

Ethnic Enclaves, Reversed Politics, and the Entrenchment of Difference

Dr Sherrill Stroschein *ISRF Mid-Career Fellow 2017-18*

NOTE: The Mid-Career Fellowship application form may have been updated since this proposal was submitted.

Abstract

Ethnic enclaves are towns, cities, and counties where the state's ethnic minority is the local majority. They are fascinating spaces in which the minority-majority dynamics of ethnic politics are reversed. This project examines the dynamics of local party politics in ethnic enclaves, and the changing relationship between ethnic enclaves and central state governments. I will compare enclaves in four East European states, where ethnicity is a persistently salient feature of politics: Hungarian enclaves in Romania, Serbia and Slovakia, and Albanian enclaves in Macedonia / Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Ethnic enclaves have been woefully understudied in politics and political science, due to 1) a lack of focus on the nuances of local politics, and 2) because enclave ethnic politics run counter to the general state-level dynamics examined in the field of politics. I am interested in how the identity difference between the enclave and the rest of the state changes over time, in both perception and in practice. My previous fieldwork in the Hungarian enclave in Romania has revealed a tendency of ethnic party fragmentation among ethnic Hungarian parties in local enclave politics (2011). The emergence of Hungarian challenger parties in the early 2000s and their ongoing participation in politics has increased the salience of the enclave as a political island in Romania. Local symbols and flags have become increasingly prevalent over the past 10 years, as competition among the Hungarian parties for local powers in the enclave has reinforced identity boundaries. Over time, there has been an increasing entrenchment of difference between the Hungarian enclave and the rest of Romania in the conduct of political discourse and practice. I want to know more about this dynamic, and the degree to which a similar general pattern emerges (or does not emerge) in Serbia, Slovakia, and Macedonia / FYROM.

The Research Idea *The innovative thesis of the project*

Contemporary political contestation in Eastern Europe began with the onset of democratic elections in 1990. Local elections have been among the most contentious there. An examination of local elections in selected enclave towns since 1990 allows me to trace the development of ethnic politics in these enclave towns from a starting point

to the present. I posit that over time, the practices of democratic politics in enclave towns empowers local parties. The emergence of these parties increases the salience of difference between an ethnic enclave and the rest of the state - a process of entrenchment. The example of Hungarians in Romania illustrates this dynamic. In most of Romania, ethnic Hungarians vote for one Hungarian party, the 'original' Hungarian party that began contesting for office in 1990. However, Hungarian-majority demographics in the Hungarian enclave in Romania allow Hungarian voters to choose independents or new 'challenger' Hungarian parties, without the danger of losing seats or power to Romanians. Over time, these Hungarian challenger parties become powerful entities within the enclave base, and feed into the political interactions between the enclave and the central state. These challenger parties engage in strong discourse and practice

regarding the separate identity of the enclave, using local symbols and often claiming for further enclave political powers. The boundary between the enclave and the remainder of the state becomes increasingly and incrementally entrenched through these practices. I plan to examine the degree to which this dynamic emerges in other countries with enclaves and minority ethnic parties.

Background *Current research reference points and their limitations*

There are two main lines of inquiry in my field of political science that relate to this project: 1) ethnic parties and ethnic politics, and 2) the politics of ethnic autonomy and secession. I outline their limitations here, and in the sections below I outline how a practice approach and insights from sociology can address some of these limitations. First, in the literature on ethnic parties, most studies examine ethnic parties as uniform among co-ethnics across a state, without considering how support for ethnic parties might vary among co-ethnics at the local level under different demographic conditions. This project builds on my previous research into how ethnic party politics differ in enclaves (2011), and emphasises the role of local politics and reversed ethnic demographics in enclaves. A second related line of inquiry is the politics of ethnic autonomy and secession. A vast array of literature questions whether ethnic autonomy, or increased powers for an ethnic enclave, might decrease ethnic demands for full secession from a state - or whether autonomy might instead support a move towards enclave secession. Much of this literature takes a quantitative form, applying statistical analyses of codes from databases for these traits. This project does not approach autonomy claims in clear yes-or-no terms, but rather as points in a dynamic process in

which ethnic claims feed back into political dynamics. This project examines changes in the salience of the boundary between the enclave and the rest of the state in discourse and practice.

The Focus *How the research provides a fresh approach to real-life problems*

Current studies of ethnic politics tend to overlook the fact that the state in which those politics unfold is not a unitary space with the same dynamics throughout. States have varied demographic pockets across different local settings, and thus states are comprised of a varied topography of local ethnicities. As one example, when conflict emerged in Ukraine's Crimea and in the Eastern regions of its territory, coverage of these events had some difficulty in describing or explaining the enclaves of Russians in these regions. These concentrations of Russians and Russian-speakers were a longstanding part of the state's demographic topography, but were rendered problematic by the language of nation-states that dominates both media and research in this field. There is clearly a need to better understand how enclaves work before they are embroiled in violent conflict. This project focuses on the political dynamics within non-violent ethnic enclaves, to better understand their ongoing political dynamics and their unfolding relationship with the rest of the state. Political parties serve a dual and endogenous or circular role: 1) as channels to represent political views of the public and 2) as organizations that help to construct those views and to promote them within the public. This project focuses on the local dynamics of ethnic parties in enclaves, and how they influence its position in the state. I posit that over time, the dynamics of local politics in enclaves can entrench different identities between enclaves and the rest of the state, in perception and in practice.

Theoretical Novelty *What conceptual innovation the research is aiming at*

This project emphasises the relational dynamics of interaction, informed in particular by the work of sociologist and historian Charles Tilly, and reflecting work by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. A focus on relations allows for an understanding of ethnicity as the presence of boundaries between groups. The salience of ethnic boundaries and thus ethnic categories changes over time as a function of the discourse and practices of those engaged in politics. This approach allows for incremental identity change in the course of interaction, a process that is infused with feedback effects (endogeneity) as prior events affect those that follow. This relational and incremental focus moves away from two prevalent orientations in political science that are

inadequate to evaluate the relational and changing nature of ethnic relations and politics. The first orientation, rational choice theory, requires a focus on individuals and individual action in analysis. This individualist focus renders relationships and interactions invisible outside of a framework of strategic game theory. The second orientation is one of 'big data' and the effort to produce general statements about social life via statistics, using databases of codes for traits such as a state's ethnic fragmentation, conflict levels, regime type, and declarations of secession. For this statistical approach to work, stability of these categories and codes over time must be assumed. The statistical approach thus has difficulty incorporating change of these elements into an analysis. This project's orientation embraces the interdependence of relations, interactions, and incremental change to understand enclave politics and the enclave-central state relationship.

Methodology *How different disciplinary inputs will interact in empirical inquiry*

This project compares ethnic enclave politics in four countries, and includes three towns in Serbia, Romania, and Slovakia, and two in Macedonia. These choices are informed by my field of comparative politics, in which insights on general political dynamics can be gained from comparing outcomes in places with similar demographic conditions. I posit that the dynamics of local party politics in enclaves will entrench an identity of difference between the enclave and the rest of the state over time. This general statement is derived from previous work in Romania and may or may not reflect political dynamics in Serbia, Slovakia, and Macedonia. The project will examine the degree to which it applies beyond Romania. Research and fieldwork on enclave politics in each of these countries will examine election results for local counties in the selected cities from 1990 to the present. I will also interview party officials and collect newspaper articles on local politics in the selected enclave towns as well as on interactions between the enclave and the central state government. I am especially interested in perceptions and practices related to changes in this enclave-central state interaction over time, including shifts in the use of local symbols such as flags. The research orientation is informed by historical institutionalism in sociology, and examines comparative processes or trajectories. The project focuses on 1) how the cities in each country compare to each other over time and 2) how the trajectories of enclave-central state politics compare across the four countries.

Work Plan *How the work will be organised over the award period and what outputs are intended.*

This enclave project is the focus of my second monograph, and comes from an interest in local politics and enclaves that emerged from work on my first monograph (2012). I can work in Hungarian, Romanian, Slovak, and Serbian, and will seek translation assistance for Macedonian and Albanian. The time frame for the research includes some research and fieldwork before the grant period begins in April 2017. A list of the time frame is given below.

Pre-grant period 2016: fieldwork trips to Serbia and Romania following local elections, May and July 2016. Hungarian enclave towns of Senta, Kanjiza, and Subotica in Serbia, and Odorheiu Secuiesc, Miercurea Ciuc, and Sfantu Gheorghe in Romania.

Pre-grant period 2017: UCL research leave, January-March 2017, writing and fieldwork preparation

April 2017: grant period begins, fieldwork preparation

May 2017: two-week fieldwork trip to Macedonia / FYROM, following local elections, to Albanian-enclave towns of Tetovo and Gostivar

June 2017: writing and fieldwork preparation

July 2017: two-week fieldwork trip to Slovakia, to Hungarian enclave towns of Dunajska Streda, Komarno, and Kralovsky Chlmec

August 2017-March 2018: complete draft of enclave politics monograph, and draft article manuscript on the role of enclave politics in the Ukraine conflict.

With the project focus on local party politics in enclaves, I have timed the fieldwork trips for three of the four countries to follow local elections in 2016 and 2017. The grant period follows a short UCL research leave to maximise the focus on book writing and an article on enclaves in Ukraine.

Outcome *What further steps and what longer-term outcome are envisaged.*

The primary goal of this project is the production of a monograph, tentatively titled *Ethnic Parties in Enclave Regions*, to be submitted to a university press. Cambridge University Press has expressed some interest in my next project, as my first book published with them had reasonable success and was released also in paperback. I intend to extend the book discussion beyond these four countries to consider countries in which it was not first elections but rather decentralisation that led to the onset of stronger local politics. This discussion would include an examination of local elections and party politics in Scotland in the UK, in Catalonia in Spain, and in Quebec in Canada. Research on this aspect of the book would focus on non- fieldwork sources, and I can

work with written sources in Spanish and French. Drawing from the main general insights of the monograph, the second goal of the enclave project is to produce an article on politics in Russian enclaves of Ukraine and the conflict in Ukraine. It is useful to consider how the book's arguments on enclave politics relate to the dynamics in the Ukraine conflict, as enclave politics there were not a focus of much research before the conflict. This article would not involve fieldwork but rather an examination of secondary sources on local politics and elections. The overall aim of the book and the article is a theory of the general dynamics of enclave politics that can be useful for understanding a variety of settings.