestos coded using a strict codebook and coding rules. The analytical part examines the evolution of the Irish party during the last 25 years with an emphasis on the progression of Sinn Féin analyzed through its coded manifestos. The chapter proceeds with an investigation into the overall changes of the system through the lenses of the above mentioned typologies and analyzes the positions of Irish political parties on the left-right scale using the rile factor as introduced by Laver and Budge.