

BOOK SYMPOSIUM

Ethnic struggle, coexistence, and democratization in Eastern Europe, by Sherrill Stroschein, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, 314 pp., \$29.99 (paperback); and \$109.99 (cloth), ISBN 9781107656949

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Sherrill Stroschein's *Ethnic Struggle, Coexistence, and Democratization in Eastern Europe* is an original contribution to the literature on ethnic conflict and democratization in several respects. The larger substantive issue that motivates the book is the relationship between democratization and cultural diversity. As Stroschein notes, she is interested in explaining how minorities in democratizing contexts can sometimes utilize protest in order to achieve accommodating policies that they could not possibly achieve at the ballot box, given their minority status. In a field that is primed to look at violence and exclusion rather than peaceful and inclusive outcomes, Stroschein effectively shows that protest can be an effective vehicle for achieving ethnic accommodation. This alone is an important take-away point. But more than that, Stroschein convincingly demonstrates that ethnic accommodation was achieved not because inclusion was an intentional goal from the beginning; rather, it was an outcome that emerged out of the unintended interactions and responses that protest can unwittingly set off. Scholars often talk about how identities should be understood as relational. But what Stroschein does in this book is quite bold, in that she takes the relational and interactive dimensions of ethnic mobilization seriously as both theoretical concern and analytical tool.

The empirical research underlying the book is impressive. Stroschein examines the politics surrounding Hungarian minorities in nine cities of three countries (Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine) using four languages. The book focuses on a unique corner of the world – Transcarpathia – where political boundaries have periodically shifted over the last hundred years and where issues of national identity and minority rights remain pressing and real. A multi-method research strategy underpins the investigation. An element of thick description is accomplished through the unpacking of events based on a close reading of newspaper accounts from multiple points of view. There is an ethnographic component that involved living with families of both the titular and minority ethnic groups in each of the nine cities investigated. And there is an event analysis, which Stroschein uses to analyze the timing of competing mobilizations over such issues as language and educational policies, historical monuments, and territorial and local autonomy. Stroschein develops a novel, graphical approach to event analysis that places majority and minority mobilizations into visual interplay with one another, juxtaposing them to variations in state policies and elite discourse.

Substantively, Stroschein makes two main arguments: (1) that ethnic Hungarian minorities in all three of these states managed to gain political concessions through protest

that could not have been achieved through the ballot box; and (2) that repeated ethnic contention over time produced a public deliberative process that eventually led to accommodative policies through a learning process. Stroschein contends that majorities and minorities learned what could be achieved through their interactions with one another and pragmatically changed their stances accordingly. A period of initial brinkmanship was followed by more pragmatic responses. Even initial violence (as in the case of Romania) eventually produced moderating effects.

Stroschein's interactive focus is intriguing, the arguments are plausible, and the analysis is creatively and imaginatively carried out. But there are some flaws and points that needed further elaboration. For one thing, there are some problems with the event analysis that Stroschein carries out. Stroschein eschews statistical correlation and prefers instead an eyeball approach to drawing inferences from the data (i.e. do patterns look like they are related). This injects an element of arbitrariness into the interpretation, in part because the graphs produced are so complex. The problem is compounded by her use of Goldstein weights to place various degrees of mobilization into a single field of interpretation. These weighted scales are not easy to interpret, as they imply a unit equivalency for different things. Are, for example, two attempts to plan a demonstration the equivalent of one demonstration that actually takes place? One of the fundamental goals of all scaling is to ensure that there is comparable meaning to each unit of change at different intervals. That simply does not occur with Goldstein weights.

It is also not clear why accommodative equilibria necessarily came about. Certainly, there are many cases in the world in which minority demands are not accommodated and in which the kinds of pragmatic adjustments that Stroschein outlines in the book do not occur. In this respect, part of the problem that plagues the book is case selection: there are no cases examined in which mobilization did not occur, minorities remained quiescent despite widespread grievances, significant and protracted violence occurred rather than accommodation (there is only a single incident of major violence examined in the book), or pragmatic adjustment did not take place despite mobilization. Given the case selection problem, it is difficult to know how to read Stroschein's findings. Should the kinds of pragmatic, accommodative outcomes described in the book be considered the norm or the exception in ethnic relations? The only out-of-sample case discussed in the book is Northern Ireland. But this is hardly a comparable example, since Northern Ireland experienced several decades of violence before accommodation occurred.

Conversely, if accommodative outcomes are relatively rare, this raises the question of why they were able to occur specifically in Eastern Europe in the 1990s and early 2000s. Stroschein argues that two conditions were critical to producing accommodative outcomes: (1) negotiation between elites of different groups; and (2) a bond of legitimacy between elites and masses. This sounds similar to the types of conditions that proponents of consociationalism might point to as critical for resolving ethnic conflict. But Stroschein does not tell us why elites negotiate in some circumstances but not in others, or what factors prevent dominant elites from engaging in repression in the face of minority protest. She is a bit too quick to dismiss alternative explanations such as the role of the European Union, which is widely considered to have been critical in shaping accommodative outcomes in other cases (such as in the Baltic). The key counterfactual of the book is that minorities gained through protest that which they could not have achieved at the ballot box. Yet, in some of the cases examined, minority political parties attained negotiating power by becoming coalition partners or holding critical swing votes. Stroschein rejects the policies of Hungary, the ethnic homeland, as a possible factor that helped to bring about accommodative outcomes. But one wonders whether the stark swings in the character of Hungarian government over the last

two decades have had effects on the Hungarian diaspora, given that the diaspora has been central to the rise of the political right, which has accorded it voting rights in Hungarian politics.

As noted earlier, the book is based on an impressive array of sources. But given the nature of what Stroschein seeks to explain (accommodative outcomes), she might have paid closer attention to the actual deliberative processes among decision-makers that produced accommodative policies. As the literature on social movement outcomes emphasizes, establishing the causal influence of protest on policy outcomes is not an easy task, since there is often deep uncertainty over whether an observed change is actually the result of movement activity. The solutions widely recommended in the literature are to focus on the activities of multiple actors, consider alternative explanations, develop a comparative research design, and focus on process-tracing (Giugni 1999, xxiv). Stroschein accomplishes the first of these tasks admirably. But the latter three could have been carried out with greater rigor.

Other aspects of the book might also have benefited from crisper conceptualizations. For example, Stroschein puts great emphasis on the causal impact of mass action, not elite behavior or decision-making. But the differences between “masses” and “elites” may be less clear than she makes them out to be. Even if only a small portion of the population was involved in protest, or even if protests were highly organized by activist organizations, Stroschein codes these events as driven by “the masses.” Why should leaders and activists of movements not in power be understood as “the masses” rather than as “activists” or “counter-elites?” And can one really generalize about whether ethnic protest is always driven from below, since other scholars have found that sometimes ethnic mobilization is elite-led? (Wilkinson 2006) Stroschein argues that minority mobilizations and majority mobilizations tend to move in tandem over the episodes that she examined due to processes of emulation. But this pattern is probably better interpreted as “counter-mobilization” (mobilization by one group that precipitates mobilization by another group opposed to the demands of the first group) rather than emulation, in that emulation is usually carried out with respect to a positive example that one wants to imitate, not something one wants to counter or oppose. Finally, Stroschein maintains that bilateral, simultaneous mobilizations are necessary for mass inter-ethnic violence. Yet, by definition some forms of inter-ethnic violence (pogroms, for example) involve mobilization by only one group, not two, and obviously do not require simultaneous mobilization.

Despite these issues, *Ethnic Struggle* is a wonderful book that is creative in both method and argument. It holds important lessons concerning the role that contention and learning play in the production of ethnic accommodation and deserves to be widely read and discussed within the field.

References

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