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BOOK SYMPOSIUM

Ethnic Struggle, Coexistence, and Democratization in Eastern Europe,

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[Pieces by: Mark Beissinger, Zsuzsa Csergo, Elise Giuliano, and Myra Waterbury]

There is nothing more engaging than hearing what bright minds have to say about ideas that an author has mulled, mangled, and finally published. I am extremely grateful to the thoughtful comments on my book from Mark Beissinger, Zsuzsa Csergo, Elise Giuliano, and Myra Waterbury. These are serious comments that produce an in-depth consideration of how we conduct research, as well as of some of the book’s arguments. In particular, there are five primary issues that emerge from the comments that merit special consideration, arranged here in their order of importance.

The first issue relates to the nature of the research that we conduct, and the form of knowledge that we produce with that research. The aim of social science is to produce general statements about the nature of social life. In inductive research, arguments emerge from inferences based on evidence we can examine, with the intent that they might also apply to evidence that we have not examined; that is, to general circumstances (Landman 2008). In making a statement that *ethnic protest can be part of an accommodative democratization process*, I am making an inference from the empirics examined in the book. I am then proposing that this statement might also hold in democratizing contexts that are *not* examined in the book. This is of course a risky thing to do, best attempted with a) good evidence and b) limiting scope conditions. While I am confident about the detailed evidence examined in the book, I have a hunch that the scope conditions for the general statement may only become clear over time and through research on other places, as such research reveals the degree to which they may or may not hold.

My confidence in the evidence comes from the fact that I chose a focused set of cases in a most-similar systems research design. The arguments emerged inductively from this evidence, something that can be done with a most-similar systems comparison without ending up in a complete morass of too many details. The cases chosen all border on Hungary and contain significant Hungarian minorities. The book was premised on the notion that if I could identify general statements on the dynamics of ethnic parties across those settings, those general statements or arguments might apply across other countries as well. Charles Tilly, who was the dissertation supervisor for the very initial stages of this research, once described this logic to me in the following way. A biology researcher tries to figure out how an *e coli* bacteria processes enzymes, with the goal of producing research that tells us something about the mechanisms of enzyme production generally. A logic of research similar to that in the biological sciences pervades much of the methodological approach in the book.

However, many in the field are informed by the logic of the physical sciences, or the mathematical / statistical sciences. In this perspective, the most-similar cases approach can be viewed skeptically, because it does not match with a statistically-based prescription for large samples and random sampling. Even for a small number of cases in comparative research, an

application of statistical prescriptions (King, Keohane and Verba 1994) has become quite popular in the field. While useful for some questions, this logic is less useful for others. For large questions such as “how is ethnicity interacting with politics in transitions?,” an inductive approach, starting first with the evidence, can be a better start at finding an answer. For this book, I found a small set of similar cases to be useful as a means to minimize potential alternative influences in an inductive study.

Beissinger and Csergo are not fully convinced by this approach, and make a plea for consideration of a wider array of cases. Waterbury makes an additional point: that the places considered in the book might have featured dynamics particular to the early stages of democracy. I would submit that these critiques relate more to the limits of the scope conditions for the argument being made, rather than to the evidence used to infer the argument. Or, to use Tilly’s analogy, the biological mechanisms of enzyme production revealed by one creature may not generalize across all species, but only some. The research itself is solid, but how far will it travel to other contexts? The next research step is to figure out how far they travel. And here I concede to a degree. Making a general statement via inference is risky, especially if one doesn’t yet know how far it will fly. It may be that my arguments made in this book indeed apply to a more limited scope of cases than I might have hoped, but further research into the parameters or scope conditions is a project assignment for the field. Waterbury’s point that these countries changed over time such that the dynamics are specific to the “critical juncture democratization” gives me particular pause. It fits well with the book’s argument that conditions change over time as a result of continued interactions. As it contains loaded implications for the meaning of generalizable arguments, I will be mulling this point over for some time.

Beissinger and Csergo note that all of the cases examined are those in which accommodation took place, and wonder about cases in which there is violence instead. I did indeed select cases where there was accommodation, in order to understand how accommodation came about. These statements then become part of the collective knowledgebase of our field. Researchers can use these arguments to see what is missing when accommodation does not come about. I do posit a hunch that the appearance of militaries and military equipment make a difference in these outcomes, while a riot in which participants use available home implements such as knives might be less detrimental to future accommodation. Military shocks would disrupt the accommodative mechanisms of 1) cross-group elite negotiation and 2) in-group mass-elite resonance that I posit in the book (pp. 25-26). Another hunch is that the post-1989 context was a fruitful one for accommodation, because the post-communist context made states less likely to shoot at their own populations. But the main question in the book is about *explaining how* accommodation works – in order to see how it is that it does not work in other settings. Beissinger and Csergo are disappointed that I have not provided a better answer for *how often* it works, in terms of the scope conditions. I hope that my work on *explaining how* might inform other projects more focused on *how often* it might work.

The second issue concerns the way in which I conducted the event analysis.

Beissinger remains skeptical about the graphs produced from the events, which were used as part of the inductive project to produce general statements from the detailed empirics. He refers to this technique as an “eyeball approach” to inferring from the evidence, rather than “statistical correlation.” This is a serious critique, as he wonders whether there is not then an arbitrary quality to the analysis. There are two responses to this observation, one quick and one more considered.

The quick response is that the process of assigning codes or numbers to social life is *always* fraught with a degree of arbitrariness. Counting people in a census or counting votes in elections are quite convincing ways to use numbers. But coding textual material and then

conducting statistics on those codes is arguably no less arbitrary than the means of event analysis I have conducted here. Moreover, while working in the field I developed my own skepticism of methods that cannot be easily explained to those individuals who are actually being researched. The more complex our logic of analysis, the further we are from the lived information that we examine. The more removed we are from the actual events, our analysis might become more dubious in terms of whether we are revealing the truth about something or just presenting an impressive, disconnected model. Beissinger is right that in assigning codes to graph out these events, I have also engaged in an exercise that steps away from the material, in a potentially arbitrary way. However, the codes are not used here as if they have inherent meaning. Instead, they simply reflect the intensity of events *relative to each other* over time. For this reason, I limited the use of numbers to the “eyeball” method, in which their relative meaning can tell us something in general terms without stepping too far from the specific material itself. Performing regressions or fancier techniques with the codes, with fine-tuned error margins, would hide the fact that the numbers have a limited ability to represent what actually took place. Detailed narratives help the reader to evaluate whether my general story matches with the evidence examined.

The more considered response is that statistical logic is not well-suited to the type of information that I needed to answer the question of how ethnicity related to politics. Applying statistical logic would have required that I try to “control for” an endogenous relationship between protest and policy formation. Which one is the independent variable? Which one is the dependent variable? How could I “clean” the data to make sure that they could be separable to avoid endogeneity, or each causing the other? All of these steps would have blinded me to the fact that ethnic protest and policy formation were indeed intertwined over time, and thus *inherently endogenous*. The best way to see how the two related over time was to graph out each over time, an advantage of processual research. The resulting graphs produce Beissinger’s “eyeball” effect, as the two move together, woven in alternating fashion across the decade. Similarly, the graphs of local-level mobilizations, inspired by musical notation, are a way to represent how it is that different collective actors might move in relation to each other in events such as a riot, using a narrative drawn from local newspaper accounts.

The social world may in fact be endogenous a great deal of the time. But social science researchers are encouraged by statistical methods to cover up this possibility. The logic of research in the biological sciences is more amenable to these ideas, in searching for mechanisms that can be generalized to other settings. Much like diagrams representing mechanisms in biology, the “eyeballing” graphs are intended to represent and thus simplify complex narratives. This step allows for the general mechanisms to be better examined across a variety of settings.

A related point is something that comes up repeatedly when I have presented the book. What if it is the outlier cases that really tell us something, rather than the means or the distributions that are the focus of statistics? One could say that in choosing to research the 1990 ethnic riot between Hungarians and Romanians in Târgu Mureş, I was selecting on a “dependent variable.” But understanding the mechanics of a riot (or a revolution) should be something that our field cares about doing. Choosing questions and material for research according to a strict set of methods prescriptions is the road to irrelevance. In biology, we might really need to understand the workings of specific processes in order to see whether we might be able to prevent (or encourage) them.

The third area of issues raised relates to the causal arguments in the book.

Beissinger, Csergo, and Giuliano would like more evidence for the “smoking gun,” or what actually did the causing in the story on ethnic accommodation. Csergo raises a matter that I indeed wrestled with a great deal during the project – the question of local actions in relation

to central governments. She wonders how closely it is that protests at the local level put pressure on elites who were negotiating policy at the central level. Waterbury also questions these layers of analysis, and posits that it could be that local, state, and cross-border politics (Waterbury 2011) are becoming blended, such that it can be hard to identify whether actors at one level might be independent of the others.

This critique is linked to a more direct one by Beissinger and Giuliano, and hinted at by Csergo and Waterbury – isn't the real work here on accommodation negotiations by elites, without mass input? Giuliano is particularly interested in the potential role played by parties and party leaders. I myself was surprised when I looked through the empirical accounts of the two detailed mobilizations discussed in the book. But the facts were quite clear that students tended to mobilize first, sometimes joined by workers, and with elites getting involved only after these initial mobilizations. When Hungarian elites did get involved later, they sometimes tried to organize events as well, thus producing the elite-mass “tandem” pattern observed for minorities. It is true that, as Giuliano notes, the framing of some of these demands prior to the mobilizations might have played a role in non-elite perceptions of what they wanted from politics. Indeed, I was simply able to record what people did, rather than when their ideas might have changed or been changed. This gap would be a fruitful area for future research, and this point is discussed further below in terms of preferences.

I would submit that resonance between elites and masses is crucial to understanding how it is that accommodation dynamics take place. Csergo suggests this as one way out of the dilemma. People care about certain issues. On the most salient issues, they will engage in mass protest. Indeed, if elites or party leaders ignore those protests, in a democratic system they can be replaced by other leaders. In fact, in the period after the 1990s examined in the book, there has been some upheaval and fragmentation in the Hungarian parties in Romania and Slovakia, due partly to mass dissatisfaction with their elite negotiations on ethnic issues (Birniš 2006, Stroschein 2011). Beissinger, Csergo, and Waterbury raise the prospect of influence by the EU as an alternative explanation, and Beissinger and Waterbury also emphasize the potential role of Hungary as a kin state. But the means by which the EU or Hungary could influence this dynamic was also through domestic elite negotiations. Elites could choose to respond to the EU or Hungary, or not, just as they could choose to respond to mass protest or not. Csergo notes in her book on language policy that elites tended to respond to the EU's demands when they aligned with the elites' own goals (Csergo 2007). I would submit that ethnic protest placed even more direct pressure on elites, due to the fact that in a democracy they could be replaced by domestic elections, and the EU could not remove them from office. At the same time, there could perhaps be more room in the book's discussion about the interplay of discourses involving the European Union and Hungary – given more prominent coverage in Csergo's and in Waterbury's work.

Waterbury makes the point that perhaps elites matter more after the initial point of transition, once institutions have become more formalized. This situation could perhaps explain some of the political dynamics that I have not expected in the time period following that in the book. For example, I was quite surprised that a quite restrictive language law, passed in Slovakia in 2009, met with relatively few Hungarian protests in response. Perhaps by that time, ordinary people had become more accustomed to the notion that elites should be conducting the main business of politics, through formalized, representative institutions. A true answer to this question would require more extensive research.

The fourth issue regards the way in which group (and individual) preferences are covered in the book, an issue raised by Giuliano, and reflected in Waterbury's comments. The discussion of how demands of groups were moderated over time admittedly assumes a limit to how far preferences might be changed – because individuals continued to act in a group or ethnic way. People moderated their demands, but continued to act and speak

as if ethnicity was crucial to their identities. I would agree that preference changes could be examined further. This idea could provide another answer to the relative lack of Hungarian protest over Slovakia's 2009 language law. Another explanation to this quiescence might be that by that time, claims had moderated to such a degree by then that protest did not become an automatic response. In the book I simply accepted that empirically, individuals tend to act and speak in an ethnic way. But for future research, a fruitful means to pursue these ideas lies in the sociological concept of boundary construction and maintenance, particularly as applied by Tilly (2005).

Related to her curiosity on preferences, Giuliano questions the content of the demands made by the Hungarians in these states. She notes that the emphasis on symbolic matters in these stories is a puzzle. Informed by her own work on Russia (Giuliano 2011), she notes that minorities elsewhere are often motivated more by pragmatic demands and status. In thinking about these matters, I wonder if perhaps *forms* of mobilization might be more generalizable across different contexts than the *content* behind mobilization. If this might be the case, perhaps some of the work in the field has been barking up the wrong tree, including some of my own. In addition, Giuliano raises the perplexing issue of how we might allow for individual preferences to differ within a group in analysis, including preferences across generations. It is becoming clear that generations have quite different preferences in a variety of settings, especially on economic matters. This matter will require more thought by me and by others, especially due to its implications for generalizable arguments on preferences.

Finally, the readers raise some definitional questions. Beissinger wonders how easy it is to distinguish between elites and masses, and indeed this is a query I hear at nearly every presentation I give on the book. This is a difficult issue, as some simplification is always required to make general statements. My best response is an empirical one. In the local-level mobilizations examined in detail in Târgu Mureș and Cluj, Hungarian students played a crucial role in the first events of mobilization. It is true that university admissions requirements are high in Romania, and that students are in some ways in a position of privilege – as well as having more time to mobilize. However, it would be very hard to define students as elites, which I define as officeholders and party leaders. Similarly, the workers who early on joined in the Târgu Mureș mobilizations could not be defined as elites. Thus, while it may be difficult to draw a standard boundary line between elites and masses, the empirical narrative provides information so that readers can evaluate the relative positions of these participants, and then evaluate the mass-first argument I make regarding mobilization.

Beissinger raises another definitional matter worth consideration. He notes that it is not only bilateral ethnic mobilizations that produce ethnic violence, as there are also one-sided mobilizations such as pogroms. This is of course the case, and perhaps I should have outlined more clearly that my focus was more upon mobilizations involving both groups, as well as accommodation mechanisms involving both groups. Research into pogroms could perhaps import some of the mobilization mechanisms, but I suspect that the dynamics would take a different form than those I have examined in this book.

In the panel discussion, Giuliano questioned whether in using the term “divided states” or “divided societies” I might be contradicting some of the book's points. After all, the notion that ethnic accommodation might take place via protest in democracies seems to indicate that being “divided” is related to the ethnic practices at the time in a given state. Indeed, the optimistic idea that societies can work away from this divisiveness was one of my motivations for getting the material out there in the form of this book. I am very grateful to Beissinger, Csergo, Giuliano, and Waterbury for their careful reading of a project on which I have spent a large part of my life. There is clearly more to think about, which I look forward to exploring in the next.

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