Nationalities Papers, 2017
Vol. 45, No. 5, 928–949, https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1282448

Modes of transition and the timing of separatist war onset: a comparative analysis of South Ossetia and Kosovo

Loretta Dell'Aguzzo *

Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Florence, Florence, Italy

(*Received 16 June 2015; accepted 12 June 2016*)

This paper compares the escalation of civil war in South Ossetia and Kosovo and shows how different modes of transition deeply influenced the timing and type of conflict in these two cases. It argues that regimes resulting from a transition from above – when the elite in power leads the process of regime change and imposes its political agenda on other social actors – are more likely to ensure political stability in the short term, since governments are more cohesive internally, enjoy the support of the military, and can rely on a loyal bureaucracy. In contrast, regimes that emerge from transitions from below are more likely to experience civil war with an ethnic minority in the short term because of an intrinsic weakness of the elite in power. Under these circumstances, the newcomers need to win the loyalty of the military and of the bureaucracy, and separatist groups can take advantage of the incumbents' weaknesses and try to build resources to militarily challenge the state.

Keywords: regime change; modes of transition; separatist war; South Ossetia; Kosovo

Introduction

The collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Central and Eastern Europe produced an ideological vacuum that favored the emergence of nationalism and, subsequently, the onset of several ethno-political conflicts in divided societies. While some states found ways to manage internal conflicts peacefully, others did not and internal territorial disputes spiraled into separatist wars. As a matter of fact, most of these conflicts erupted during the transitions from authoritarian rule. This paper aims to explain how different modes of regime change affect the conflict trajectories in multiethnic societies.

Regime change and especially democratization can be understood as an aspect of political development (Huntington 1965) and – as other aspects of modernization – may produce chaos and instability. Indeed, the idea of a strong association between political development and violence is deep-rooted in political science. As Huntington noted in *Political Order in Changing Societies*, de Tocqueville argued that "the art of associating together must grow and improve in the same ratio in which the equality of conditions is increased" (1955, 118). In his influential book, Huntington argues that increased political instability in some regions during the 1950s and the 1960s was the product of rapid social change and mobilization of new groups combined with the much slower development of political institutions. According to Huntington, the widening of participation can

*Email: loretta.dellaguzzo@hotmail.it

overthrow traditional political institutions while preventing the development of modern ones (Huntington 1968, 3–5).

Dahl takes a similar view. He maintains that some paths to the first democratization can be more dangerous than others: more explicitly, the path to democracy is more problematic when inclusiveness precedes liberalization, since bringing in large groups (and divergent interests) before new rules and institutions are established makes compromise difficult. Analogously, the sudden and simultaneous increase in participation and liberalization can be disruptive, given that it "drastically shortens the time for learning complex skills and understandings for arriving at a system of mutual security" (Dahl 1971, 35–37). The main argument of these contributions is that mass mobilization may undermine political stability insofar as institutions are underdeveloped and thus unable to channel political participation.

The idea of an association between democratization and disorder was pushed into the background of academic literature and political debates until the mid-1990s, when internal conflicts rose sharply as a consequence of the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of multinational socialist federations. During the last two decades, the processes of state- and nation-building, regime change, and civil wars developed simultaneously in several post-socialist states and this proposition regained popularity. In particular, Mansfield and Snyder criticize the "naive enthusiasm for spreading peace by promoting democratization associated with the Clinton Administration" (1995, 36) and – building on Huntington – maintain that intense competition between old and new elites in the early stages of democratization may increase political instability. More specifically, while the old autocratic power structures are in decline, the new democratic institutions are still too weak to effectively regulate mass political competition. Furthermore, new and old elites in democratizing countries "have the motive and the opportunity to resort to the rhetoric of nationalism, which mobilizes mass support through the language of popular sovereignty while evading the accountability that would be provided by free and fair elections" (Mansfield and Snyder 2005, 39).

In addition, most authoritarian regimes in multinational societies are dominated by a specific cultural group. Thus, the main problem resulting from regime change regards how the transition will affect the interests of different ethnic groups. The stakes are often considerable, including the relative status of groups, the representation of interests within the state, the definition of citizenship, and so on (Beissinger 2008, 90). In such a context, political change increases ethnic insecurity and political competition radicalizes ethnic strife (Saideman et al. 2002).

Recent studies confirm a variable relationship between civil conflict and regime type in most contexts, revealing that open regimes experience fewer civil wars, while conflict occurs most frequently in intermediate democracies (Ellingsen and Gleditsch 1997).[1] However, there is no systematic evidence that democratizing regimes are the most conflict-prone. Indeed, Gleditsch and Ward (1998) distinguish between smooth and gradual democratization processes, on the one hand, and oscillating democratization processes full of reversals, on the other hand, to better assess the effects of democratization on the likelihood of war. Their conclusion is that smooth democratizations are less likely to engage in civil wars.

As these contributions show, previous studies on regime change and civil war focused mainly on the impact of regime type and regime change on political stability. This paper attempts to advance the literature on democratization by accounting for the effects of the modes of transitions on the timing of internal armed conflict. In this study, I develop a theoretical explanation as to why transition imposed from below in deeply divided societies may

be more dangerous in the short run, while that imposed from above can prevent the outbreak of separatist wars before the new regime is consolidated.[2]

Before introducing the theoretical framework, one clarification is required: intrastate conflicts are complex processes and no single factor can fully account for civil war onset. As Levy points out, "whether war or peace occurs is usually determined by multiple variables operating at more than one level of analysis" (Levy 2001, 4). Actually, in the words of Horowitz,

> whether and when a secessionist movement will emerge is determined mainly by domestic politics. [...] Whether a secessionist movement will achieve its aims, however, is determined largely by international politics, by the balance of interests and forces that extend beyond the state. (1985, 230)

Using regime change as a single variable to predict when a separatist war will start presents some shortcomings: it does not account for the behavior of potential external actors, who may decide to intervene in case of a transition from either below or above. As a rule, territorially concentrated ethnic groups are weaker than the government, therefore – from a rationalist perspective – they would opt for a radicalization of the conflict only when they perceive either that the government is extremely weak or when they enjoy the support of external actors, which alters their cost-benefit calculation. Jenne (2004) has described ethnic mobilization as a process based on the interactions among state authorities, ethnic minorities, and external "lobby actors" and has found evidence that the radicalization of a minority's demands is positively associated with external support. Previous studies on external intervention in domestic conflicts agree that foreign states are primarily motivated by geopolitics rather than by ethnic or religious affinity (Byman 2001, 23). Indeed, Siroky finds that external support for ethnic minorities is more likely when regional elites have local control in areas that are contiguous with potential sponsors (2016). That being said, focusing on the mode of transition presents some advantages: first, this factor has a direct impact on the relations between the government and the minorities, since it alters the distribution of power within state borders. Therefore, it may profoundly alter the political opportunity structure as well, encouraging potential rebels to challenge state authorities or constraining their actions. Thus, although a focus on the mode of transition neglects the role of international actors in territorial armed conflict, it brings new knowledge about the domestic context in which separatist conflicts develop.

Modes of transition in the post-socialist space and the timing of civil war onset

Previous studies on transitions from authoritarianism agree that several paths can lead to the installation of a new regime and that the different modes of transition can significantly affect subsequent political developments (Karl 1990; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). The process of transition from authoritarian rule alters the status quo abruptly and may alter the conflict trajectories as well, since it brings new actors into the political arena and allows the creation of new institutions and new rules of the game, which can produce either a de-radicalization or an escalation of the conflict. Generally, regime change begets a great deal of uncertainty about future equilibria, especially among those who enjoyed the benefits of the previous regime and had access to political power. In many post-socialist states, such uncertainty was intensified by the collapse of those state structures that had ensured social and military security over the preceding 50 years. The disappearance of stable institutions induced the population to seek personal security outside state structures. In such a context, mechanisms capable of triggering a spiral of violence can start, especially in divided societies, which face the challenge of integrating ethnic

minorities into the new regime. In this paper, I argue that different trajectories from authoritarian rule can deeply alter interethnic relations and influence the probability and the timing of separatist armed conflicts. In order to corroborate this hypothesis, it is necessary to identify the different modes of regime change. For this purpose, I first analyze three dimensions of change: two of them concern the identity of relevant actors in the transition process and the third is related to the strategies central actors adopt to bring about regime change.

As far as the first dimension is concerned, as Morlino suggests, the degree of continuity or discontinuity with the previous regime must be analyzed. Continuity implies that the elite in power in the authoritarian regime drives the process of regime change; conversely, discontinuity refers to a sharp break with the past, occurring when the opposition drives the transition (Morlino 2011, 85–86). The second dimension relates to the degree of inclusiveness of the founding coalition of the new regime. The concept of inclusiveness refers to the presence of representatives of relevant ethnic minorities in the coalition that wins the first multiparty elections. When representatives of both dominant nation and ethnic minorities are members of the founding coalition, the transition is coded as inclusive; conversely, when the winning coalition is composed only by members of the dominant nation, the transition is coded as exclusive.

As to the strategies adopted, the major distinction concerns the degree of confrontation between the incumbents and the challengers. More specifically, when a strong polarization between competing actors is present, the group endowed with greater capabilities is able to impose its agenda on the opponent (McFaul 2002). In this case, a country goes through a transition imposed from above, if the governing elite is still more powerful than the opposition, or from below, when the challengers are resourceful enough to bring about the collapse of the old regime, through mass mobilization.[3] Finally, when the incumbents and the opposition seek "to redefine rules governing the exercise of power on the basis of mutual guarantees for the 'vital interests' of those entering into it" (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 37), countries undergo a negotiated transition.

On the basis of the aforementioned dimensions, we can first distinguish between inclusive and exclusive transitions and then among transitions imposed from below or from above and negotiated transitions. Most transitions in the post-socialist area were exclusive. The presence of few inclusive transitions from authoritarian rule does not come as a surprise: the probability of an inclusive transition depends in part on new and old elites' strategic choices and – as Snyder argues – in the contemporary world we have seen "elites jockeying for power within the ethnic group and having incentive to be immoderate" (Snyder 2000, 30) more often than elites leading their people toward compromise. In the context of regime change, old elites may act out of self-preservation by seeking to maintain their positions of power (Engstrom 2009, 37). In order to preserve the status quo, they seek to capitalize on existing ethnic divides (Francisco 2000, 49). Similarly, new elites can fill the ideological vacuum left by the old regime with nationalist ideas (Snyder 2000).

Conversely, inclusive transitions are characterized by the inclusion of all the relevant groups in the negotiating process and provide an opportunity to both the dominant nation and ethnic minorities to negotiate about the future shape of political institutions, thus reducing ethnic tensions through the creation of adequate mechanisms for the inclusion of more disadvantaged groups in the republic's political and social life (De Nevers 1993, 65). Actually, transitions resulting from a compromise between the dominant nation and ethnic minorities ease ethnic tensions in the short term and postpone the discussion about minorities' status to the stage of constitution-building, during which minorities that have contributed to the foundation of the new regime can actively cooperate with the dominant nation.

Among ethnically fragmented post-socialist countries, the most relevant case of inclusive transition is that of Czechoslovakia, where the Slovak Public Against Violence had a prominent role in the process of political change and mobilized – along with Czech movements – against the Communist incumbents. The strength of the pro-democracy organizations, coupled with the government's isolation, forced the government to make concessions that amounted to capitulation – in particular, the introduction of pluralism and the commitment to competitive elections (Munck and Leff 1997, 335). The issue of secession in Czechoslovakia was pushed onto the political agenda after a democratic and multinational government was established. As a matter of fact, the party system that emerged from the founding elections witnessed a split along national lines between Czech and Slovak elites, and one of the first issues the new government had to face was a symbolic struggle over the state's post-Communist name. However, thanks to the inclusion within the federal cabinet of representatives of the Slovak minority, Slovak separatist parties could use legitimate institutional channels to change the status quo.[4]

In contrast to inclusive transitions, exclusive ones – which occur when representatives of minorities are excluded from the founding coalition of the new regime and the dominant nation is represented by nationalist leaders – may foster the mobilization of ethnic minorities, who react to what is perceived as an unacceptable change to the previous balance of power. Thus, exclusive transitions produce a radicalization of the conflict and raise the probability of civil war. However, the mere occurrence of an exclusive transition neither determines the onset of a separatist conflict nor provides any information about the timing of the potential outbreak of violence. Indeed, the probability of a separatist conflict is largely influenced by the government's ability to prevent ethnic mobilization. The cohesion of the ruling coalition and the coercive and administrative resources of the new regime allow, on the one hand, the redistribution of resources to the dominant nation and, on the other hand, control of separatist minorities, thus delaying – or even preventing – armed conflict. Therefore, in order to understand the timing of separatist wars onset in the context of transitions, it is necessary to evaluate which mode of regime change is more likely to establish a stronger regime.

As mentioned, based on the strategies adopted to bring about regime change, we can distinguish among three main types of (exclusive) transitions: imposed from above, imposed from below, and negotiated.[5] Most common types of regime change in the post-socialist area are transitions imposed from above and from below. Transitions from above occur when the balance of power favors the incumbents, who take the lead in the process of regime change. In this pattern, opposition forces are not powerful enough to displace the old regime (Gill 2002, 106) and sometimes they cannot even exert pressure on the ruling elite, as in Central Asia, where incumbents were completely unreceptive to a political opening until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Unlike transitions imposed from below, in this pattern the elite in power manages to win the founding elections of the new regime. In some post-socialist states, transitions imposed from above have established stronger regimes than those that emerged from negotiated transitions or from transitions from below, since elites in power inherited from the previous regime the loyalty of the army and the media and could rely on the expertise of the old nomenclature for the functioning of institutions. In particular, control over the military and the police, namely the monopoly on coercion, provides the government with higher repressive capabilities. How does coercion delay the outbreak of a separatist war? Conventional wisdom agrees that the use of repression, on the one hand, increases the costs associated with protest (Lichbach 1987), but, on the other, increases minorities' frustration and grievances, since they perceive state violence as illegitimate and "unfair" (Petersen 2002). According to Gurr, repression

is one of the major sources of incentives for collective action in the long run, given that the use of force against people may "provoke resentment and enduring incentives to resist and retaliate" (2000, 71). Moreover, Gurr and Moore – comparing different sources of minority grievances – find that a recent history of repression against the group is the single most important determinant of current grievances (1997). Furthermore, DeNardo maintains that social movement members may disagree about how to react to state repression: those who are strongly committed to the goal of mobilization are more likely to press forward despite the state's use of coercion, while others may fear that the costs of collective action outweigh its benefits (1985). Similarly, Della Porta argues that "repressive, diffuse, and hard techniques of policing tend to [...] discourage mass and peaceful protest while fueling the most radical fringes" (1995, 80). Accordingly, we may posit that repression can reduce the level of protest in the short term, but it produces a radicalization of the separatist movements in the long run, favoring the creation of groups that – given the imbalance of power between them and the state – are induced to resort to terroristic tactics, determining at last an escalation of the conflict.

Among the highly diverse post-socialist countries, the Central Asian republics and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) experienced transitions from above. In the first case, incumbents' repression prevented violent ethnic mobilization during the transition period and, unlike Milosevic's regime, most Central Asian autocracies have proved able to survive without being exposed to regime crisis due to internal divisiveness and challenges from opposition.[6] Several reasons account for Central Asia's stability. First, most of the leaders represented a continuation of the previous "party of power." They were former party officials under the Soviet regime and were regarded by both minorities and titular nationalities as able to stay above ethnic interests (Matveeva 1999, 27). Moreover, in this area the central governments limited democratization reforms and restricted the growth of civil society (George 2009b, 76), thus leaving little room for contestation.

Analogously, Serbian repressive policies prevented violent ethnic mobilization during the transition process. Indeed, during the first years of the Milosevic regime, the leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo (DLK), Ibrahim Rugova, opted for nonviolent resistance, given that he feared relentless police repression. Only in 1996, when this strategy proved ineffective, did the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) emerge and start a terrorist campaign against Serbian police, thus provoking the government military occupation of the province and, ultimately, the civil war in 1999.

Unlike transitions imposed from above, impositions from below occur when the elite in power has lost popular support and the opposition capitalizes on the delegitimation of the old regime, and they are often characterized by high popular participation and protest. This is a common pattern in transition processes in the post-socialist area. In this path of transition from dictatorship, the balance of power is in favor of the challengers who can force the incumbents to start some form of political liberalization through mass mobilization. Generally this mode of transition ends up with the electoral success of the opposition parties at the first competitive elections.[7] Transitions from below may lead to a radicalization of the conflict and increase the probability of civil war as well. However, unlike transitions imposed from above, they produce much political instability in the short run, since they are more likely to establish weaker regimes, especially if they occur simultaneously with the process of state-building. The first determinant of the weakness of the regimes resulting from transitions imposed from below is that opposition is generally made up by very heterogeneous coalitions, which are united by their desire to bring about regime change, but "after the fall, divisions appear among them and they struggle over the distribution of power and the nature of the new regime that must be established" (Huntington 1991, 606).

In the absence of a protracted negotiation with old elites over the main features of the future regime, diverse and sometimes contradictory ideas of the groups that make up the ruling coalition emerge only after the fall of the previous regime. Thus, after the founding elections such divisions lead to an institutional gridlock delegitimizing the elite in power during an extremely critical stage (Munck and Leff 1997). This state of affairs induces minorities to take advantage of the crisis within the new government and to radicalize their demands. Second, transitions imposed from below may produce a complete deinstitutionalization of the remnants of previous state structures. Moreover, such mode of transition may prevent collaboration between the new elite in power and the old nomenclature, due to the ideological distance between them (Zurcher 2007).

A further determinant of regime weakness following a transition from below is strictly connected with the process of state-building. In fact, post-socialist states experienced the dissolution of the state and the transition from authoritarian rule simultaneously. Thus, governments had to face several challenges at the same time: among other things, they had to restructure inefficient and rent-seeking state bureaucracies and reconstruct the army and police (Wheatley and Zurcher 2008). The collapse of socialism and the dissolution of ethno-federal states had left the new states without the fundamental coercive apparatuses that could provide them with a monopoly on coercion. In such a context, the conventional asymmetry of power among state authorities and the challengers is missing, since the two groups of actors have to reconstruct their organizational capacity from scratch. According to George, low state capacity has been a relevant determinant of the separatist wars in Georgia, which in 1991 had no armed force under civilian control and little rule of law. This reduced the central government's bargaining power *vis-à-vis* regional leaders (2009a, 18). Thus, minorities may become more assertive toward a weak government, which in turn may be induced to fill the political vacuum at the center with the adoption of a nationalist discourse in order to win public support. Moreover, the absence of civil control over the military – frequent during the state-building process – may increase political instability, since new military formations may pursue goals divergent from the national interest. In a recent analysis of the role of warlords in regime consolidation after civil wars, Jesse Driscoll argues the formation of militia groups in Georgia during the period of Soviet collapse contributed to state disintegration insofar as ethnic minorities began to organize militias of their own in order to defend themselves (2015). In such a scenario, political chaos can easily erupt into an armed conflict. Exclusive transitions from below were common in the South Caucasus and in the Baltic countries. While in the latter region the effect of majority nationalism and ethnic discrimination was reduced by the prospects for membership in the European Union and NATO and by the liberal turn of Russian foreign policy in the 1990s, in Georgia and Azerbaijan the exclusion of highly cohesive and organized minorities, combined with low state capacity, led to bloody territorial wars during the first stages of the transition processes.

As far as negotiated transitions are concerned, "fourth wave" transitions – as noted by McFaul (2002) – were rarely the product of implicit or formal pacts. Actually, according to Geddes,

> successful pact making seems to require the prior existence of well-organized parties able to make and keep commitments [which] implies a reasonable degree of party control over the rival factions within each party. Such prior party development is uncommon in countries with little democratic experience. (1999, 136)

Regimes that emerge from pacts between soft-liners of the previous regime and opposition forces are likely to resemble those that emerge from impositions from below in at least one

crucial aspect: the founding coalition of the new regime tends to be highly diverse, since it is generally composed of members with different ideological backgrounds and different interests. Divisions within the government may induce separatist leaders to radicalize their claims, thus breeding political instability before the new regime is consolidated.

In the post-socialist space, regime change in Moldova is the closest approximation of a negotiated transition. As in the Baltic states and the South Caucasus, *glasnost* fostered national mobilization in Moldova, where in the late 1980s a Popular Front was established. The Moldovan Popular Front was composed both of pro-reform and nationalist movements, which demanded unification with Romania. The Moldovan Communist political elite initially condemned the national movement but soon recognized that in order to maintain power it would have to join forces with the Popular Front. Following the first competitive elections in 1990, the former Communist official Mircea Snegur was elected president by the parliament and Mircea Druc – a strong advocate of union with Romania – was elected prime minister. Divisions within the governing coalition became apparent immediately after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when the government pursued a pro-Romania agenda, thus alienating the Russian minority in Transnistria, while the president openly rejected reunification and refused – until early 1992 – to undertake military action to resolve the conflict (Roper 2002, 105). During the period between 1990 and 1992, Transnistrian leaders took advantage of the new Moldovan government's divisions and inconsistency and built their own militia. When the Moldovan military attempted to crush the well-armed separatists in March 1992, the conflict escalated into a civil war.

Case selection

In order to test my hypothesis, I will compare two cases of separatist conflicts that occurred after a transition from Communist rule: the war over the status of South Ossetia, in Georgia, and the war over Kosovo, in the FRY. These cases share several similarities both at the group and at the state level. First of all, both South Ossetia and Kosovo were granted some forms of territorial and cultural autonomy during previous regimes and both lost autonomy as a result of the breakup of multinational federations and exclusive transitions. These similarities are extremely relevant since previous studies have found that autonomy provides minority groups with high organizational capacity and material and symbolic resources crucial to mobilization (Cornell 2001). In a recent article, Siroky and Cuffe maintain that lost autonomy increases the likelihood of separatism, since it increases ethnic grievances and weakens the central government's ability to make credible commitments. In addition, they find evidence that downgrading the group's power status does not reduce its collective action capacity and that the cost of free riding within these minorities "may be higher than joining forces with those who seek separation" (2015, 3). Furthermore, the literature on ethnic conflicts reveals that groups that have lost autonomy are more likely to engage in separatist wars than other minorities (Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010). As for state-level similarities, transitions in both Georgia and Yugoslavia empowered nationalist leaders, who adopted similar discriminatory policies toward ethnic minorities and enjoyed – at least during the early stage of their rule – strong popular support.

At first glance, the FRY, the successor state of the Socialist FRY, had stronger institutions than Georgia, which was a new republic with a very short history of independent statehood between 1918 and 1920. Indeed, both states had to face great challenges: like the Soviet Army, the Yugoslav National Army (YNA) broke along ethnic lines. Since the dissolution of the Yugoslav Communist Party in January 1990 left the army without political guidance, the officers started to look for other sources of legitimation. Actually,

in the early 1990s, only a few Serb officers offered their support to Milosevic and were consequently purged in mid-1992 (Pavkovic 2000, 131). Undoubtedly, Georgian state institutions during the dissolution of the Soviet Union were weaker than Serbian state structures. However, during and after the transition process, all the Soviet republics had to deal with the dismissal of old structures and the creation of new ones, but only few of them experienced ethnic civil wars. As a matter of fact, new states in Central Asia have consolidated their power since 1991. In this area, Soviet bureaucratic culture proved highly resilient; the high degree of ideological continuity between Central Asian leaders and the extensive administrative apparatus provided the new regimes with the legitimacy required to maintain political stability (Cummings 2010, 18). Therefore, my argument is that – notwithstanding the clear disparity in state capacity between Georgia and the FRY – the main difference between these two countries lies in the relation between the new regimes and the remnants of previous states' administrative and bureaucratic structures. More specifically, I maintain that ideological continuity, the central feature of transitions from above, grants governments state support in preventing ethnic mobilization.

Transition from below and the rapid escalation of conflict in South Ossetia

In the second half of the 1980s, several dissident groups emerged in Georgia. Their main initial goal was to free the country from Soviet rule and to promote Georgian national culture and identity. One of the main organizations established in those years was the St. Ilia the Righteous Society, led by Soviet dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia. This movement aimed "to encourage the political development and education of the Georgian people, in order to prepare them for future independence" (Aves 1991, 9) since they considered the Soviet Union "an occupation regime" (Nodia 1996). Therefore, Gamsakhurdia opposed any form of cooperation with federal institutions and boycotted the country's first multicandidate elections.

During the 1980s, the Georgian Communist Party (GCP) resisted *glasnost*, thus excluding a mainstream politics that might have provided an alternative to more extreme nationalist movements (Beissinger 2002, 180). As a result, Georgian opposition was highly fragmented and only radical nationalist groups managed to attract wide popular support. Indeed, as Liz Fuller observed, "the Georgian authorities' initial response to the creation of the St. Ilia the Righteous Society [...] was virtually indistinguishable from the tactics of threats, detention, and arrest employed against the Georgian human-rights movement during the late Brezhnev era" (Fuller 1988a, 5). Moreover, the GCP at first tried to counter the radicals by setting up a semi-official movement, the Rustaveli society, which was moderately nationalist and supportive of the reformist policies the Georgian government was implementing (Cornell 2001, 157). The new organization was supposed to promote Georgian culture and language, but it was too obviously under Communist control to develop into a broad popular movement (Aves 1992, 159). In this way, the party sidelined reformist Georgian intellectuals who would otherwise have looked to a Popular Front for leadership. Undoubtedly, the strategy of the GCP favored the radicals, who managed to gain popular support by defying the government restrictions and organizing protests against the Soviet regime (Jibladze 2007, 28).

At the end of 1988, an amendment to the Soviet constitution that would allow the center to strike down any republican law that contradicted the all-Union law and that would abolish the right of secession was proposed. In response, a wave of popular protest spread across the republic, forcing the local party to meet some of the nationalists' demands. Indeed, in November 1988, a law was passed that strengthened the position of

the Georgian language in the republic, including in minority areas, at the expense of both minority languages and Russian (Fuller 1988b). The language law, combined with direct threats to ethnic minorities made by nationalist organizations, raised South Ossetians' fears about their future within Georgia.

The wind of political liberalization that swept through the Communist bloc affected Georgia's autonomous entities as well, where new political organizations were created. Contrary to other national movements, at first minorities' movements aimed at resisting political change: the Soviet ethno-federal system had granted them some cultural and, to a limited extent, political autonomy. Therefore, in this institutional setting, ethno-national groups could exercise political power over the territory where they represented the titular nationality. The onset of the transition in the Soviet Union and its republics raised serious concerns among minorities, since they feared their privileges would be called into question once Georgia achieved independence. Their fears were not totally groundless, since Georgian national movements insisted on issues concerning the promotion of the dominant nation's culture and tradition.

In 1988 in Abkhazia a Popular Front (Aidgylara) was created whose representatives soon established contacts with the local Soviet. Their collaboration resulted in a joint declaration calling for the upgrading of Abkhazia's status to a full republic. Georgia's Supreme Soviet condemned the declaration, and its publication in local newspapers sparked furious anti-Abkhazian mass demonstrations. After a month of large-scale demonstrations in Tbilisi, a peaceful protest was broken up by Soviet troops. At least 19 were killed, 16 of whom were women. This event resonated in Georgian society and eroded the authority of the Communist Party, encouraging wide resistance to any political control from Moscow (Collier and Sambanis 2005, 266).

The intervention was intended to intimidate the nationalist movement and to deter popular movements from opposing the republican government to the extent they had done previously, but this turned out to be a terrible miscalculation. The use of force against peaceful demonstrators and the arrest of Gamsakhurdia and other radical nationalists inevitably "strengthened the hands of the radicals who rejected any compromise with Soviet authorities" (Aves 1991, 28) and sidelined the moderates who were working to establish a Popular Front, whose founding congress was to be held later in 1989. Moreover, the hard-line had a devastating impact on interethnic relations, since the radical wing of the Georgian national movement managed to win widespread support while the Communist Party lost any legitimacy. Indeed, the local authorities were forced to implement Gamsakhurdia's nationalist agenda in order to stay in power. As Nodia points out,

> in the period April 1989 to October 1990, Georgia lived under divided rule: the Communist government in power continued to carry out the routine management while all important political decisions were taken under pressure from or with the consent of the national movement. (Nodia and Tevzadze 2003, 11)

The "Tbilisi massacre" had enormous consequences on Georgia's transition and on relations between the dominant nation and minorities as well. In the following weeks, the republican leadership was replaced and the nationalists held the new party secretary for ransom. Indeed, under the threat of the nationalist organizations, in 1989 the local party issued a language law designed to increase the use of the Georgian language in all spheres of life throughout the republic. Minorities perceived the growing Georgian nationalism – and the regime weakness as well – as a threat to their survival within the republican borders. Therefore, new political organizations backed by the local Soviet emerged in South Ossetia as well. In January 1989, the South Ossetian Popular Front (Ademon Nykhas, AN)

held its founding meeting and Alan Chochiev was elected president. At first AN was organized around economic problems, and sentiment rapidly turned against the dominant nation, blamed for the poor living conditions of the Ossetians. This was clearly a reaction to growing Georgian chauvinism. Tensions between Georgians and Ossetians increased after the March 1989 publication of an open letter in support of the Abkhaz movement for separation from Georgia. Moreover, AN demanded that the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast be upgraded in status to that of an autonomous republic and be united with the North Ossetian Autonomous Republic. After the publication of the Georgian language program envisaging the strengthening of the position of the Georgian language all over the country, the oblast soviet engaged in what came to be called the "war of laws" with Tbilisi, passing laws that were to supersede the mandates of the republican government. The first act of the oblast soviet was the publication of a draft law that would give the Georgian, Russian, and Ossetian languages the same status within the oblast borders.

Meanwhile, in Georgia the Communist Party was unable to resist the nationalist agenda, and in the autumn of 1989 the republican government declared the supremacy of Georgian law over Soviet legislation. In March 1990 the Communist Party's guaranteed right to a monopoly was removed and the first free parliamentary elections were called for in October. This led to further tensions with the Ossetians, especially because the Georgian parliament announced a law prohibiting regional parties from participating in elections, in order to practically disenfranchise AN (Goldenberg 1993, 97).

The founding elections in 1990 represented the first opportunity to establish a robust representative institution to counterbalance the high rate of mobilization and all of Georgia, including separatist regions, participated in elections to form the first non-Communist parliament (Cheterian 2009). Thus, the exclusion of regional parties from competition fostered a sense of alienation among ethnic minorities who decided to boycott the national elections. In the following weeks, South Ossetia declared its secession from Georgia, only to have its declaration voided by the Georgian Supreme Soviet as unconstitutional.

Two-round parliamentary elections were held in October and November 1990, under a mix of the proportional and majority systems: the proportional vote was divided between the Round Table led by Zviad Gamsakhurdia (53%) and the Communist Party (29%), with none of the moderate parties crossing the 4% threshold. Nevertheless, a number of democratic moderates were elected by the majority vote, and they formed the "Democratic Center," an 11-member opposition faction in the 250-seat parliament (Nodia 1996, 6). At first, this constituted the only parliamentary opposition to Gamsakhurdia, since many of the Communist deputies soon left their party and joined the ruling coalition. The supremacy of the nationalist movement over Georgian politics was definitively established in May 1991, when Gamsakhurdia was elected president of the new republic with 86.5% of the vote (Fuller 1991, 20–23).

From the early days of the new regime, it was apparent that although Gamsakhurdia had won power through formally democratic elections, his main aim was to consolidate his own power within existing institutions rather than to build new ones. He appointed members of his own organization to key positions in the internal security and economic structures, often provoking resentment due to the disruption of long-established patron–client networks (Demetriou 2002a, 870). In order to increase the control of the center over the peripheries, Gamsakhurdia replaced the old rayon party secretaries with centrally appointed prefects (Siroky and Aprasidze 2011, 7).

Moreover, the radical opposition did not acknowledge the legitimacy of the government and organized elections to the so-called National Congress. The radical opposition

represented in the congress was not very popular, but it was supported by Mkhedrioni, the most powerful of the paramilitary groups. The concern of the government grew. In February 1991, the government managed to neutralize Mkhedrioni and arrest its leaders, including the head of the organization, Jaba Ioseliani (Nodia and Tevzadze 2003, 15). Divisions within the dominant nation compounded tensions with Abkhazian and South Ossetian minorities: while the center attempted to consolidate its power, ethnic minorities claimed the right to manage their internal issues on their own, through political autonomy or outright secession.

Initial violent clashes in South Ossetia took place at the end of 1989 during a march on Tskhinvali organized by Gamsakhurdia "to defend the Georgian population" after the Ossetian parliament voted to upgrade South Ossetia's autonomous status within Georgia (Horowitz 2005, 96). The first escalation of the civil conflict occurred in January 1991 when the National Guard conducted a bloody raid on Tskhinvali after elections for the local parliament. When two months later South Ossetians voted overwhelmingly to preserve the USSR, the fighting intensified. The conflict continued until the end of 1991 without blatantly escalating to a civil war. After 1991, the fighting shifted from predominantly "social" violence (consisting of skirmishes between unorganized bands of poorly armed men) to full-scale warfare involving large military formations and heavy weaponry with air support (Demetriou 2002b, 26).

Tensions between Georgia and South Ossetia rose significantly in 1992 mainly because of the crisis and collapse of Gamsakhurdia's regime. Divisions within the ruling coalition weakened the government, which was unable to control the military.

As we have seen, the exclusion of ethnic minorities from the founding coalition of the new regime was reinforced by the adoption of an electoral law that prevented separatist movements and parties from contesting the elections.[8] This inevitably increased minorities' alienation and grievances against the Georgian state. Moreover, Gamsakhurdia's nationalist rhetoric contributed to the radicalization of the conflict, intensifying the fears of minorities, who reacted by organizing paramilitary groups in order to respond to a potential Georgian military provocation. However, during 1990 and 1991, the republican government's efforts were aimed at consolidating the regime and organizing the first presidential elections, thus issues concerning the status of the autonomous regions were pushed to the background.

The newly elected parliament's inability to temper the authoritarian personality of Gamsakhurdia was a side effect of the transition from below that occurred in Georgia, which brought to power inexperienced political personnel. The party list system had hurt candidates from Tbilisi's intelligentsia, who were unknown outside the capital, especially in the rural areas. Most of the candidates had no support base of their own, but were dependent on the charismatic leader for their rise to power. The main selection criterion was loyalty to the leader rather than skills and expertise (Goldenberg 1993, 97).

Gamsakhurdia's authoritarian turn, however, isolated him rather than consolidated his power. As a matter of fact, the president's *modus operandi* caused dissatisfaction even in his immediate circle. The government crisis had started by the end of August 1991, when the president's closest confidantes stepped aside. However, the domestic political crisis grew worse when Gamsakhurdia tried to disband the National Guard, a military formation created out of several paramilitary groups, and subordinate it into the Interior Ministry. The commander of the National Guard, Tengiz Kitovani, condemned the decision and left Tbilisi together with a substantial number of troops. Moreover, when the government attempted to suppress the Mkhedrioni, the struggle for power in Georgia degenerated into a civil war. The warlords opted to seize power directly, in order to secure their monopoly on the extortion racket and sustain their paramilitary structures (Zurcher 2007, 139).

The struggle between government militias and the two main paramilitary organizations quickly degenerated into an armed conflict that resulted in the collapse of the regime installed by Gamsakhurdia, who took refuge in Mingrelia, his native region, in the fall of 1991 (Galeotti 1991, 76). Political instability in Georgia gave Tskhinvali the opportunity to cut the ties with Tbilisi, expressing the will to unify South and North Ossetia and thus secede from Georgia and enter the Russian Federation. An opportunity presented itself when government militias withdrew from the oblast to engage in the conflict against Mkhedrioni and Kitovani. In January 1992, a referendum was held in the South Ossetian oblast and 90% of the population opted for unification with the Russian Federation (Freedom House 2012).

This reiteration of the intention to secede from Georgia did not provoke an immediate reaction, given that the main paramilitary leaders in Tbilisi were in the process of assuming power over the country. Forces loyal to Gamsakhurdia had also retreated to their native power base in Mingrelia, concentrating paramilitary activity in the northwest of the country (Cornell 2001, 166). In order to bolster their credibility, the ruling Military Council invited Eduard Shevardnadze to return to Georgia as president. Shevardnadze's arrival to power was thought to improve the chances of arriving at a compromise with the minorities and rebuilding the Georgian state. Indeed, initial steps were positive, given that a cease-fire agreement was reached in May, but Shevardnadze's failure to control the paramilitary forces was already clear. While negotiations for the cease-fire were going on, Georgian National Guard and Mkhedrioni forces began a siege of Tskhinvali that lasted until mid-1992. During this time, the Ossetian National Guard, fitted out with anti-tank weapons and armored vehicles, responded in kind. The armed conflict turned immediately into civil war, in which volunteers from North Ossetia and paramilitary formations were involved (Bowers 1994). Following a period of intense fighting in which Russian troops also fought against Georgian forces, Shevardnadze and Russian President Boris Yeltsin on 24 June 1992 signed a cease-fire agreement that took effect on 14 July 1992 (Zverev 1996).

Transition from above and the long-delayed war in Kosovo

After the death of Marshal Tito, political stability in Serbia was threatened by the presence of two provinces within the republican borders – Kosovo and Vojvodina – that enjoyed cultural and political autonomy. Albanians from Kosovo considered Tito their only source of protection from an otherwise inevitable Serbian hegemony, while Kosovo's Serb minority aimed to curtail the power of the Albanian majority.

During the early 1980s, Kosovo faced a harsh economic crisis and the population's dissatisfaction rapidly culminated in street protests, organized by students from Pristina University. These protests increased the grievances of the Serbian minority, who had lost considerable privileges in the 1974 constitutional reforms and felt threatened by Albanian demographic and political hegemony. They sought allies among the Serbian leadership in order to amend the constitution, but with little success. Serbs asked federal and republican authorities to intervene in order to stop alleged acts of violence and intimidation committed by Kosovar Albanians and in 1985 started to launch petitions and to organize protest marches (Transchel 2007, 107).

The Kosovo question in the 1980s raised widespread concern in Serbia as well, both among the population and the intellectual elite. The 1974 constitution upended the balance of power between the republic and the province of Kosovo: republican laws were discussed by the provincial assemblies, which could prevent their application over

the whole republican territory, but Serbia could not rule out provincial laws (Hudson 2003, 68). This state of affairs propelled members of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences to draft a memorandum maintaining that Serbs in Kosovo were victims of "physical, political, legal, and cultural genocide" (Vickers 1993, 222).

Until the first half of the 1980s, the Serbian and Yugoslav socialist leaderships were overtly hostile to any form of nationalism, thus on one side the state used to repress Albanian protests, while on the other neglected Serbian discontent. The situation changed radically when Slobodan Milosevic – recommended by the relatively measured previous office-holder Ivan Stambolic – was elected leader of the Serbian League of Communists in 1986 (Meier 1999, 36). Milosevic was a party conservative, opposed to the reform movements that embraced private enterprise, multiple candidate elections, and so forth (Wintrobe 2002, 8). Moreover, during his early political career, Milosevic showed no signs of being a Serbian nationalist.

The critical juncture of Milosevic's career as a nationalist leader occurred in 1987, when Stambolic sent him to Kosovo to calm tensions between local Serbs and Albanians. Following a staged provocation, the Kosovo police started beating the Serbian protestors, and Milosevic sided with the demonstrators, famously stating that "No one will ever dare beat you again!" By siding with the Serbian protesters over the Albanian authorities, Milosevic "instantly became the leader of all Serbs" as his actions were praised by the Serbian media (Doder and Branson 1999, 43–44). From 1987 on, Milosevic cynically realized the potential of nationalism and used his new status as the guardian of Serbs to rise to the supreme power in the republic.

Back in Belgrade, Milosevic started to organize a faction within the party that would eventually oust Stambolic, the leader of the moderates, from power. In early 1987, Milosevic was not yet backed by the army and could not climb the ladder of the party hierarchy *manu militari*: his sole strength was a surprising capacity to mobilize the dominant nation and the ability to use the media as a tool of nationalist and antiparty propaganda (Doder and Branson 1999). Soon a media campaign against Stambolic and his allies started, culminating at the end of September 1987 with an extraordinary party congress.

During the summer, the media launched a nationalist campaign against the Albanian population in Kosovo. At the same time, Stambolic, in a final attempt to put a stop to the propaganda, became a victim himself of the smear campaign orchestrated by Milosevic. During the Eighth Conference of the Central Committee of the Communist League of Serbia, Stambolic was accused of not protecting the Serbian minority in Kosovo and even supporting "the desecration of Tito's name and image" (Stevanovic 2004, 30). Ironically, both Stambolic and Milosevic were accused of indecisiveness in their struggle with "counter-revolution in Kosovo" and a lack of true Titoist zeal in confronting internal class enemies. The latter accusation against Stambolic and the more liberal wing of the League of Communists of Serbia underlines that it would be a mistake to dismiss Milosevic's discourse as nationalist *tout court*. Indeed Milosevic used a twofold ideological strategy to take power: on one side, he used nationalist discourse in order to gain support from the Serbian population, while on the other he reassured the apparatchiks of the party, the army generals, and the bureaucracy, presenting himself as an orthodox Communist (Vujacic 1995, 32–33). His seeming commitment to Titoism won him the support of the party elders. Moreover, as Vladisavljević puts it,

> Milosevic emerged personally as the leader largely on the strength of his strategic position as president of the regional party presidium, which granted him power to build up political support in the Central Committee and to change power relations in high party organs. (2004, 206)

Milosevic was also aware of the power of the media and appointed several media directors in the Belgrade and Central Committee. As far as the military was concerned, Milosevic adopted a political style meant to appeal to the high-ranking officers; he courted the army, building links with the military leadership and taking care not to threaten their privileges (Djilas 1993).

In the late 1980s, Milosevic managed to bring together a coalition of conservatives of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY), local and regional party elites, Marxist and nationalist intellectuals, and elements of the YNA whose political power and material privileges were the first targets of the liberal-democratic forces. This unlikely coalition used the rhetoric of nationalism to mobilize the population against the regime (Pesic 1994, 118). Thanks to this widespread support, Milosevic replaced Stambolic as president of Serbia in December 1987.

The consolidation of power in Serbia could not prevent democratization in the other federal republics, thus Milosevic promoted the so-called anti-bureaucratic revolution in Vojvodina and Kosovo and in the Republic of Montenegro in order to control at least half of the votes in the Federal Assembly. In other words, "Milosevic sought to place himself at the head of a mass movement whose aims were ostensibly nationalist, seeking to restore Serbian central control over the provinces, and direct it against the Party establishment" (Thomas 1999, 44). Milosevic's emphasis on "anti-bureaucratic" reform caught the mood of widespread public anger at the corruption and nepotism that pervaded the party structures (Wintrobe 2002, 9).

In 1988 the "anti-bureaucratic revolution" marked a turning point with the overthrow of the leadership of Vojvodina. The leadership of the Serbian northern province feared Milosevic's populism, since it could jeopardize local autonomy. In October 1988, about 15,000 protesters surrounded the government building in Novi Sad demanding that the entire Vojvodina leadership resign. Toppling the provincial leadership was the first step of the recentralization of power. After replacing the Vojvodina party leadership with his own supporters, he turned to the Montenegrin government, which drew on a massive police response to suppress the protests. The use of the police led to harsh attacks not only by the Serbian leadership, but also by Serbian intellectuals. The Montenegrin party leadership was forced to resign in early 1989. By the end of the year, the Kosovo provincial government was replaced by supporters of Milosevic as well (Magas 1993).

Moreover, in 1987 Serbia initiated a process to cancel Kosovo's autonomous status in the Yugoslav Federation, culminating in a new constitution for the Serbian Republic in 1989 abolishing all aspects of Kosovo's autonomy. Kosovo's judiciary, police force, and provincial administration were brought under the direct control of Belgrade, while the Provincial Assembly was suppressed (Salla 1995, 428). Kosovo was fraught with protests throughout 1988 and 1989, and dissatisfaction was already high by the time the constitutional changes were passed. On 17 November 1988, Trepca miners in Mitrovica started to march the 30 miles to Pristina in defense of Kosovo's autonomy and political establishment. In the following days, the miners were joined by all strata of the Albanian population. Moreover, deeply concerned with the dangerous aims of Milosevic, in February 1989, 1350 Albanian miners barricaded themselves in the depth of their mine and started a hunger strike (Malcolm 1998, 343). The demonstrations of March 1989 cost the lives of 22 protesters and 2 police officers. In the protests of January and February 1990, in which around 40,000 students in Kosovo participated, the Yugoslav National Army (YNA) and special federal police forces killed 27 Kosovo Albanians and wounded many more.

Martial law was maintained in Kosovo by the army and special police forces from other parts of the Federation (Murati et al. 2007, 25).

At the end of the 1980s, in Kosovo new political parties were founded and the DLK became the first non-Communist party in Yugoslavia. The DLK's founding meeting elected literary critic Ibrahim Rugova as its leader, and its membership grew significantly in the initial months, claimed at the time to number more than a half-million (Pula 2004, 804). In September 1991, the DLK called a referendum on Kosovo independence and the overwhelming majority of the Albanian population opted for secession from Serbia. The following year Rugova was elected president of Kosovo (Thompson 1992).

In fear of Serbian repression, Rugova and the DLK embraced a philosophy of nonviolence, which arose more from strategic calculations rather than from a deep philosophical belief. Indeed, as Clark underlines,

> it is a misrepresentation to call him [Rugova] a pacifist. Above all, he was pragmatic. He followed a peace policy broadly speaking, but at one stage seems to have favored Kosovo having its own territorial defense system, and later worked for NATO intervention. (2000, 6)

Rugova believed that at that stage war would simply lead to the ethnic cleansing of the Albanians, a fear shared by most of the population, which was horrified by the crimes committed by Serbian armed and police forces in Croatia and Bosnia (Judah 2008, 70). Moreover, the option of an armed insurgency against Serbia was not viable since in 1989 the republic dismantled Kosovo's territorial defense force and in 1990 removed most Albanians (around 3500) from the provincial police force, replacing them with ethnic Serbs and Montenegrins (Pula 2004, 811).

Unlike Georgia in the early 1990s, Serbia could exercise a monopoly on force within its borders. From the time Milosevic became president in 1989, he established control over the YNA and supported the creation of paramilitary forces, through the state security and the Interior Ministry. According to Murati, these forces played three roles: first, they were used to instill fear among minorities; second, they were used as icons of Serbian bravery and nationalism in order to help mobilize Serbs for wars; third, they were used by Belgrade to justify YNA operations in order to avoid responsibility and to blame, when needed, these paramilitary forces for obvious human rights violations against innocent civilians (Murati et al. 2007, 26).

Throughout the 1990s, the Serbian government marginalized the Albanian population from the political, economic, and cultural life of the province. Indeed, the development of separate Albanian institutions promoted by the DLK assisted the government's policy of having Serbs fill all positions of responsibility in state institutions (Salla 1995, 430).

While Serbia's repressive policy remained in place for 10 years – from 1987 to 1997 – unexpected changes occurred in the Albanian side. The DLK's significant support endured until 1995, when its policy was discredited due to failures to yield concrete results in ending Serbian rule in Kosovo. In addition, the fierce and continuous violence committed by the Serbian regime against the Albanian population, and this movement's inability to protect civilians, helped to weaken the DLK's influence. The role of the international community in this field is important too. Even though publicly the nonviolent policy of Rugova was supported by the international community, Kosovo's independence was rather not supported. This further undermined the DLK's position. The situation deteriorated in 1996. After the Dayton accords ignored the Kosovo problem, the pacifist movement in Kosovo started to lose ground (Hudson 2003, 126).

As the pacifist movement weakened, a military option gained ground. The first major breakup within the Albanian peaceful resistance movement occurred when students at

the University of Pristina on 1 October 1997 started massive demonstrations against the Milosevic regime without Rugova's permission. These students' protests paved the way for the liberation war led by the KLA.

The ethno-political conflict escalated in 1998, when the KLA began a guerilla war and terror campaign with the goal of securing Kosovo's independence. In response, Milosevic instituted a police and military campaign against the KLA that included massive atrocities against civilians. Thousands of ethnic Albanians were killed and more than 500,000 were forced from their homes (Hornitz and Catherwood 2006, 270).

The international community initiated mediation efforts that resulted in the Rambouillet accords in February 1999, which called for Kosovo's autonomy and allowed NATO troops to enter Kosovo in order to secure the peace. When Milosevic declined to recognize the agreement, NATO began an aerial bombing campaign on 24 March 1999 to halt the violence. After 78 days of bombing, Milosevic surrendered.

Conclusion

In this paper, I emphasize the importance of regime strength, understood as the ruling coalition's internal cohesion and its ability to control the military, for the prevention – or at least, the delaying – of civil war. Therefore, I show how different modes of transition may influence a regime's capabilities and thus alter the conflict trajectories – and the timing of civil war onset – in divided societies.

The comparative analysis of the conflict processes in South Ossetia and Kosovo shows that exclusive transitions imposed from below may jeopardize political stability in the short run, since they produce weaker regimes, thus providing an opportunity for the radicalization of ethnic minorities' claims. For example, when Gamsakhurdia rose to power in Georgia, he could rely on the support of the majority of the Georgian nation and on the loyalty of the parliament, but he failed to win that of the old nomenclature and of the military. The Georgian executive did not exercise control over the army, and the proliferation of irregular militias in the country weakened the government. The struggle between Gamsakhurdia and the leaders of the paramilitary troops led to a regime crisis, which provided an opportunity for South Ossetian separatists to radicalize their demands and declare independence from the republic during the early years after Georgian independence from the Soviet Union. Moreover, the failure to integrate the paramilitaries into the state structures and to control them led to the last escalation of the conflict in May 1992, when the National Guard and Mkhedrioni entered the capital of South Ossetia for a final push.

On the other hand, transitions imposed from above, as the case of the FRY proves, can create stronger and internally cohesive regimes, able to manage minorities' mobilization at least in the short term. Kosovar political organizations in the first half of the 1990s were forced to rely on nonviolent protests, due to Serbian repression. However, this paper confirms the proposition that in the long run indiscriminate use of force against dissidents increases minorities' grievances against the state and encourages marginalized groups to resort to violence when a political opportunity arises.

This study demonstrates that popular upheavals against dictatorial regimes and transitions from below in multinational societies may alter the political equilibrium in ways that spark instability and violence, thus hampering the consolidation of democracy. However, transitions imposed from above are wont to delay (not to completely eradicate the threat of) violence only in the short run. These findings suggest that the inclusion of different segments of society in the founding coalitions of the new regimes may represent

the best option to prevent the onset of civil conflicts. Obviously, further research is needed to determine whether these findings can be generalized to other geopolitical regions.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the two anonymous referees for their valuable suggestions and comments.

Notes

1. See also Hegre et al. (2001), Muller and Weede (1990) and Gurr and Moore (1997).
2. The concept of "short term" is used to indicate the period between the collapse of the old regime and the instauration of a new regime, that is when new institutions and rules of the game are established. Data on eight cases of regime change in post-socialist countries (1990–2008) provided by Jansson et al. reveal that the average duration of these transitions is 397 days (2013). Therefore, I use the concepts of "short term" to indicate a period comprising between 0 and 3 years after the collapse of the previous regime and "long term" to refer to a period longer than three years.
3. The term "imposition" has been previously adopted by Karl and Schmitter (1991, 275) to define violent transitions. In this paper, this concept does not imply the resort to coercion and violence: imposed transitions denote those transitions in which a pact between the old and the new elite was made impossible due to high polarization and power disparity.
4. Interestingly, whereas regime change in Czechoslovakia was undoubtedly a bottom-up process, secession was a top-down process. Though from 1990 to 1992 polls showed a plurality of citizens in each republic favoring the continuance of the state (Leff 1996, 137), Czech and Slovak leaders opted for the dissolution of the state in blatant disregard for popular will. Cox and Frankland maintain that this course is due to weak mass-elite linkages "as appeared to be the case in post-Communist Czechoslovakia, [where] the relative autonomy of elites is increased, and the importance of the issues which divide them is amplified" (1995, 87).
5. In the vast literature on democratization, the use of different terms to identify the same concept contributed to a terminological Babel. Actually, the term "transformation" used by Huntington (1991) coincides with the concepts of "reforma-pactada" and "transaction" developed, respectively, by Linz and Stepan (1996) and Mainwaring (1992). Similarly, the words "replacement" and "rupture," on one side, and "breakdown" and "collapse," on the other, are conceptually equivalent.
6. A notable exception is represented by the overthrow of Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev during the Tulip Revolution in 2005. However, popular protests in this case did not result in a regime change, but in a mere transfer of power. Radnitz highlights that limited political change in Kyrgyzstan was made possible by policies that allowed "a business or political elite network to form outside the state" (2006, 144). More recently, Radnitz compares the mobilization processes in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and finds that – in order to challenge the incumbents – independent elites should be able to build both vertical and horizontal networks. Whereas the first allow them to mobilize the population, the latter ensure cooperation among the challengers when the state threatens their position (Radnitz 2010).
7. In states such as Czechoslovakia, Georgia, and the Baltic countries, national movements against Communist (and Soviet) rule emerged in the late 1980s. These new societal actors were able to organize mass protests against the old regimes, delegitimized by accusations of corruption, poor economic performance, and a repressive attitude against any form of dissent. Moreover, the popular fronts in these states achieved overwhelming victories in the first competitive elections held in the early 1990s.
8. The law stated that only parties and alliances whose activities extended on the entire territory of the republic of Georgia were allowed to participate in the elections. If votes for a list did not reach a national threshold of 4%, no candidates from that list would be elected.

ORCID

Loretta Dell'Aguzzo http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9185-9245

References

Aves, Jonathan. 1991. *Path to National Independence in Georgia 1987–1990*. London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London.

Aves, Jonathan. 1992. "The Rise and Fall of the Georgian Nationalist Movement, 1987–1991." In *The Road to Post-Communism: Independent Political Movements in the Soviet Union, 1985–1991*, edited by G. Hosking, J. Aves, and P. Duncan, 157–177. London: Pinter.

Beissinger, Mark R. 2002. *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Beissinger, Mark R. 2008. "A New Look at Ethnicity and Democratization." *Journal of Democracy* 19 (3): 85–97.

Bowers, Stephen. 1994. "The Ossetian Conflict." *Jane's Intelligence Review* 6 (1): 3.

Byman, Daniel. 2001. *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand.

Cederman, Lars E., Andreas Wimmer, and Brian Min. 2010. "Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel? New Data and Analysis." *World Politics* 62 (1): 87–119.

Cheterian, Vicken. 2009. "The August 2008 War in Georgia: From Ethnic Conflict to Border Wars." *Central Asian Survey* 28 (2): 155–170.

Clark, Howard. 2000. *Civil Resistance in Kosovo*. London: Pluto Press.

Collier, Paul, and Nicholas Sambanis. 2005. *Understanding Civil War: Evidence and Analysis*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Cornell, Svante E. 2001. *Autonomy and Conflict Ethno-territoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*. Report No. 61. Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research.

Cox, Robert H., and Erich G. Frankland. 1995. "The Federal State and the Break-up of Czechoslovakia: An Institutional Analysis." *Publius* 25 (1): 77–82.

Cummings, Sally N. 2010. *Symbolism and Power in Central Asia: Politics of the Spectacular*. Abington: Routledge.

Dahl, Robert. 1971. *Poliarchy, Participation and Opposition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

De Nevers, Renee. 1993. "Democratization and Ethnic Conflict." *Survival* 35 (2): 31–48.

della Porta, Donatella. 1995. *Social Movements, Political Violence and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Demetriou, Spyros. 2002a. "Rising from the Ashes? The Difficult (Re)Birth of the Georgian State." *Development and Change* 33 (5): 859–883.

Demetriou, Spyros. 2002b. *Politics from the Barrel of a Gun: Small Arms Proliferation and Conflict in the Republic of Georgia (1989–2001)*. Small Arms Survey. Occasional Paper No. 6. http://www.smallarmssurvey.org.

DeNardo, James. 1985. *Power in Numbers: The Political Strategy of Protest and Rebellion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Djilas, Aleksa. 1993. "A Profile of Slobodan Milošević." *Foreign Affairs* 72 (3): 81–96. http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/48958/aleksa-djilas/a-profile-of-slobodan-milosevic.

Doder, Dusko, and Louise Branson. 1999. *Milosevic: Portrait of a Tyrant*. New York: The Free Press.

Driscoll, Jesse. 2015. *Warlords and Coalition Politics in Post-Soviet States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ellingsen, Tanja, and Nils P. Gleditsch. 1997. "Democracy and Armed Conflict in the Third World." In *Causes of Conflict in Third World Countries*, edited by Ketil Volden, and Dan Smith, 69–81. Oslo: North-South Coalition and International Peace Research Institute.

Engstrom, Jenny. 2009. *Democratisation and the Prevention of Violent Conflict: Lessons Learned from Bulgaria and Macedonia*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing.

Francisco, Ronald A. 2000. *The Politics of Regime Transition*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Freedom House. 2012. *Freedom in the World 2012, South Ossetia*. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/south-ossetia.

Fuller, Elizabeth. 1988a. *Independent Political Groupings in Georgia*. RFE/RL Research Report 527 (88), November 25.

Fuller, Elizabeth. 1988b. *Draft 'State Program' on Georgian Language Published*. RFE/RL Research Report 559 (88), December 12.

Fuller, Elizabeth. 1991. *The Georgian Presidential Elections*. RFE/RL Report on the USSR 3 (23), April 19.

Galeotti, Mark. 1991. *The Role of the Security Forces*. RFE/RL Report on the USSR 3 (36), September 6.

Geddes, Barbara. 1999. "What Do We Know about Democratization after Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2: 115–144.
George, Julie A. 2009a. *The Politics of Ethnic Separatism in Russia and Georgia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
George, Julie A. 2009b. "Expecting Ethnic Conflict. The Soviet Legacy and Ethnic Politics in the Caucasus and Central Asia." In *The Politics of Transition in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Enduring Legacies and Emerging Challenges*, edited by Amanda F. Wooden, and Christoph H. Stefes, 75–102. London: Routledge.
Gill, Graeme. 2002. *Democracy and Post-Communism. Political Change in the Post-Communist World*. London: Taylor and Francis.
Gleditsch, Kristian S., and Michael Ward. 1998. "Democratizing for Peace." *American Political Science Review* 92 (1): 51–61.
Goldenberg, Susan. 1993. *Pride of Small Nations: The Caucasus and Post-Soviet Disorder*. London: Zed Books.
Gurr, Ted R. 2000. *People Versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.
Gurr, Ted R., and Will H. Moore. 1997. "Ethnopolitical Rebellion: A Cross-sectional Analysis of the 1980s with Risk Assessments for the 1990s." *American Journal of Political Science* 41 (4): 1079–1103.
Hegre, Havard, Tanja Ellingsen, Scott Gates, and Nils P. Gleditsch. 2001. "Toward a Democratic Civil Peace? Democracy, Political Change, and Civil War, 1816–1992." *American Political Science Review* 95 (1): 33–48.
Hornitz, Leslie A., and Christopher Catherwood. 2006. *Encyclopedia of War Crimes and Genocide*. New York: Facts on File.
Horowitz, Donald L. 1985. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Horowitz, Shale. 2005. *From Ethnic Conflict to Stillborn Reform: The Former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia*. College Station, TX: A&M University Press.
Hudson, Kate. 2003. *Breaking the South-Slav Dream. The Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia*. London: Pluto Press.
Huntington, Samuel H. 1965. "Political Development and Political Decay." *World Politics* 17 (3): 386–430.
Huntington, Samuel H. 1968. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Huntington, Samuel H. 1991. "How Countries Democratize." *Political Science Quarterly* 106 (4): 579–616.
Jansson, Frederik, Patrik Lindenfors, and Mikael Sandberg. 2013. "Democratic Revolutions as Institutional Innovation Diffusion: Rapid Adoption and Survival of Democracy." *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 80 (8): 1546–1556.
Jenne, Erin K. 2004. "A Bargaining Theory of Minority Demands: Explaining the Dog that Did Not Bite in 1990s Yugoslavia." *International Studies Quarterly* 48 (4): 729–754.
Jibladze, Irakli. 2007. *The Dynamics of the Georgian National Mobilization and Its Radicalization: 1987–1992*. Budapest: CEU ETD Collection.
Judah, Tim. 2008. *Kosovo, What Everyone Needs to Know*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Karl, Terry L. 1990. "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America." *Comparative Politics* 23 (1): 1–21.
Karl, Terry L., and Philippe Schmitter. 1991. "Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe." *International Social Science Journal* 43 (2): 269–284.
Leff, Carol S. 1996. *The Czech and Slovak Republics. Nation Versus State*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
Levy, Jack S. 2001. "Theories of Interstate and Intrastate War: A Levels-of-Analysis Approach." In *Turbulent Peace: The Challenging of Managing International Conflict*, edited by Chester A. Crocker, Fen O. Hampson, and Pamela Aall, 17–38. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.
Lichbach, Mark. 1987. "Deterrence or Escalation?: The Puzzle of Aggregate Studies of Repression and Dissent." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 31 (2): 266–297.
Linz, Juan J., and Alfred Stepan. 1996. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Magas, Branka. 1993. *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracking the Break-Up 1980–92*. London: Verso.
Mainwaring, Scott. 1992. "Transitions to Democracy and Democratic Consolidation: Theoretical and Comparative Issues." In *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective*, edited by Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O'Donnell, and Philippe Schmitter, 294–342. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
Malcolm, Noel. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: MacMillan.
Mansfield, Edward, and Jack Snyder. 1995. "Democratization and the Danger of War." *International Security* 20 (1): 5–38.
Mansfield, Edward, and Jack Snyder. 2005. *Electing to Fight. Why Emerging Democracies Go to War*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
Matveeva, Anna. 1999. "Democratization, Legitimacy and Political Change in Central Asia." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 75 (1): 23–44.
McFaul, Michael. 2002. "The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World." *World Politics* 54 (2): 212–244.
Meier, Viktor. 1999. *Yugoslavia. A History of Its Demise*. London: Routledge.
Morlino, Leonardo. 2011. *Changes for Democracy. Actors, Structures, Processes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Muller, Edward, and Erich Weede. 1990. "Cross-national Variation in Political Violence: A Rational Action Approach." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 34 (4): 624–651.
Munck, Gerardo L., and Carol S. Leff. 1997. "Modes of Transition and Democratization: South America and Eastern Europe in Comparative Perspective." *Comparative Politics* 29 (3): 343–362.
Murati, Valon, Blerim Ahmeti, Selatin Kllokoqi, and Glauk Konjufca. 2007. *Actors and Processes of Ethno-National Mobilization in Kosovo*. Bozen: European Academy Research.
Nodia, Ghia. 1996. "Political Turmoil in Georgia in Georgia and the Ethnic Policies of Zviad Gamsakhurdia." In *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, edited by Bruno Coppieters, Ch. 2, 73–89. Brussels: VUB Press.
Nodia, Ghia, and Gigi Tevzadze. 2003. *Building Democracy in Georgia –Attempts to Establish Democracy in Georgia*. Discussion Paper 1. Stockholm: Institute for Democracy and International Assistance, IDEA International.
O'Donnell, Guillermo and Philippe Schmitter. 1986. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Pavkovic, Alexandar. 2000. *The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia. Nationalism and War in the Balkans*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Pesic, Vesna. 1994. "The Cruel Face of Nationalism." In *Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and Democracy*, edited by Larry Diamond, and Marc F. Plattner, 132–135. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
Petersen, Roger D. 2002. *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Pula, Besnik. 2004. "The Emergence of the Kosovo 'Parallel State,' 1988–1992." *Nationalities Papers* 32 (4): 797–826.
Radnitz, Scott. 2006. "What Really Happened in Kyrgyzstan?" *Journal of Democracy* 17 (2): 132–146.
Radnitz, Scott. 2010. *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-led Protests in Central Asia*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
Roper, Steven D. 2002. "Regionalism in Moldova: The Case of Transnistria and Gagauzia." In *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union*, edited by James Hughes, and Gwendolin Sasse, 101–112. London: Frank Cass.
Saideman, Stephen M., David J. Lanoue, Michael Campenni, and Samuel Stanton. 2002. "Democratization, Political Institutions, and Ethnic Conflict: A Pooled Time-series Analysis, 1985–1998." *Comparative Political Studies* 35 (1): 103–129.
Salla, Michael. 1995. "Kosovo, Non-violence and the Break-up of Yugoslavia." *Security Dialogue* 26 (4): 427–438.
Siroky, David S. 2016. "The Sources of Secessionist War: The Interaction of Local Control and Foreign Forces in Post-Soviet Georgia." *Caucasus Survey* 4 (1): 63–91.

Siroky, David S., and D. Aprasidze. 2011. "Guns, Roses and Democratization: Huntington's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus." *Democratization* 18 (5): 1227–1245.
Siroky, David S., and John Cuffe. 2015. "Lost Autonomy, Nationalism and Separatism." *Comparative Political Studies* 48 (1): 3–34.
Snyder, Jack. 2000. *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*. New York: W.W. Norton.
Stevanovic, Vidosav. 2004. *Milosevic: The People's Tyrant*. London: I.B. Taurus.
Thomas, Robert. 1999. *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Thompson, Mark. 1992. *A Paper House: The Ending of Yugoslavia*. London: Vintage.
de Tocqueville, Alexis. 1955. *Democracy in America*. New York: Knopf.
Transchel, Kate. 2007. *The Breakup of Yugoslavia: Conflict in the Balkans*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.
Vickers, Miranda. 1993. *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Vladisavljevic, Nebojsa. 2004. "Institutional Power and the Rise of Milošević." *Nationalities Papers* 32 (1): 183–205.
Vujacic, Velko. 1995. "Serbian Nationalism, Slobodan Milosevic and the Origins of the Yugoslav War." *The Harriman Review* 8 (4): 25–34.
Wheatley, Jonathan, and Khristoph Zurcher. 2008. "On the Origin and Consolidation of Hybrid Regimes: The State of Democracy in the Caucasus." *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 4 (1): 1–31.
Wintrobe, Ronald. 2002. "Slobodan Milosevic and the Fire of Nationalism." *World Economics* 3 (3): 1–26.
Zurcher, Christoph. 2007. *Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict and Nationhood in the Post-Soviet Era*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
Zverev, Alexei. 1996. "Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus, 1988–1994." In *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, edited by Bruno Coppeiters, Ch. 1, 13–71. Brussels: VUB Press.