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Introduction

The Ethnic Effect

Strange Attractors
And ourselves, fluttering toward and away in a pattern that,
given enough
Dimensions and point-of-view,
Anyone living there could plainly see –
Dance and story, advance, retreat,
A human chaos that some slight
Early difference altered irretrievably?

Chapman and Sprott, Images of a Complex World: The
Art and Poetry of Chaos

After completing field research in Ecuador in 1998 I traveled around the
country sightseeing. Returning one afternoon from a visit to the beau-
tiful Presidential Palace in the old part of Quito, I narrowly escaped
indigenous demonstrations turned violent. The protests in the summer
of 1998 marked the culmination of events that began in the late 1980s
and early 1990s, when indigenous communities throughout Ecuador were
organizing strikes, roadblocks, land seizures, occupation of buildings,
and other demonstrations. Autochthonous protests led to the ousting of
two Ecuadorian presidents, Jamil Mahuad in January 2000 and Lucio
Gutiérrez in 2005. The relationship between the state and indigenous
groups remains strained, although some improvements are notable (Birnir,
2004-a).

Two years later in Bolivia I observed a similar, if more strained, rela-
tionship between indigenous leaders and the political elite of the coun-
try. My interviewees were uniformly concerned, with good reason, about
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deteriorating ethnic relations in the country. Recent reports of ethnic violence in Bolivia include the lynching of a mayor associated with a nonethnic party in the town of Ayo Ayo by several members of indigenous groups. The Indians allegedly were incited by a political speech made by recently elected president Evo Morales, the leader of Movimiento al Socialismo, an indigenous party that finished second in the 2002 legislative elections (United Press International, 2004, June 16; Birnir and Van Cott, 2007). This violence followed years of unrest involving, for instance, indigenous blockades and the resignation of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in 2003.

My experiences in Ecuador and Bolivia resonate with the common image of ethnic politics, which has been influenced by the recent ethnic violence in Bosnia and communal violence in India.1 These observations reinforce the conventional wisdom that ethnic politics cause serious problems for aspiring and maturing democracies. The academic literature also generally supports the notion of ethnicity as a destabilizing influence, such that ethnic political expression is considered intransigent and not conducive to the political compromise necessary for the healthy development of stable political systems.2

There are many countries, however, where the conventional view that ethnicity is destabilizing is rebutted. In parts of 1992, 1996, and 1997 I lived in Romania and spent some time in Covasna, which has the second largest Hungarian population of all Romanian counties. My interviews with political activists as well as other Romanians clearly revealed tension, and abundant stereotyping, between the Romanian and Hungarian communities. These two communities split on many fundamental issues, such as language and religion. At times this disagreement resulted in violence. Nevertheless, my overwhelming impression was that on a day-to-day basis, contrary to being an explosive mixture, these two communities

1 Clearly the problems differ in terms of both the ethnic violence and the effects on the political system. In Bosnia, intransigent ethnic postures are not thought to be conducive to the democratic nation building currently under way. India, in turn, is a long-standing democracy. Nevertheless, ethnic violence is considered by many to be potentially detrimental to that system. For example, in their summary of the findings about India of the Fundamentalist Project, Almond and associates (2003) note, “In contemporary India the [then] governing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), dominated by militant Hindu ethno-religious movements, has been accused of seeking to eliminate secular pluralism” (p. 131). The authors also point out that because the BJP has been forced to appeal to secular and non-Hindu groups, the language and actions of party leaders are a curious mixture of conciliation toward secular groups and other religious groups and Hindu nationalism/religious fundamentalism (p. 136–140).

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did a remarkably good job of coexisting and interacting. In fact, I left Romania with the thought that perhaps ethnic political mobilization aided democratic development. Ethnic party constituencies were committed to democratic values but flexible about the political expressions of their parties. Neither the party of the Hungarian minority in Romania nor the party of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria has engaged in sustained organized violence. Rather, both parties are integral to peaceful political life in their respective countries, participating in both government coalitions and opposition alliances.

These observations about the different recent histories of Ecuador, Bolivia, and Romania naturally raise the question of why some ethnic parties are successfully incorporated into stable political life while others engage in escalating violence with other groups in society. One seemingly obvious answer is racism toward indigenous groups. Ethnic groups in Ecuador and Bolivia are racially distinct from the ruling elite (though there is also significant racial mixing in both countries). One would, however, be hard pressed to distinguish ethnic Hungarians from ethnic Romanians and ethnic Turks from ethnic Bulgarians on features alone.

The case of Spain, and the markedly different histories of the Basques and Catalans, would suggest that the answer is not that simple. In the late 1980s I spent two summers in Spain studying, with the second summer paid for by a foreign student grant from the Spanish government. While the whole experience was wonderful, I later wondered whether the grants were intended to counteract the negative image of Spain as a less-than-safe destination, as the early 1980s marked the height of Basque terrorism. Studying and later traveling around Europe I met many Basques whom I could not distinguish from ethnic Spaniards. Furthermore, a larger ethnic group, the Catalans, are peacefully integrated into Spanish national politics.

What then do ethnic groups in Ecuador and Bolivia and Basques in Spain have in common that distinguishes them from ethnic groups in Romania and Bulgaria and Catalans in Spain? According to the present understanding of ethnicity, race is only one of the features around which ethnic groups coalesce. Building on the current understanding of ethnicity as constructed and fluid, the definition used in this book is deduced from social identity theory, which stipulates that any group is defined in relation

3 See, for instance, Horowitz, 1985; Olzak, 1992; Laitin, 1998; Chandra, 2004; Posner, 2005. Some cite Horowitz’s definition of ethnicity as primordial. My reading of Horowitz, however, is that while he considers ethnicity to contain primordial elements, he also considers it to contain constructed elements. Therefore, I believe he belongs in the latter category rather than the former.
to other groups. In contrast to organization by voluntary associations such as unions of blue-collar workers, I argue along the lines of Posner (2005) that ethnicity is organized around characteristics that are either impossible to change, such as color of skin, or very difficult to change, such as primary language. Thus, a group of people sharing a characteristic that is difficult or impossible to change define themselves as ethnic in contrast to other ethnic groups in society, or in contrast to a dominant group that does not define itself in ethnic terms. This identification is fluid, as it may change over time or the importance of the ethnic group identification may become secondary to some other group identification in a person’s repertoire of identities.

The political conditions under which ethnic groups conduct their affairs vary greatly. The most basic distinction is that between authoritarian and democratic regimes. By definition, in democracies ethnic groups ideally participate along with other social groups in producing the inputs that direct the governance of the country. The involvement of ethnic groups in authoritarian politics theoretically is less predictable. Ethnic groups may hold the reins of power to the exclusion of other groups, they may be excluded completely from governance, or they may share in the governance of the country with other social groups. For a systematic comparison of expected ethnic involvement in politics and possible deviations therefrom, democracies therefore provide the more straightforward domain for the study of ethnic politics in this book.

Normatively, democracies also are preferred political structures in contemporary migratory societies because democracies allow for a greater variety of interest representation than do authoritarian regimes. Furthermore, recent democratic transitions strongly suggest that democracy is arguably the political wave of the future. If these impressions are correct, it is increasingly important to understand the true effect of ethnicity on democratic sustainability. Consequently, the politics that are the subject of this book are democratic politics. By democracy, I refer to a political

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4 Throughout the book I refer to the majority group as nonethnic. I do not mean to imply that majorities have no ethnicity, only that ethnicity is generally not the primary or even one of the principal identities around which organization takes place. Even in countries such as South Africa where prior to democratization the majority black identity consolidated in face of apartheid, this racially based identity is now cross cut by multiple identities some of which are ethnic but organized around characteristics other than race.

5 As Kymlicka (2001) points out, democracies differ greatly in their “liberalism” with respect to minority rights. Nonetheless, it seems safe to assume that minority rights are better protected in democracies because they allow minority groups on average greater input in governance than do authoritarian regimes, where no particular groups are necessarily involved in governance.
system where all members of society are allowed to participate freely and where elections are considered free and fair.\textsuperscript{6}

Political identities such as ethnic identities that influence the functions of democracies do not, however, emerge from thin air. Indeed, consolidating ethnic identity has often become a form of resistance to the dominant authoritarian regime. Evidence from Western Europe since before the development of contemporary democracies certainly suggests that distinct ethnic identities develop despite institutional incentives to assimilate.\textsuperscript{7} Current history supports this idea as well. For instance, Franco’s attempts to suppress the national characteristics of both the Basque and the Catalan nations backfired and fomented ethnic nationalism in Spain. Similarly, young Turks in Bulgaria paid little attention to their cultural heritage until the community was confronted with communist state policies of assimilation.

Since Franco and communism, however, both Spain and Bulgaria have re-democratized, providing ethnic groups in both countries with the option of participating in electoral politics. But while Spain has experienced sustained ethnic violence perpetrated by Basque nationalists, in Bulgaria, the Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) has been in and out of government and even cooperated with the successor party of the communist regime. The same holds true in neighboring Romania, where the Hungarian Democratic Forum (UDMR) was an integral part of the coalition government from 1996 to 2000, struck a deal with the Social Democratic Party (PSD) to support the government in return for political concessions following the 2000 election,\textsuperscript{8} and joined the governing coalition following the 2004 election. The question I ask, therefore, is, What distinguishes peaceful plural democracies from violent ones?

To complicate matters further, not all ethnic groups in Spain are violent. Whereas the Basques have engaged in violence, the Catalans are a model political identity, emerging from the political functions of democracy.
of peaceful political maneuverability, moving in and out of government coalitions. What, then, distinguishes violent ethnic groups from peaceful ones within the same democracy?

In attempting to answer these questions, it becomes evident that while cleavage has received considerable attention in the ethnic conflict literature, the role of ethnicity is largely absent from studies of parties, voting behavior, and legislative behavior. We know very little about how members of ethnic groups vote and why and how their votes shape democratic party systems. Nor do we know much about ethnic legislative politics in the aftermath of elections. For instance, under what conditions are ethnic groups included in governments, and what are the effects of inclusion or exclusion in the legislature?

No single account can comprehensively explain the outcome of ethnic politics. I do not attempt such a comprehensive explanation. Rather, my objective is to theorize about the nature of ethnic political participation once democracies have been established procedurally and to highlight some incentive structures that systematically influence this participation. Under the right circumstances, these incentive structures contribute to the peaceful integration of ethnic groups into national politics. Indeed, my research reveals that ethnic politics have the potential to help stabilize new democracies by jump-starting party system stabilization. Whether ethnic groups become a stabilizing or a destabilizing influence in maturing democracies is in part, I suggest, a function of ethnic group access to government. Thus, circumstances unfavorable to democratic development may push all political participants toward intransigence that subsequently spirals into violence. The auxiliary components that contribute to peaceful or violent ethnic participation are numerous. Here is one example: Before they can gain political access, ethnic groups must either mobilize and field political parties that receive significant support within the ethnic population or support a mainstream party that represents their interests. Therefore, lack of mobilization among ethnic groups may

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9 For instance, Yashar (1999) and Van Cott (2005) point out that in any analysis of institutional effects on ethnic party formation, Latin America must be embedded in a contextual analysis of indigenous politicization. Yashar (1999) argues that in Latin America, ethnic identity historically has been weakly politicized, and that expecting democratic consolidation simply as a result of institutional developments is naïve.

10 Mobilization itself is a complex issue. The social movement literature holds that political mobilization, or organization of groups for political ends, depends on internal characteristics of the group, such as ability to mobilize resources and elite cohesion (Kitschelt, 1986). Other determinants include the structure of political opportunity that affects people's expectations about success, including such variables as state capacity.
temporarily insulate party systems from ethnic unrest despite lack of access to government by those groups. Ethnic groups in many parts of the world, such as the former Soviet republics, are currently undergoing a demographic transformation,11 and many still live under authoritarian regimes.12 However, my research indicates that once these groups consolidate their minority group identity and are able to mobilize under increasingly democratic conditions, the best way to ensure they operate peacefully is to promote their access to government.

THE ARGUMENT AND IMPLICATIONS

This book does not, however, address the conditions for ethnic mobilization mentioned or the question of why countries adopt particular democratic institutional structures. While these are fascinating topics of inquiry, they are outside the scope of this study.13 The purpose of this project is to cast some light on the effect of ethnic politics once democracy is established procedurally. The first task is to examine the foundations of current assumptions of ethnicity in politics and to construct some arguments about ethnic groups’ electoral participation that allow for the flexible expression of ethnic group affiliation in electoral and legislative politics demonstrated by many of the ethnic groups mentioned. Further, and contrary to conventional wisdom, I suggest that ethnic groups and their political demands are not inherently intransigent and that violence is for repression and political access points (Brockett, 1991; Tarrow, 1994) and permissive electoral institutions. In addition, the literature that speaks exclusively to ethnic mobilization holds that ethnic cleavages are not automatically politicized, but rather that ethnic groups overcome their collective action problem and mobilize strategically in response to exogenous conditions (Horowitz, 1985; Olzak, 1992).

11 For example, though migration of ethnic Russians to Russia has slowed since its peak in 1994, the numbers returning each year are still significant (Heleniak, 2003).
12 According to Roeder (1994), most governments of the former Soviet Union had by 1994 reverted to authoritarian forms. Authoritarian governments by definition exclude other groups from access to politics. It is also possible that the system promoted in the Soviet Union, where in addition to the Russian minority local ethnic majorities were favored in administration and other state enterprises (Roeder, 1991; Laitin, 1998), hampers current Russian minority access to government in the republics. In other words, the local ethnic majority might not be willing to share power with the Russian minority any longer now that it is not centrally obliged to do so. Furthermore, because the local majority is already entrenched in all principal administrative positions, the Russian minority may have little recourse.
13 The question of how groups mobilize is an interesting topic that is the subject of several recent studies, for example, Van Cott (2005).
not a necessary corollary of ethnic politics. Instead, I will show that ethnic groups and other factions become intransigent in response to political situations where access to government is limited. Consequently, it is possible that in Spain and Sri Lanka, for instance, the political intransigence and violence expressed by some ethnic groups stem from circumstances exogenous to ethnic affiliations.

My argument is based on the premise that all voters use information available to them to make vote choices. Socialization theory, rational choice theory, political psychology, and game theory all lead one to believe that ethnicity is a particularly salient cue. Moreover, ethnic group affiliation generally persists despite authoritarian efforts to assimilate the minority. Ethnic identities are passed on through families via language and culture, which are difficult to regulate. Therefore, under authoritarian regimes ethnic minorities already have a developed form of group loyalty.

Furthermore, while minority identity and dominant identity sometimes crystallize in contrast to each other under authoritarian regimes, democratic political competition deemphasizes majority ethnic identity by taking it as a given and subjecting the dominant group to a multitude of cross pressures. Cleavages that commonly cross cut the majority population include, for example, nationalistic or global identifications, and conservative or liberal economic and social identities. Dominant group identity in many contemporary East European democracies, for example, also developed in response to external repression, for which the dominant group rightly or wrongly believed the minority was partially responsible. During democratization, however, the dominant groups were subject to a multitude of cross-pressures in political competition, whereas general dominant identity rights were a given in the construction of the nation. Thus, dominant groups did not have a single issue on which to unite. This is true even in countries such as Romania where nationalism is a stable political expression. Nationalism was less prominent politically during democratization than it is now, and even now the majority of the dominant

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14 According to Glazer and Moynihan (1975), the ethnic group is defined in terms of interest as an interest group implying no inherent intransigence.

15 For a definition and discussion of the effects of cross-cutting cleavages see, for instance, Lijphart (1977).

16 According to Kymlicka (2002), “Dominant groups throughout [Eastern Europe] feel they have been victimized by their minorities acting in collaboration with foreign enemies” (p. 20).
The Argument and Implications

group does not identify with or support nationalistic political parties. In contrast, during democratic transition ethnic minorities operated under political conditions that did not take their minority identity–related objectives as given (while these groups also may have been subjected to a multitude of cross-pressures).\textsuperscript{17} As countries have democratized, it consequently has been easier to translate ethnic group loyalties into stable party loyalties than to create new party loyalties among the uncommitted majority of voters.

The central proposition in this book is therefore that \textit{ethnic identity serves as a stable but flexible information shortcut for political choices}, influencing party formation and development in new and maturing democracies. This is a novel argument in the literature on ethnic politics and serves as a unifying element that systematically explains disparate empirical observations of ethnic politics in democracies.\textsuperscript{18} Where ethnic groups are numerous and mobilized and are allowed full participation in democratic electoral politics, they can be expected to field or support parties that represent ethnic interests from the very first election. Furthermore, because of the informational function of the group, ethnic group members are expected to vote consistently for the party that they know represents their policy interests. Consequently, under conditions of limited information in new democracies, one would expect unrestricted ethnic party formation and voting to stabilize party system development in the short term. This prediction is particularly significant in the context of current theories, as it suggests that ethnic diversity mediates some of the expected political turbulence associated with the transition to democracy (Przeworski, 1991).

If ethnic groups are allowed continued participation in electoral politics and are, over time, able to access all levels of government to represent the interests of their ethnic constituency in negotiations over policy, the overall effect on democratic regime development in the long term also is expected to be stabilizing. The mechanism by which access to governing

\textsuperscript{17} As Kymlicka (2001) points out, the extent of ethnic minority rights differs between states. Nowhere, however, in the governance of the central state are minority rights at all times equal to the majority right; nor are all plurality rights equal at any one time. This is even true of consociational democracies (Lijphart, 1999), where minority groups may rotate the executive systematically between groups. In cases where all groups are plurality groups rather than minorities it is also likely that maintaining the rights of each ethnicity serves as a unifying cause for the group.

\textsuperscript{18} This includes observations made by Fearon and Laitin (1996), Rothchild (1997), and Wilkinson (2004).
coalitions may have a moderating effect on ethnic groups, while exclusion may contribute to increasing intransigence, is straightforward: Political actors pursue political goals. In legislative politics, the ultimate goal for both politicians and their constituencies is access to government. In government, groups can bargain over office-related goods and policies proposed by their coalition partners and get some of their own policy objectives passed. Therefore, groups are best able to influence policy within a governing coalition, when aligned with the government, or through sufficient representation in the legislature such that their demands cannot be ignored.

For convenient shorthand, this argument of *stable but flexible ethnic information shortcuts* will be referred to as the argument of *Ethnic Attractors* in the remainder of the book. The reason for the choice of terminology is the image it conjures of ethnicity as the *Strange Attractor* in the “chaotic system” of electoral choice in new and maturing democracies. Thus the Ethnic Attractor produces a long-term pattern through the association of ethnic voters who are enticed to rely on fellow group members for electoral cues. Even so, such shortcuts do not imply any particular political predisposition of any group member or the group as a whole. For this reason, ethnic groups are cohesive or stable but inherently flexible electorates. In the short term, cohesion dominates ethnic group behavior. In the long term, flexibility becomes the norm, as the group responds cohesively to exogenous influences.

Notably nothing in the argument of Ethnic Attractors would predict the ethnic electoral instability and violence that frequently capture our attention in such places as Bolivia and India. Rather, operating under the assumption that democracies provide widespread representation to groups, Ethnic Attractors leads to the belief that electoral instability and violence in ethnic politics are curious anomalies that bear further scrutiny. This is a significant departure from previous scholarship, which scrutinizes the characteristics of the group to discern kernels of violence within the ethnic makeup. To the contrary, the argument of Ethnic Attractors prompts an examination of the conditions that prevent ethnic groups from fulfilling their peaceful political potential.

19 For further discussion of why politicians and constituencies prefer access to government rather than simple reelection to the legislature see Chapter Two. In short, this argument follows the lead of Cox (1997).

20 Chapter Six discusses how formal participation in a government coalition is not a necessary condition as political bargaining may take place informally.