

Executive Summary IREX Regional Symposium, April 2008

Scholarly treatment of democratization and ethnic heterogeneity offers little clarity regarding the relationship between regime type and ethnic violence. Ted Robert Gurr (1993) and Juan Linz and Al Stepan (1996) hail democracy as a way to lessen insecurities between ethnic groups, since democracies tend to safeguard minorities against state tyranny. Yet Jack Snyder (2000) warns of the dangers in democratization programs, since leaders in such regimes must compete for constituencies among weak institutions. Scholars also disagree regarding the effect of state strength on ethnic conflicts. Although some attribute the outbreak of ethnic conflict in postcommunist states to state weakness, others find that increased state power has led to increased violence. The Bulldozer and Rose Revolutions in Serbia and Georgia promised to extend democracy and strengthen the state in order to address the corruption that had prevailed in previous governments. What has been the impact of these punctuated regime transitions on the frozen conflicts? Are the interactions between the separatist territories and the “revolutionary” state governments systematically different than those states that have not experienced similar dramatic political changes?

From the scholarship above, we can identify several testable hypotheses regarding the impact of regime type and state capacity on the level of stability (i.e., absence of violence) between base state governments and the separatist territories.

- H₁: *Democracy improves base state interactions with separatist territories*: The values of pluralism and minority rights will help enable peaceful interactions between the base state and the separatist territory.
- H₂: *Democratization hurts the frozen conflicts*: Populist base state leaders will boost their popularity with nationalist claims, decreasing the likelihood for peaceful interactions with the separatist territory.
- H₃: *Increases in base state capacity decrease the likelihood of peaceful interactions*: Two processes intertwine here. First, increases in state capacity in these contexts often have emerged as a response to corruption. Anti-corruption reforms could destabilize separatist state economies, which often rely on contraband to survive. Second, base states will hesitate to make concessions if they feel they are likely to obtain a better deal in the future, on the basis of increased economic, political, or military capability.

Based on the above hypotheses, we may establish the following expectations:

- *Flash Democratizers* are characterized by abrupt pluralistic phenomena and increases in state capacity and perhaps anti-corruption reforms. We can expect ambiguous policies that in some ways embrace and welcome separatist territory negotiations and compromise, but at the same time appeal to nationalist constituencies, follow anti-corruption policies that increase frozen territory vulnerability, and increase military spending. We should observe *increased instability*. Cases: Georgia and Serbia.
- *Long-term Democratizers* are characterized by less pluralism and more state weakness, but also do little to make the separatist territory insecure. They are likely to make fewer overtures to the separatist territory, but also less likely to build-up threatening military force. We should observe the maintenance of *stable but frozen* conditions. Cases: Bosnia-Herzegovina and Moldova.
- *Authoritarian regimes* do not have the regular electoral pressures, nor do they have a governmental system where pluralism and minority rights are guaranteed. In weak

authoritarian regimes, we may see problems of long-term lawlessness by separatist groups. In strengthening authoritarian regimes, we can expect little action on compromise and negotiation by the base state, with an increased likelihood of instability. Case: Azerbaijan.

Research approach and methodology

This project uses a case study approach, drawing from the population of frozen conflicts in postcommunist Eurasia. The variation in democratizing experience among these five countries permits systematic comparison on the impact of regime type on base state overtures toward and interactions with the frozen conflict territories. This research reflects field research conducted in Georgia, primarily from interviews conducted with central government officials associated with policymaking, as well as the ongoing processes of negotiations with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Assessments of the four other countries stem from sources available in the U.S., primarily reports of the OSCE and the UN of the status and conduct of their peacekeeping missions, from policy statements by the base state governments, from in-depth analysis conducted by non-governmental organizations.

Summary of research findings

The Flash Democratizers: Serbia and Georgia: Increased Instability

Interactions between the base state governments of Serbia and Georgia and the frozen conflict territories of Kosovo, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia became unstable after the colored revolutions. In Kosovo, a bus explosion in 2001 killed eleven Serbian civilians. In 2004, the worst violence since the end of the war occurred in Kosovo as ethnic Albanians targeted Serbs and Orthodox churches in a series of riots that spanned several days, devastated homes and churches, and killed 31 people. In Georgia in 2004, skirmishes broke out between government forces and South Ossetians over what the Georgian government characterized as an anti-corruption police action. In Abkhazia, the governing authorities called for increased military exercises and warned of a coming Georgian invasion.

In Georgia, Mikhail Saakashvili framed his approach to Abkhazia and South Ossetia as a project in state building, to eradicate corruption and increase economic growth so as to provide a carrot to the economically depressed separatist areas. He argued that the promise of wealth, combined with extensive political autonomy, cultural protections and economic reparations for destroyed homes and the like would entice the citizens of Abkhazia and South Ossetia back into the Georgian fold. Saakashvili has simultaneously used inflammatory rhetoric regarding unification and has consistently appealed to a nationalist constituency. Thus, Georgia's behavior corresponds with the ambiguous policy forecast.

Surprisingly, in Serbia, there was no change in policy toward Kosovo with the new leadership.¹ The official position has remained an absolute denial of the possibility for independence, no effort to increase trade across the border on either side. Serbia also affirmed its intention to deploy 999 Serbian troops to "protect" the Serbian minority in Kosovo, these troops to be drawn from Serbia's most elite units. Although the new regime favored pro-Western rhetoric during the Bulldozer revolution, this stance on Kosovo has been unwavering in its insistence that it would remain a part of Serbia. The instability that has emerged reflects also no desire on the part of the Kosovar government to embrace the "new" Serbia. The Kosovar

¹ At the time of writing, Kosovo declared its independence and was recognized by the U.S. as an independent state. So this might be considered a historical case analysis.

leadership eschewed pressure from the UN mission to see the change as a way to engage Serbian leadership, in part because of the government's concern with the international community's hurry to support the new Serbian regime.

Long-Term Democratizers: Moldova and Bosnia: Stability, but Little Resolution

Neither Bosnia nor Moldova have experienced a mass movement like the colored revolutions, yet each show incremental increases in political pluralism since 1992. Both have come close to real and peaceful negotiated outcomes with the separatist governments of Republika Srpska and Transnistria. In both cases, the efforts of Western (or Western leaning) external actors overwhelmed domestic policy in bringing change. In the case of Bosnia, this came in the form of the EU, to which Bosnia has begun its formal accession. Notably, the President of Republika Srpska has signaled his interest in this process. Even so, the processes between region and center are difficult to assess, since the Dayton Accords established so much of the political decentralization of powers.

In Moldova, there was a significant near miss at a settlement that would keep Transnistria as a powerful region within Moldova, with the Moldovan decision not to sign the Kozak memorandum in 2003. The Transnistrian interest in negotiation has collapsed since the Ukrainian policy in 2005 to shut down that lucrative contraband trade that operated between Ukraine and Transnistria. Although this has not had the effect of ending corruption, it inspired the president of Transnistria to pull out of scheduled talks in 2006. Overall, however, the absence of increased state capacity in Moldova has meant that Transnistria has had little to fear from the Moldovan government. Oddly, the impact of regime change on Transnistria has stemmed most prominently from the anti-corruption policy of post Orange Revolution Ukraine.

An Authoritarian Regime: Azerbaijan: Increasing Instability

From 2003-2005 representatives from Azerbaijan and Armenia met to resolve the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), settling on an array of negotiation points that included turning over occupied non-NK territory back to Azerbaijan, the return of Azeri IDPs, and a subsequent referendum on political status. Although there have been negotiations at the highest level in recent years, these have led to no agreement. Both sides harbor groups that either strongly advocate no action toward a settlement or prefer renewed war as a mechanism for resolution. An outbreak of violence occurred in March 2008, the first fire of which has been blamed on each government by the other.

In the case of Azerbaijan, the reluctance to resolve the conflict is not due so much to constituency pleasing politics, given the lack of ballot box accountability. However, the influx of wealth from increasing oil reserves and the recent spike in oil prices has allowed the Azerbaijani government to invest heavily in defense. The official Azerbaijani line has evolved, therefore, toward one that is seeking to take the area by force, seeking a military advantage over the less wealthy Armenians.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Several common elements emerge here. First, state-building is a potentially destabilizing exercise, even if it does occur in a pluralistic fashion and with some efforts to advance the interests of the separatist region (as it was in Georgia). State-building policies increased military and police capacity both in pluralistic (Georgia and Serbia) and authoritarian (Azerbaijan) contexts, which increased violence in all three cases. Second, anti-corruption measures became

inflammatory, particularly when they threatened to undermine the economies of the separatist territories. Third, the overwhelming Western support for the colored revolutions alienated the separatist territories, increasing their insecurity.

My recommendation is that the U.S. policy community find ways to boost the sagging economic circumstances of the separatist communities in a way that is not tied to an outcome on political status. This will encourage those territories to have a multi-faceted image of the Western stance rather than one that will always align with one side over the other. If anti-corruption measures are to be taken, the U.S. should work to buffer the damage such policies will have on the separatist community. Such policies might lessen the vulnerabilities felt by separatist territories. A second recommendation concerns how the U.S. might influence base states' policymaking and how they approach the separatist regions. The impulse of these governments to eschew compromise in the face of a growing state capacity is an understandable, but dangerous and destabilizing, response to their growing power.

Suggestions of future research and applications

Scholars need to spend more time looking comparatively at frozen conflicts broadly and the circumstances through which they are created, resolved, or exacerbated. My research found many common trends across cases, some that were important for the theoretical argument here, but others that were not (such as the common treatment of IDPs from the conflict regions within the base states). By expanding the research focus beyond individual countries within Eurasia and beyond Eurasia itself to include other case examples, such as Northern Ireland, Taiwan, East Timor, or Palestine, we can better examine the causal elements of stability and destabilization. In some cases, these are contextual, based on the foreign policy of major actors, but in other cases, there are domestic structures that might be altered in order to better the lives of those living within (or forced to flee) the conflict zones.

Such research has extensive applications, some of which are critical for U.S. policy interests. Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, are both ethnically heterogeneous countries riven by corruption and infrastructural weakness. As the U.S. works to consolidate governmental power in these countries, it will need to find mechanisms to replace the lucrative contraband economies that seem to correspond with ethnic and sectarian groups.