

Ethnic Struggle, Coexistence, and Democratization in Eastern Europe. By SHERRILL STROSCHIN. Pp. 289. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2012. £60.00. Hardback. ISBN: 9781107005242.

In *Ethnic Struggle, Coexistence, and Democratization in Eastern Europe* Sherrill Stroschein looks at the Hungarian minorities in three East European countries and draws a conclusion that is both compelling and counterintuitive: ethnic protest facilitates democratization. Far from necessarily engendering ethnic conflict and violence, as is often the received wisdom within ethnic studies, grassroots ethnic mobilization and protest function as an indispensable democratizing mechanism.

Stroschein's conclusion is derived from a detailed analysis of ethnic mobilization in three countries with significant Hungarian minorities – Slovakia, Romania, and Ukraine – and in three cities in each country: one with a Hungarian majority, one with a Hungarian minority, and one with a roughly even demographic split. After outlining the historical and political contexts, the core of the book is devoted to a thorough analysis of these case studies. Chapters 4 and 5 analyse the trajectories of ethnic mobilization in two Romanian cities where ethnic contention emerged at the beginning of the 1990s over issues of education (Târgu Mureş) and symbolic issues (Cluj). Stroschein compares the dynamics of mobilization in Târgu Mureş, where contention led to inter-ethnic violence, with those in Cluj, where no violence ensued, and uncovers a number of recurring patterns: the spontaneous mobilization of the masses, 'cross-group emulation' as a trigger for both mobilization and demobilization, and the learning process involved in inter-group contentious interactions. The following two chapters turn to the interaction between locally contentious politics and statewide policy-making over language (Chapter 6) and local autonomy (Chapter 7). These analyses provide more evidence for these interactive patterns and illustrate the two-way causal relationship between protest and policy.

Stroschein's conclusion stands on a number of arguments. Firstly, that protest can play a deliberative role by including ethnic minorities in the decision-making process. Without this 'alternative route to formal institutions' (p. 248), she argues, minorities would be relegated to the role of permanent losers by the majoritarian principle of democracy. Secondly, contention habituates different ethnic groups to each other, makes each group's demands known to the others, and – through a learning process of trial and error – moderates group demands. Conflict is not the necessary outcome of ethnic contention; it occurs during periods of uncertainty (as in Târgu Mureş in 1990) or when external intervention in local dynamics breaks the flow of communication between groups (p. 26). Thirdly, ordinary people do not necessarily respond to elite manipulation to start mobilizing; they mobilize if and when 'matters of sincere importance to them are not being addressed by political elites' (p. 29). The role of elites is, rather, to enable moderation in inter-group interactions through bargaining with each other and brokerage with their respective masses. This 'mass-first' pattern convincingly challenges the elite-centred perspective prevailing in the literature on ethnic politics.

Stroschein devotes ample attention to fundamental theoretical and methodological concerns. She proposes an approach to the study of ethnic politics

based on relations (rather than actors), time, and sequence. Applying lessons of historical institutionalism to the study of political processes, Stroschein suggests that it is not necessary to control for endogeneity (as statistical methods tend to do), as the endogenous relationship between processes – in this case mass mobilization and policy-making – can and ‘should become the main focus of study’ (p. 35). Indeed, the focus of the book is on the trajectories of ethnic mobilization and policy formation over time, and the endogenous relations between them – that is, the fact that these trajectories cause one another and that no linear cause-effect model could explain their relationship. This approach, carried out through the methodological tool of event analysis, is a welcome alternative to statistical methods, in that it embraces endogeneity and accounts for (incremental) change.

Despite the strength of Stroschein’s mass-first approach in uncovering patterns and causal mechanisms in her case studies, this comes at the price of treating minorities as homogenous in terms of their interests and needs. Stroschein reifies these minorities in assuming that they have group-based, homogenous interests for which they spontaneously mobilize, and openly accepts this as a necessary compromise (p. 20). However, she leaves unanswered the question of how interests and demands expressed at the grassroots level are formulated and whether political and media elites play a role in this formulation. Despite this simplification, the mass-first claim advanced by Stroschein makes an important contribution by questioning rigid elite manipulation perspectives and challenging scholars of ethnic politics to reconsider the relationship between elites and masses.

While the focus on contentious politics at the city level brings a fresh and valuable perspective to the study of ethnic politics, it might excessively discount the role of institutionalized politics and ethnic parties. Although the author describes the role of Hungarian ethnic parties in their countries’ electoral politics (p. 90), she does not include it in her arguments on mass mobilization and policy formation. This leaves two important questions unanswered: to what extent do ethnic parties (and party politics in general) have a role in defining the issues over which masses decide to mobilize, and how does the role played by ethnic parties in national and local politics inform the institutional response to ethnic mobilization?

This is an important, thought-provoking book that advances the debate in ethnic studies and also contributes greatly to the study of democratization and – by extension – democracy in divided societies. Future research in these fields will doubtless have to engage with the deliberative role of ethnic protest. Moreover, Stroschein makes an important contribution to the social sciences in general by proposing a detailed ‘recipe for analysis’ (p. 246) and providing an outstanding example of it with her book. Finally, the book also presents a welcome (and rare) optimistic perspective in ethnic studies. Contention, as a form of social group interaction, can actually bring moderation and democratization rather than exclusion and conflict.

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