

**Indivisible Territory and  
Ethnic War**

by  
**Monica Duffy Toft**

Paper No. 01-08

December 2001

Monica Duffy Toft is assistant professor of public policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, assistant director of the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, and a faculty associate of the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University.

Contact:  
mtoft@cfia.harvard.edu

Published by the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University.  
Copyright by the author.

The author bears sole responsibility for this paper. The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the WCFIA or Harvard University.

**Publications Chair, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs**

Robert Paarlberg

**Publications Manager, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs**

Amanda Pearson

**Submission procedures:** Weatherhead Center affiliates are encouraged to submit papers to the Working Paper Series. Manuscripts are assessed on the basis of their scholarly qualities—the extent of original research, the rigor of the analysis, the significance of the conclusions—as well as their relevance to contemporary issues in international affairs. Manuscripts should range between 25 and 80 double-spaced pages and must include an abstract of no more than 150 words. We request that each paper be submitted in both electronic format and a hard copy. The electronic format should be on a disk in a standard word processing application (WordPerfect or Microsoft Word preferred) or as an email attachment.

Please submit hard copies and disks to Amanda Pearson, Box #10, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1737 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA 02138, and address all email attachments to [apearson@cfia.harvard.edu](mailto:apearson@cfia.harvard.edu).

**Orders:** Working Papers are available for \$5.00 each, plus \$1.00 for shipping and handling, from the Weatherhead Center Library, 1737 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA 02138.

**WEATHERHEAD CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
1737 CAMBRIDGE STREET  
CAMBRIDGE, MA 02138  
TEL: 617-495-4420  
FAX: 617-495-8292**

## **ABSTRACT**

This article introduces a theory of ethnic war. It argues that the likelihood of ethnic violence is largely a function of how the principal antagonists—a state and its dissatisfied ethnic minority—think about territory. Attempts to negotiate a resolution short of war will fail when : (1) the ethnic minority demands sovereignty over the territory it occupies, and (2) the state views that territory as indivisible. Ethnic war is less likely to break out if only one of these conditions is met, and very unlikely if neither condition is met. The article first introduces a theory to explain ethnic war. It then presents a statistical analysis of the theory's key variables and tests the theory's causal logic by comparing Moscow's interactions with Tatarstan and with Chechnya. The article concludes with three implications: ethnic groups are rational; that certain settlement patterns will not be amenable to outside intervention; and partition may not be a good policy option to end violence.

The world is populated with multiethnic states: 82 percent of all independent states comprise two or more ethnic groups, which are often involved in disputes either with each other or with the state itself.<sup>1</sup> Although such disputes do not always lead to war, they frequently do, as we know from recent history in the Balkans, Rwanda, East Timor, and elsewhere. The aim of this article is to explain why some ethnic conflicts turn violent, while others are settled non-violently.

The substantial body of literature on the origins of ethnic violence includes five important theories. Ancient hatreds arguments see violent ethnic conflict as the result of long-standing historical enmity among the warring groups. Proponents of this theory usually place great weight on the language, cultural, racial, or religious ties that unite individuals within a group.<sup>2</sup> Violence breaks out when a long-standing rival ethnic group threatens a particular ethnic group's boundaries.

Modernization theories focus on the relative economic and political development of regionally-concentrated ethnic groups within a state's borders.<sup>3</sup> Proponents argue that ethnic

---

<sup>1</sup> Calculated by author. See Appendix 1.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of the "ancient hatreds" school are Edward Shils, "Primordial, Personal, Sacred, and Civil Ties," *British Journal of Sociology*, 8 (1957), pp. 130-145; Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); and Harold R. Isaacs, *Idols of the Tribe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975). Related psychological explanations include: William Bloom, *Personal Identity, National Identity, and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and an empirical analysis of the Middle East conflict in "Self-Involvement in the Middle East Conflict," Committee on International Relations, *Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry*, Vol. 10, No. 103 (November 1978). An account that combines biology with sociology is Pierre L. Van den Berghe, "Race and Ethnicity: A Sociobiological Perspective," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1978), pp. 401-411.

<sup>3</sup> The seminal work is Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1966). See also Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Ethnic Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), especially chapter 6; and Jean LaPonce, *Languages and Their Territories*, trans. Anthony Martin-Sperry (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), especially, pp. 137-149. For an excellent review of this literature see Saul Newman, "Does Modernization Breed Ethnic Political Conflict?" *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (April 1991), pp. 451-478. More recent empirical research within the economic tradition is being conducted under the auspices of the World Bank, stressing economic variables and development as causes of civil war more generally; see Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Justice-Seeking and Loot-Seeking in Civil Wars" (unpublished manuscript, World Bank, February 1999). For critiques of modernization theories, see Edward A. Tiryakian and Ronald Rogowski, eds., *New Nationalisms of the Developed West: Toward Explanation* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1985);

conflict and violence are the product of uneven patterns of modernization among different ethnic groups.

Relative deprivation arguments focus on individuals who perceive that their political or economic status in society is declining.<sup>4</sup> This dissatisfaction leads those individuals to form groups, sometimes based on ethnicity, that compete for scarce resources. This competition sometimes turns violent.

Security dilemma theories focus on fear as the central driving force of ethnic conflict.<sup>5</sup> In multiethnic states that are collapsing, the constituent ethnic groups worry that the central regime will no longer be able to protect them. In this security vacuum, the different ethnic groups compete—usually violently—to establish and control a new regime.

Elite-manipulation approaches hypothesize that desperate political leaders use nationalism to manipulate a passive public so that they can remain in power.<sup>6</sup> Once nationalism is unleashed on

---

Michael Hector, *Internal Colonialism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974); and John Coakley, *The Territorial Management of Ethnic Conflict* (London: Frank Cass, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> See James Davies, “The J-Curve of Rising and Declining Satisfaction as a Cause of Revolution and Rebellion,” in Ted Robert Gurr and Hugh Davis, eds., *Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Press, 1979); Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*; and Susan Olzak, *The Dynamics of Ethnic Competition and Conflict* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> International relations scholars have applied the concept of the security dilemma to explain ethnic violence. The first was Barry Posen, “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict,” in Michael Brown, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 103-124. Also see Stephen Van Evera, “Hypotheses on Nationalism and War,” *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Spring 1994), pp. 5-39; and R.H. Wagner, “The Causes of Peace,” in Roy Licklider, ed., *Stopping the Killing: How Civil Wars End* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), pp. 235–268. For an excellent critique of neorealism and its application to internal wars see, Steven R. David, “Internal War: Causes and Cures,” *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (July 1997), pp. 552–576. Also see the introductory chapter by Robert Jervis and Jack Snyder to Barbara F. Walter and Jack Snyder, eds., *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and James Fearon, “Commitment Problems and the Spread of Ethnic Conflict,” in David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, eds., *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 107-126. A recent comprehensive review can be found in William Rose, “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict: Some New Hypotheses,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Summer 2000), pp. 1-54.

<sup>6</sup> Three of the best works include: Peter Gourevitch, “The Reemergence of Peripheral Nationalisms: Some Comparative Speculations on the Spatial Distribution of Political Leadership and Economic Growth,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (July 1979), pp. 303–322; Paul Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991); and V.P.

the masses, it may take on a life of its own and create hostility and violence among the different ethnic groups.

Each of these five theories offers important insights into ethnic violence, but their explanatory power is limited because there are many cases that contradict each theory. My aim is to offer an alternative theory that has greater explanatory power.

I postulate that the key to predicting ethnic violence is how the different actors —ethnic groups and states — view territory.<sup>7</sup> For ethnic groups, territory is invariably tied to the group's identity. Control over territory means a secure identity. For states, control over territory is directly linked to their physical survival. Where both ethnic groups and states calculate that they need to control the same piece of territory to guarantee their survival, a violent clash is likely to result. Understanding ethnic war thus requires understanding how two actors can view control over the same piece of ground as indivisible.<sup>8</sup> That is, territory cannot meaningfully be divided and remain of value to states and ethnic groups.<sup>9</sup>

For ethnic groups, settlement patterns—where groups live, and whether they are a majority or minority—determine the capability and legitimacy of a group's mobilization for independence. Where both capability and legitimacy are high—as they are for a group that is concentrated in a

---

Gagnon, Jr., "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/95), pp. 130–166.

<sup>7</sup> This article draws on my earlier research. See author, "The Geography of Ethnic Conflict: Do Settlement Patterns Matter?" Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, April, 1996; and author, *The Geography of Ethnic Conflict*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> No one has previously examined the connection between indivisibility, territory, and ethnic war. The conflict bargaining literature identifies three barriers to nonviolent conflict resolution: (1) issue indivisibility; (2) a commitment problem and (3) private information. The focus of analysis in this article is issue indivisibility. See for example, James Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Summer 1995), pp. 379–414; John Vasquez, "The Tangibility of Issues and Global Conflict: A Test of Rosenau's Issue Area Typology," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1983), pp. 179–192; and Paul F. Diehl, "What Are They Fighting For?: The Importance of Issues in International Conflict Research," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (1992), pp. 333–334.

region, especially if that region is its homeland—an ethnic group is likely to consider control over disputed territory an indivisible issue and demand independence.

States are likely to view control over territory—even worthless or costly territory—as an indivisible issue whenever they fear precedent-setting. Precedent-setting concerns arise when states fear that granting independence to one group will encourage other groups to demand independence, unleashing a process that will threaten the territorial integrity of the state. If an ethnic group is willing to accept an outcome short of full independence, or if the state sees its territory as divisible, ethnic war is unlikely to break out. But if an ethnic group demands independence and a state fears precedent-setting, ethnic war is likely.

I subject this theory of ethnic war to a variety of tests. To start, I perform a pair of statistical tests on the theory's main hypotheses. The first test assesses whether different settlement patterns are associated with different levels of violence. The second test is more comprehensive: it not only looks at settlement patterns and violence, but also at the impact of precedent-setting, along with some other hypotheses. These statistical tests, however, are only useful for establishing correlation among the theory's key variables. To establish causation, I examine Russia's dealings with Tatarstan and Chechnya between 1991 and 1994. Russia, a multiethnic state, had concerns with precedent-setting in both cases. However, violent conflict broke out over Chechnya, but not Tatarstan. The difference is that Chechnya demanded independence from Russia, while Tatarstan demanded only greater autonomy. I argue that the reason is that the dispersed settlement pattern of the Tatars circumscribed their bid for independence, while the concentrated status of the Chechens afforded them both the capability and the legitimacy to pursue independence.

---

<sup>9</sup> In the biblical example Solomon is called upon to resolve a dispute over the possession of a child. His famous resolution was to literally divide the child in half. The example highlights the fact that what is literally divisible, such as homeland territory, is often not meaningfully divisible.

No effort is made in this article to examine any of the other theories of ethnic violence and compare them with my own. Instead, I concentrate on laying out and testing my theory.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. I outline my theory on the origins of ethnic war in the next section, and then present the statistical tests of the theory. In the third section I test the theory in the Tatarstan and Chechnya case studies described above. I summarize my key findings and discuss their broader theoretical and policy implications in the conclusion. My main conclusions are that ethnic groups are rational actors, and that certain settlement patterns are not amenable to third-party intervention or partition.

### **Causes of Ethnic Violence**

This section presents a theory that explains when ethnic disputes are likely to turn violent, and elaborates the logic that underpins it.

The likelihood of ethnic war is largely a function of how the principal antagonists—a state and its dissatisfied ethnic minority—think about a territory in dispute.<sup>10</sup> Violence is likely if the ethnic minority demands independence over the territory it occupies, and the state sees this territory as indivisible.<sup>11</sup> If either of these conditions is absent, the two sides can cut a deal that averts armed conflict.

This raises the question of when an ethnic group will seek direct control over the territory it occupies (i.e., demand independence), and when will a state consider its territory as indivisible. I argue that the key to predicting the scope of ethnic group demands is their settlement patterns.

---

<sup>10</sup> This theory can also explain inter-group violence when the territory in dispute is claimed as a homeland by both groups, and when controlling states are too weak to prevent war.

<sup>11</sup> One way around the indivisibility issue is to admit to the possibility of issue indivisibility rhetorically, but then add the concept of side payments to effectively eliminate issue indivisibility from consideration. Catalan nationalists, for example, might trade political autonomy for increased economic autonomy. Yet this is a troubling approach in two ways. First, it backs us up only one level of analysis: instead of asking “under what conditions will actors consider a given issue indivisible?” we must now ask



Ethnic groups will seek to rule territory in which they are geographically concentrated, especially if that region is a historic homeland. They will show little interest in controlling territory when they are either widely dispersed across the state, or are concentrated only in cities. I also argue that the key issue for states is precedent-setting: states will refuse to surrender territory to one ethnic group when they fear it will lead other groups to demand independence, setting in motion a process that could unravel the state. Understanding the importance of territorial control to both ethnic groups and states requires understanding how each actor believes territorial control is crucial to its long-term survival.

### ***Territory and Survival***

Controlling territory is of great importance both to ethnic groups and to states because both believe their survival depends on it. Nevertheless, they see the relationship between territorial control and survival differently. For ethnic groups, territory is often a defining attribute of a group's identity, inseparable from its past and vital to its continued existence as a distinct group. States are defined by territorial borders, and tend to view challenges to those borders as threats to their very existence. The ways in which ethnic groups and states link their survival to territory largely influences whether disputes over territory end in a negotiated settlement, or instead in war.

Ethnic groups comprise individuals who share a common trait such as language, race or religion, a belief in a common heritage and destiny, and an association with a given piece of territory.<sup>12</sup> These shared ties are often intricately connected, as the Welsh national anthem illustrates:

---

“why do some actors accept side payments on indivisible issues while others do not?” The Algerians, North Vietnamese, Bengalis, Palestinians, and Chechens have been offered side payments and refused.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 22–31. Few ethnic groups have no association with a particular territory. One such group is the Roma of Europe. For an excellent discussion of the distinction between ethnic groups, states, and nations, as well as the importance

Wales! Wales! I am devoted to my country. So long as the sea is a wall to this fair beautiful land, may the ancient language remain.

The Welsh people share a common lineage and language, with deep roots in a particular and distinctive land. Without Wales, the “Welsh” could not exist. The territory of Wales is the Welsh homeland.

Homelands contain “the fundamentals of culture and identity. And, as such, [they are] about sustaining cultural boundaries and boundedness.... The ‘other’ is always and continuously a threat to the security and integrity of those who share a common home.”<sup>13</sup> A “homeland” is therefore a special category of territory: it is not an object that can be exchanged, but an indivisible attribute of group identity. This feature explains why ethnic groups rationally view the right to control their homeland as a survival issue, regardless of a territory’s objective value in terms of natural or man-made resources. Thus, in places like Jerusalem and Kosovo, men and women continue to risk their lives to establish or maintain control of their homelands. Homeland control ensures that a group’s language can be spoken, its culture expressed, and its faith practiced. This intimate connection between homeland territory and the preservation of identity distinguishes ethnic groups from states.

States view the link between territory and survival differently. A state is the center of political relations for a specific population over which it has the recognized authority to establish and enforce laws.<sup>14</sup> States provide for the survival of their citizens, including members of ethnic

---

of homeland see, Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> D. Morley and K. Robins, “No Place like Heimat: Images of Homeland in European Culture,” in E. Carter et al. eds., *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> For excellent discussions of the state, see Michael Mann, *States, War and Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), especially chap. 1; Charles Tilly, “Reflections on the History of European State-Making,” in Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975); Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 169–191; Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of

groups, but no higher authority provides for the survival of states.<sup>15</sup> As a result, they constantly worry about the physical capacity of other states to compromise their survival.

A key consequence follows from states' deep-seated concern for survival: states tend to view power in material terms, and they seek to obtain, maintain, develop, measure, and mobilize material resources for defense or conquest.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the state's focus on physical survival often overrides subjective or sentimental attachments to land. This material perspective contrasts with that of ethnic groups, who view territory as inextricably bound up with their identity and thus ultimately with their survival as a group. Two examples illustrate this difference of perspective. The state of Israel, for example, would be perfectly willing to negotiate control over Jerusalem if doing so would improve its security, but orthodox Jews would never do so. Similarly, in 1999 the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia grudgingly accepted loss of control over Kosovo under threat of destruction from NATO, but Serbs refuse to consider Kosovo lost.

In sum, ethnic groups and states both care about survival, but they define survival and its relationship to territory differently. It remains, therefore, to consider the conditions under which ethnic groups will demand sovereignty and states will regard the disputed territory as indivisible.

### ***Ethnic Groups and the Demand for Independence***

Ethnic groups will demand sovereignty when two conditions hold.<sup>17</sup> First, a group must calculate that its capabilities give it a reasonable chance of gaining control of the territory it desires.

Second, the group must believe that its cause is legitimate. Both of these are strongly affected by

---

Analysis in Current Research," *ibid.*, pp. 3–43; and Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), especially chap. 1.

<sup>15</sup> See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979).

<sup>16</sup> On this point in particular, see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> By "demanding sovereignty" I mean demanding full independence: the creation of a new state within the international system of states.

a group's settlement patterns. In this section I explain how settlement patterns affect capability and legitimacy, and how these in turn affect the likelihood of a group's sovereignty demand.

The physical distribution of ethnic groups within states fall into four main patterns: concentrated-majority, concentrated-minority, urban, and dispersed. Concentrated groups are those whose members live almost exclusively in a single region of a state. For example, before Yugoslavia broke apart in 1991, ethnic Slovenes were concentrated in one region (now the independent state of Slovenia), in which they constituted ninety percent of the population. Concentrated groups may be either minorities (less than 50 percent) or majorities (equal to or greater than fifty percent). By this definition, the Slovenians described above were a concentrated-majority. Other groups may be concentrated in a single region, but not constitute a majority of the region's population. For example, in Abkhazia, a region in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia, ethnic Abkhaz were a concentrated-minority because (in 1989) they represented only seventeen percent of the population. Urban groups are those concentrated in one or several cities. For example, 88 percent of ethnic Russians living in the fourteen new states created from the wreckage of the Soviet Union live in urban areas.<sup>18</sup> Dispersed groups are those whose members are scattered across a state (or many states). Both the Roma in Europe today and European Jews before 1945 exemplify this pattern.

Ethnic group settlement patterns affect both the capability and legitimacy of a group's mobilization for sovereignty, and therefore the likelihood that such a demand will be made. Capability refers to the capacity to wage a successful fight for independence. The number of group members influences the quantity of resources (including armed fighters) that can be brought to the fight. These resources include control over economic, political, and social networks (and their more formal counterparts, institutions); access to communications assets and media that are vital to

concerted action; and money or other goods that can be exchanged for weapons, food, medical supplies, or mercenaries.<sup>19</sup>

Each of the four group settlement patterns has different capability implications. Urban groups will have the highest capabilities. Residence in an urban area implies access to media and money, as well as dense networks (especially economic). Urbanites tend to be more closely connected than non-urban groups, and better informed about state policies that affect them. As a result, urbanites are likely to be the most efficient mobilizers.

Concentrated-majorities will have capabilities second only to those of urban groups. As majorities, these groups can be expected to mobilize more fighters and resources in pursuit of sovereignty than minority or dispersed groups, and are more likely to have dense networks and to control local institutions.

For concentrated-minorities, capability is indeterminate: some groups will be the largest in their region, while others may be the smallest.<sup>20</sup> A small ethnic group is unlikely to control many local resources or dominate networks, and thus be less able to mobilize.

Dispersed groups will have the weakest capabilities. Because members are scattered across a state, dispersed groups are unlikely to have either the fighters necessary to achieve sovereignty in any particular region or the dense networks that facilitate coordinated action. Effective mobilization will therefore prove difficult.

Because it determines the effectiveness of mobilizing capability, legitimacy directly influences a group's decision to seek sovereignty.<sup>21</sup> Legitimacy enhances resource mobilization because group

---

<sup>18</sup> Pal Kolsto, "Territorialising Diasporas: The Case of Russians in the Former Soviet Republics," *Millennium*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (DATE), pp. 607-631.

<sup>19</sup> The best treatment of the requirements of collective action remains Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1978), chapter 3.

<sup>20</sup> For example, a concentrated-minority may be less than half of a region's population but still larger than any other group.

members will be more willing to sacrifice wealth and risk their lives in pursuit of a just cause. Two principles of legitimacy link settlement patterns to a group's demand for sovereignty: homeland and majority rule.

The homeland principle is the idea that a people with deep roots and historical attachment to the land have a right to control it. Control over the homeland is vital because it can determine how economic and political resources are distributed, how many foreigners can immigrate, which languages are recognized, sponsored, and spoken, and which gods may be worshipped. Losing control of homeland territory may result in dilution of the national group, its loss of power, and consequent diminution of national identity. In Canada, for example, the main motivation for a Quebecois demand for sovereignty is protection of spoken French. Without the French language, the Quebecois would soon cease to exist as Quebecois. Canada's opposition to Quebecois demands has been constrained by the widely perceived legitimacy of a "Quebec for Quebecois."

The homeland principle incorporates notions of investment and tenure that are often used to justify ethnic-group mobilization for sovereignty. Investment refers to a group's contribution to a given territory: a group's sacrifice in defense of the land, or development of it, may be advanced as an argument in favor of the legitimacy of a claim to its control.<sup>22</sup> For example, although ethnic Serbs constituted a tiny minority of Kosovo's population, Slobodan Milosevic argued that Serbs were entitled to control Kosovo because in the fourteenth century Serb ancestors had sacrificed their lives resisting marauding Ottomans. Tenure refers to the identity of the first people to

---

<sup>21</sup> Little theorizing exists on legitimacy and ethnic claims. Donald Horowitz argues that prior occupation is the strongest claim to legitimacy. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985). Ernest Gellner touches on some of these issues in his discussion of what should constitute the proper boundaries of political units; Ernest Gellner, "Nationalism in a Vacuum," in Gellner, *Thinking Theoretically about Soviet Nationalities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 243–254. For a discussion of majority rule as a legitimating principle, see Robert Dahl, "Democracy, Majority Rule, and Gorbachev's Referendum," *Dissent*, Fall 1991, pp. 491–496.

<sup>22</sup> The Jews in Israel are a good example. Jews often point to their achievements in irrigating once fallow land and building viable settlements to bolster the legitimacy of their claims to Israeli-occupied territory.

inhabit a territory. Groups often claim the right to control a territory if their ethnic ancestors settled it first. Serbs consider Kosovo the cradle of the Serbian nation because it was the seat of a medieval Serbian Empire. Albanians go even further back in time, tracing their ancestors to ancient Illyrian tribes.

Both Serbs and Albanians see Kosovo as their legitimate homeland. Both have a strong attachment to the region and both have battled with pen and sword to defend their claims. The Albanians, however, have something the Serbs do not: a majority. The majority-rule principle is simple: If one group is fifty percent or more of the population in a given region, it should be entitled to govern. As a principle of legitimacy, majority rule is important for three reasons. First, it is one of the most fundamental democratic principles. This implies that wherever democracy itself is viewed as legitimate, claims based on majority status must also be viewed as legitimate.<sup>23</sup> Second, a “majority” is quantifiable and easily recognizable. Outside observers and participants to a dispute can more easily agree on whether a group constitutes a majority than on the validity of a group’s claims about tenure or investment. Third, majority rule often facilitates the ethnic group mobilization. As Thomas Schelling notes, “People require some signal, preferably a signal so plain and so potent everyone can be sure that everyone else will respond similarly, thus affording one another the greater immunity that goes with action in large numbers.”<sup>24</sup> Majority status thus explains how some ethnic groups are able to overcome collective action problems. It also suggests why states are often reluctant to conduct plebiscites, referenda, and formal

---

<sup>23</sup> This matters because the world’s most powerful states — including the United States — are democracies, making external support for groups seeking sovereignty both more likely and more useful. Support is more likely due to shared values, and it is more useful because of the power and resources these states can bring to bear. NATO’s intervention in Kosovo in 1999 is an example.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 74.

censuses.<sup>25</sup> For states, the risks of denying majority groups greater political autonomy can be high. For example, although Belgrade claimed the right to protect minority Serbs in Kosovo before 1999 — by brutal means if necessary — the fact that more than 90 percent of the regional population was (and still is) ethnic Albanian seriously undermined the legitimacy of Belgrade’s position.

Each of the four settlement patterns has different legitimacy implications. Concentrated-majorities have the highest legitimacy. They enjoy the legitimacy of majority rule, and because they are less likely than urban or dispersed groups to be recent arrivals, they are more likely to claim homeland legitimacy as well. The combination of high capability and high legitimacy makes these groups the most likely to demand sovereignty and to risk violence toward that end.

Concentrated-minorities have mixed legitimacy. Although they may be fighting for control of a homeland, the lack of majority status is likely to hinder the effectiveness of their mobilization efforts. These groups are also less likely than concentrated-majorities to have sufficient resources to risk violence in pursuit of independence.<sup>26</sup> They are less likely to demand sovereignty than concentrated-majorities, but more likely to do so than either urbanites or dispersed groups.

Urbanites are especially weak on the legitimacy dimension. They are often recent arrivals who, unlike concentrated-majorities and minorities, lack a strong sense of attachment to the land they occupy. Urbanites who are passionately attached to a homeland are most likely attached to a distant land, rather than to the city in which they currently reside. Two consequences follow. First, attachment to a land other than the city in which they reside makes group claims to majority status unlikely, even in those rare circumstances where their numbers would support such a claim.

---

<sup>25</sup> An example is Israel’s refusal to allow an official census of Palestinians living on “Israeli” territory. See Joel Greenberg, “Palestinian Census Ignites Dispute Over Jerusalem,” *The New York Times*, December 11, 1997.



Second, because their employment skills tend to be transportable, in a crisis urban groups are more likely than other groups to flee rather than fight.<sup>27</sup> Thus, although their capabilities are the highest of the four group patterns, their legitimacy is the lowest, and without a willingness to act, capabilities are largely irrelevant. States should therefore be less worried about urbanites than either concentrated-majority or concentrated-minority groups.

Dispersed groups combine low legitimacy and low capability. Their scattered presence precludes them from claiming majority-rule legitimacy (even when they view a region as their homeland) and they will find it difficult to mobilize potent military forces. States should therefore be least concerned about dispersed groups. Table 1 presents a summary of these relationships.

**Table 1: Ethnic Groups and the demand for sovereignty**

Settlement Patterns	Capability	Homeland Legitimacy	Majority Rule Legitimacy	Likelihood of Sovereignty Demand
Concentrated-Majority	High	High	High	High
Concentrated-Minority	Indeterminate	High	Low	Moderate
Urban	High	Low	Low	Low
Dispersed	Low	Low	Low	Low

In sum, variations in settlement patterns explain variation in group capacity and legitimacy, which in turn predict variation in the likelihood that a group will risk violence to gain sovereignty. But when will states, in turn, use violence to resist such claims? In the next section I explain when this is likely, leading to war.

---

<sup>26</sup> External support matters most in these cases.

<sup>27</sup> Ethnic Russians living beyond the Russian Federation, for example, did not take up arms to keep the Union together when the Soviet Union collapsed, even though they controlled many key institutions and had the best jobs and the most money. For the most part (excepting Russians in Kazakhstan and Ukraine who settled before the twentieth century and are viewed as “native” to the areas), these new-minority Russians simply packed their bags: large-scale migration, not violence, has been the norm.

### ***The State and its Territorial Integrity***

States will regard territory as indivisible when they believe that allowing one ethnic group to gain territorial sovereignty will set a precedent that encourages other ethnic groups to demand sovereignty. In this section, I explain why multinational states are the only type of states that worry about such precedent-setting; how this kind of concern for precedent influences political leaders in multinational states; why precedent-setting explains state intransigence better than arguments based on the economic or strategic value of territory; and how a concern for precedent may provoke multinational states to oppose dissatisfied ethnic groups quickly and violently.

For states facing an ethnic group's sovereignty demand, the key question is whether the secession of one group will set a precedent for other groups, spurring subsequent secessions. A state's ethnic profile (the number of ethnic groups it contains) determines whether this precedent-setting effect is of concern. There are three types of ethnic profiles: uni-national, bi-national, and multinational. Uni-national states are ethnically homogeneous. For example, ethnic Poles comprise ninety-eight percent of Poland's population. Ethnic secession is not possible in uni-national states. Bi-national states contain two well-defined ethnic groups. In former Czechoslovakia, for example, Czechs were concentrated in western regions of the state and Slovaks in its eastern regions. In bi-national states, precedent-setting will almost never be an issue because one secession cannot provoke subsequent secessions.<sup>28</sup> Czechoslovakia's "velvet divorce," for example, was peaceful because after Slovak secession, no other potential secessionists remained to threaten the integrity of the new Czech and Slovak states.

Multinational states contain more than two ethnic groups and are by far the most common type of state, eighty percent of the distribution of state ethnic profiles worldwide.<sup>29</sup> Two-thirds of

---

<sup>28</sup> Precedent-setting could still affect relations with other states, however. One state may pressure another state that is bi-national to resist sovereignty demands in order not to set a precedent for its own national minorities. The policies of Iraq, Iran, and Turkey toward the Kurds are the classic case.

<sup>29</sup> Compiled by author. See Appendix 1.

all independent states contain three or more concentrated ethnic groups. Examples include India, Myanmar, and Russia, all of which govern concentrations of many distinct racial, linguistic, and religious groups. In multinational states, precedent-setting is a powerful constraint on the government's willingness to bargain over territorial control. Therefore, a substantial proportion of all multinational states are likely to be concerned about precedent-setting.

Precedent-setting logic influences leaders in multinational states in four ways. First, leaders are acutely aware that actions taken towards one ethnic group may serve as an example of what is acceptable for other ethnic groups, thereby becoming a principle of legitimacy. As a principle of legitimacy, precedent-setting works by assuming an equality of status among political units. If this condition is met, rights granted to any political unit must count as legitimate rights for all like units. This creates particular problems for multinational states that have recognized equivalent status for their component ethnic groups. During the final months before the collapse of the Soviet Union, for example, Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev deliberately tried to deter Russian leader Boris Yeltsin's bid for Russian independence by elevating the status of autonomous republics such as Chechnya and Tatarstan to the same level as union republics such as Latvia and Ukraine. The union republics had long been guaranteed the right to secede under the Soviet Constitution, but the autonomous republics had not. Because sixteen of the twenty-one Soviet autonomous republics were located within Russia, had Gorbachev succeeded, a newly-independent Russia might have faced sixteen legitimately-entitled secessionist movements. Thus, unless some clear historical factor distinguishes one group's status from all others (thus justifying special treatment for the anomalous group) states will view disputed territory as indivisible, thereby increasing the likelihood of war.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Gorbachev was criticized by many of his contemporaries who believed that he could have prevented or at least delayed the collapse of the Soviet Union by granting independence to the Baltic republics. For example, he could have granted independence on the grounds that they had been independent

Precedent-setting logic also explains why states sometimes bargain hard for worthless territory, yet in other cases give up economically or strategically valuable land. Take, for example, a hypothetical multiethnic country with two dissatisfied ethnic groups concentrated in different regions. One region is economically backward and a net drain on state resources, while the other contains oil, gold, and defensible mountains. Although allowing the backward region to secede might seem rational—leaving the state better off—this might set a precedent that would encourage the oil and gold-rich region to secede, putting the state’s survival at risk. Even if the material and strategic value of the state’s ethnic regions were equal, the threat of cumulative losses might jeopardize the state’s survival.

Precedent-setting logic explains state intransigence better than the most compelling alternative explanation found in the international relations literature, which is that states will be unwilling to give up control over territory that contains valuable economic resources (e.g., diamonds, gold, petroleum) or strategic resources (e.g., defensible mountains, rivers, plutonium).<sup>31</sup> Because such resources equal power, and because power equals survival, states may calculate that their security demands unequivocal control over territory containing these resources. The problem with this argument is that although states will bargain harder for strategically valuable territory, such issues are nevertheless divisible, and states may therefore be able to negotiate arrangements that compensate them for anticipated losses. For example, once

---

prior to their forced annexation by the Soviet Union; that is, they had not voluntarily joined the Union, one of the conditions of the status and rights of Union republics under the Soviet constitution. Thus their independence would not be a precedent to which any other Union republic could appeal, as the Baltics were the only Union republics that met these strict criteria.

<sup>31</sup> Traditional and contemporary international relations theory lead us to expect that strategic or intrinsic worth should cause the strongest reaction from the state. Indeed, Paul Huth found that a powerful predictor of territorial disputes among states was the desire to control strategically-located territory. Furthermore, Huth found that the presence of a bordering minority with linguistic or cultural ties to a challenger state was “*not a primary cause* of territorial disputes between states in the post-World War II period. Paul Huth, *Standing Your Ground: Territorial Disputes and International Conflict* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), chapter 4 (p. 81 for quotation, his emphasis). Also see, Peter

Russia's independence set a precedent for other union republics, such as Ukraine and Kazakhstan, to declare independence, Russia was surrounded by weak states containing valuable strategic and economic resources. In Ukraine, for example, Russia faced the possibility that key elements of the Soviet Union's nuclear weapons manufacturing and defense system — including surface-to-surface ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads — might fall under the control of a new and potentially hostile state. Ukraine, for its part, faced a proximate and much larger potential adversary in Russia, and for this reason might have sought to keep these weapons and the control of their manufacturing facilities in order secure itself from a potential threat from Russia or any other state. Yet Russia and Ukraine cut a deal that left Ukraine with the Black Sea fleet, and Russia with possession of all Soviet nuclear weapons. The divisibility of economic and strategic issues explains why states are often willing to negotiate over resource-rich territory, whereas precedent-setting logic explains why states sometimes risk violence over worthless territory.

Precedent-setting logic also explains why a state faced with an ethnic group's sovereignty demand might respond both quickly and violently. If willingness to countenance one secession might provoke subsequent secession demands, a swift and forceful response to a first demand might deter subsequent ones.<sup>32</sup> Slobodan Milosevic's decision to move troops to Slovenia, for example, sent a clear signal to other independence-minded republics that sovereignty was not negotiable. The more quickly and violently a multinational state acts to prevent secession by any group, the fewer secessionists it is likely to face.<sup>33</sup>

---

Liberman, *Does Conquest Pay?: the Exploitation of Occupied Industrial Societies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> The logic here is similar to a store's attempts to eliminate competition in the long term by foregoing profits and engaging in a price war in the short term. Reinhard Selten, "Chain Store Paradox," *Theory and Decision*, Vol. 9, pp. 127–159.

<sup>33</sup> For an analysis of when an initiator should attack, see Michael E. Brown, "Deterrence Failures and Deterrence Strategies," March 1977, RAND Paper Series, 77-502-602/2. Donald Horowitz touches on the importance of the timing of action in Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 625, fn. 38.

### **Testing the Theory: A Statistical Analysis**

This section offers two tests of the theory's main hypotheses. The first test focuses on the part of the argument that deals with the aggrieved ethnic group, examining my hypotheses about the relationship between certain settlement patterns and violence. The second considers the interests the state as well, examining the impact of five factors on the likelihood of violence: (1) relative impact of settlement patterns; (2) attachment to homeland; (3) duration of residence in a region; (4) precedent-setting; and (5) the resource-richness of a region.

The data I employ is from Phase III of the Minorities at Risk (MAR) dataset.<sup>34</sup> MAR is appropriate for testing the theory's propositions for two reasons. It is the largest dataset on issues related to ethnicity and conflict. Unlike datasets of civil wars, which exclude cases where no war results, MAR accounts for outcomes in which violence was absent, as well as civil war.<sup>35</sup> MAR is also well suited for testing my theory about the relationship between ethnic groups and states, because the unit of analysis in MAR is ethnic groups, and specifies several different levels of group violence against the state.<sup>36</sup>

The dependent variable is the same for both tests: violence between the state and ethnic group. This is captured by MAR's REBEL variable. The range of activity moves from "none reported," which is indicated by a score of 0, to "protracted civil war," which is indicated by a score of 7.

---

<sup>34</sup> MAR data are available online at <[www.bsos.umd.edu/cidcm/mar](http://www.bsos.umd.edu/cidcm/mar)>. New variable data are available from author.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Melvin Small and J. David Singer, *Resort to Arms: International and Civil Wars, 1818-1980* (London: Sage Publications, 1981); Roy Licklider, "The Consequences of Negotiated Settlements in Civil Wars, 1945-1993," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (September 1995); and Nicholas Sambanis, "Partition as a Solution to Ethnic War," *World Politics*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (July 2000), pp. 437-483.

<sup>36</sup> MAR consists of 275 politically active communal groups, defined as cultural or religious groups that do not have a recognized state or institutionalized status, and whose members share a distinctive collective identity based on cultural or ascriptive traits that are salient to both members and nonmembers. To be included, a group must have a population of 100,000 or more, or else constitute more than one percent of its state's total population. All groups included in the MAR dataset suffered from discriminatory

Intervening levels of rebellion (from “local rebellions” to “guerrilla activity”) fall between 0 and 7. The REBEL variable is coded for five-year periods since 1945, based on the highest level of violence within each five-year period. Because most of the background data used to code the cases (such as population figures) is from the 1980s and early 1990s, I examined three periods from the dataset: 1985–89, 1990–95, and 1995–98.<sup>37</sup> I collapsed these three time periods to derive a “maximum level of rebellion” score for each group over the entire 13-year period.

In the first test, the independent variable group is settlement patterns, to assess whether they are associated with different levels of violence or rebellion. I derive settlement patterns from MAR’s group spatial concentration measures (REG).<sup>38</sup> I then regressed rebellion (using OLS) on three dichotomous measures of settlement patterns: concentrated-minority, which takes on a value of “1” if the group constitutes a minority of the population in a region and “0” otherwise; urban, which takes on a value of “1” if the group lives largely in cities and “0” otherwise; and dispersed, which takes on a value of “1” if the group is scattered across a state and “0” otherwise. Concentrated-majority groups are the baseline category (the constant).

This test determines whether, as my theory predicts, concentrated-majorities displayed higher levels of violence than other types of groups. The constant term provides information on the mean level of violence of ethnic groups that are concentrated-majorities. The mean level of violence among these groups is 2.78, substantially higher than the scores for the other three types

---

policies and/or mobilized to protect or advance their interests. In other words, if a group is included in the dataset, ethnic conflict is presumed. My theory makes the same presumption.

<sup>37</sup> Although MAR is set up to measure rebellion for five-year periods, for idiosyncratic reasons, not all of the periods comprise five years.

<sup>38</sup> MAR’s REG variables serve as the foundation for my own variables, which I supplemented to code in accordance with my four categories of settlement patterns. I compiled data on minority and majority status in the region of occupation for many of the cases that were otherwise missing in MAR. Sixty-three cases still lack codings, either because too little information is available about a given ethnic group, or because substate population data are not available (e.g., the state might not conduct formal censuses, or its censuses do not include regional population proportions). I controlled for the missing data in the final regression equation. No substantial differences in levels of rebellion existed, compared to those cases for which such information was available.

of settlement patterns.<sup>39</sup> Concentrated-minorities, dispersed groups, and urban groups have lower levels of violence (the coefficients are statistically significant and negative). Urbanites display the lowest level of violence overall. The results of the regression analysis are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2: Regression of rebellion on settlement patterns**

Variables	Coefficient	Standard error	T statistic
Constant/ Concentrated-majority	2.78	.353	7.86***
Concentrated-minority	-1.61	.490	-3.28***
Urban	- 2.45	.472	-5.18 ***
Dispersed	-2.12	.418	-5.03***
Number of cases, 207 R-squared .170			

\*\*\* =p <.01, one-tailed test.

This test provides strong support for the hypothesis that particular settlement patterns increase the likelihood of violence. It clearly shows that concentrated-majorities are the most prone to violence. Furthermore, it shows that concentrated-majorities to be two and a half times more likely than concentrated-minorities to be engaged in rebellion, and approximately four to five times more likely than urban and dispersed groups. This is shown in Figure 1.<sup>40</sup>

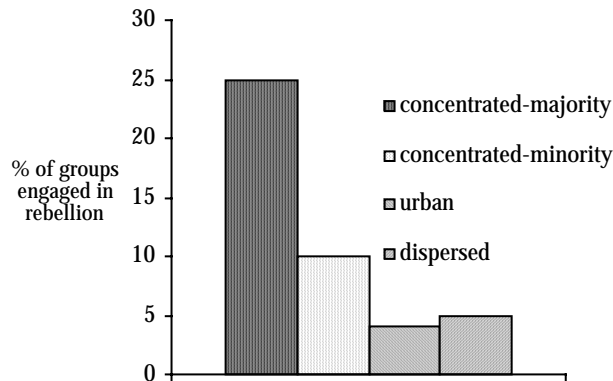
---

<sup>39</sup> This figure indicates that of a possible mean value between 0 and 7 (from “no rebellion” to “protracted civil war”), these groups averaged 2.78 in level of rebellious activity. The p-value indicates that the level of violence in these groups is statistically distinguishable from 0 by any conventional standard.

<sup>40</sup> Pearson chi2(6) = 41.61, p = .000.



**Figure 1: Settlement patterns and frequency of rebellion, 1980-95**



Of all ethnic groups engaged in large-scale rebellion, 78 percent were concentrated-majorities.<sup>41</sup> The other three categories of ethnic groups together made up the remaining 22 percent of groups engaged in large-scale rebellion. Only 37 percent of concentrated-majorities that were involved in some sort of ethnic conflict did not engage in any sort of violence; of the 63 percent that engaged in some sort of political violence, 25 percent engaged in large-scale rebellion. Concentrated-minorities were substantially less active: 68 percent were not engaged in any type of rebellion and only 10 percent engaged in large-scale rebellion. Dispersed groups revealed levels similar to concentrated-minorities: 80 percent were not engaged in any rebellion, whereas only 5 percent were involved in large-scale rebellion. Urban groups hardly engaged in rebellion: 93 percent of urbanites were not involved in any rebellion. Only one urban group was engaged in large-scale rebellion, a case that may well be a coding error.<sup>42</sup> These data clearly show

---

<sup>41</sup> Large-scale rebellion refers to engagement in large-scale guerilla activity or protracted civil war (i.e., scored a “6” or “7” in MAR).

<sup>42</sup> The sole urban group identified as engaging in rebellion was the Russians of Georgia. This, however, might be a coding error: it was the former Soviet/Russian military directed from Moscow that was engaged in the fighting in Abkhazia, not civilian resident Russians (who fled along with the ethnic Georgians and others).

that concentrated-majorities are the most rebellious and worrisome for states, while urbanites are the least worrisome, thus supporting a principal element of my theory.

Because violence depends on the interaction of ethnic groups and states, explaining violence requires consideration of both actors' positions and consideration of all of the hypotheses. A more comprehensive test of the theory goes beyond the settlement patterns of ethnic groups. In this second test, the dependent variable is the same (REBEL) over the 1985–98 period.<sup>43</sup> This test, however, has two sets of independent variables: one focuses on ethnic groups, and the other on the state. To test the part of the theory dealing with ethnic groups, I included a settlement pattern variable, as I did in the first test, but also added a homeland variable and duration variable. The “settlement pattern” variable used to test the entire theory is a collapsed version of the four patterns employed in the first test: “0” indicates the group is not a concentrated-majority in a region and “1” indicates that it is. My theory predicts that concentrated-majorities are more likely to be engaged in violence than other groups. The “homeland” variable indicates whether the ethnic group sees the territory in which it is residing as its homeland. Here, “0” indicates that the region is not seen by the group as its homeland and “1” indicates that it is.<sup>44</sup> The theory predicts that ethnic groups residing in their perceived homeland are more likely to be engaged in rebellion than those that are not. The “duration” variable indicates how long a group has lived in the place. It consists of three values: “0” indicates residence since 1945, “1” indicates residence beginning between 1800 and 1945, and “2” indicates residence since before 1800. It is based on MAR's

---

<sup>43</sup> I tested these hypotheses using OLS regression. I also analyzed the data using an ordered probit model. The findings were the same: the coefficients were in the expected direction and were statistically significant. OLS output is presented here because it is simpler to interpret.

<sup>44</sup> This is a variable I created and is not found in MAR. I coded this variable based on primary and secondary sources, including case histories, newspaper accounts, and interviews, to determine whether the groups (or individuals representing the groups) perceived the region in which they resided as part or their entire homeland.

TRADITN2 variable. My hypothesis is that the longer a group has resided in a place, the more likely it is to be involved in violence.

The other part of the theory focuses on state-level factors. I include two independent variables: ethnic profile and resource-richness. The “ethnic profile” variable aims to capture the number of potential regional secessionists confronting the state. Thus, this variable was coded for whether the group resides in a state that (1) has only dispersed groups, (2) is homogeneous or contains one concentrated group with dispersed minorities, (3) contains two concentrated groups with or without dispersed minorities, or (4) contains three or more concentrated groups with or without dispersed minorities.<sup>45</sup>

There are some points to note about the ethnic profile variable. Ethnic groups residing in states with three or more concentrated groups constituted 91 percent (n=245) of the cases in MAR. The worldwide distribution of such states stands at 67 percent, or one-third lower. Because ethnic conflict is a prerequisite for inclusion in MAR, this descriptive statistic alone reveals that groups in states with three or more concentrated groups are at a greater risk for ethnic conflict than those in other types of states. Yet, because these states are so over-represented in MAR, I was not confident about using the ethnic profile variable in the regression equation. There is too little variation, leading to a lack of statistical significance. Whether I ran the equation with it or without it, however, did not change the findings in either estimation (which is what we expect statistically). The equation reported here includes the variable: “0” indicates the ethnic group lives in a state that does not contain three or concentrated ethnic groups and “1” indicates it does. According to my theory, states with three or more concentrations of ethnic groups are more likely to regard territory as indivisible because of fears of precedent-setting and, as a result, to resort to violence more readily than states with other ethnic profiles.

---

<sup>45</sup> This is a new variable I created for MAR. See Appendix 1 for the breakdown of states.

The “resource-rich” variable indicates whether the region in which the ethnic group lives contains valuable man-made or natural resources such as minerals, dams and river systems, pasture and farm lands, industries, and strategically important locales (e.g., mountain passes or heights).<sup>46</sup> It is included in the equation as a dummy: “0” indicates no valuable resources and “1” indicates the existence of a valuable resource. This variable (which I created and is not in MAR) allows precedent-setting to be tested indirectly by examining the leading alternative hypothesis, that states will resort to violence to control wealthy regions more readily than poor regions. If we find no relationship (if the coefficient is not statistically significant), or if violence is employed to gain control of poor regions more often than of rich regions (i.e., the coefficient is negative), then this lends credence to the claim that precedent-setting might be operating (as even poor regions are seen as indivisible and worth resorting to violence to keep). Table 3 presents the model of the theory.

**Table 3: Regression of ethnic violence**

Variables	Coefficient	Standard error	T statistic
<b>Ethnic group level</b>			
Concentrated-majority dummy <sup>a</sup>	1.80	.405	4.46***
Homeland	-1.418	.538	-2.63***
Duration	.878	.348	2.55***
	.358	.178	2.02**
<b>State level</b>			
Ethnic profile	.159	.531	.300
Resource rich	-.585	.417	-1.40*
Constant	.691	.742	.93
Number of cases, 237			
R-squared = 0.17			

\* = p<.1, \*\* = <.05, \*\*\* = <.01, one-tailed test.

---

<sup>46</sup> This variable was coded using a variety of sources including ethnographic maps, United States Geological Survey maps, data from the World Bank, the Economist Intelligence Unit, newspaper accounts of fights over resources, and individual country economic data. To test whether strategic worth alone affects violence, I created a variable of interstate borders (both land and maritime) and found that it was not statistically significant. Ethnic groups living in regions with interstate borders were neither more nor less likely to experience violence than those that did not have borders.

- a. This dummy variable is to control for missing data on the concentrated-majority variable, to determine whether the missing cases (63) are different from those cases that have regional proportional data (207). The answer is no.

Overall, the statistical analysis confirms the main hypotheses of the theory. Concentrated-majority status predicts violence, just as it did in the first test above. Groups living in what they perceive to be their homeland also seem to be more readily engaged in violence. The longer a group has lived in a region, the greater the chances of violence.

The state-level hypotheses, that precedent-setting matters more than resources, also received support. First, even given the limitations of the ethnic profile variable described above, the coefficient is positive (although not statistically significant), indicating that ethnic groups in multinational states are more likely to experience violence (perhaps because of states' fears of setting precedents).<sup>47</sup> Second, ethnic groups living in resource-rich regions were less likely to be involved in violence than groups living in resource-poor regions. This suggests that states sometimes believe that resources are divisible. Furthermore, the fact that violence is occurring more often in resource-poor regions than in resource-rich regions confirms the idea that states, as well as ethnic groups, are willing to fight over worthless territory. This lends further support to the notion that something other than the value of resources must be motivating violence.

### **Tatarstan, Chechnya, and Russia**

The statistical analysis provides evidence of a strong statistical association between the variables in my theory, but it does not establish that precedent-setting and settlement patterns actually cause ethnic violence. Thus, we need evidence that precedent-setting concerns preoccupied states and that settlement patterns of ethnic groups influenced their demands for

---

<sup>47</sup> Ethnic groups in multinational states displayed a mean score of rebellion of 1.90, while those in bi-national states (n=16 or 6 percent) had a substantially lower score of .69. This descriptive statistic is a good indication that ethnic groups in multinational states experience more violence than those in bi-national states.

independence. In the next section, therefore, I explore the causal relationship between survival, territory, settlement patterns, and precedent setting in two cases: bargaining between Moscow and Tatarstan, and between Moscow and Chechnya, from 1990 to 1994.

In the former Soviet Union, the year 1994 was marked by two contrasting events involving dissatisfied ethnic groups: the signing of a bilateral treaty and the outbreak of civil war. Although both Tatarstan and Chechnya had been demanding greater independence from Russia since 1991, Tatarstan moderated its demands about independence and signed a treaty ending its dispute with Moscow in February 1994. Chechnya, in contrast, remained committed to independence, precipitating the deployment of Russian troops in December 1994 and a subsequent civil war. Given the similarities between each independence movement, their proximity in time, and that both were dealing with the identical state, why was a negotiated settlement possible in one case while civil war resulted in the other?

It is my hypothesis that different settlement patterns of Tatars and Chechens affected each group's demand for independence. Specifically, the Tatars were dispersed across Russia, and therefore had neither the capabilities nor the legitimacy to make a bid for full independence. Thus, peace obtained in Tatarstan. In contrast, violence erupted between Chechnya and Russia because the Chechen concentrated-majority settlement pattern made a bid for statehood feasible and legitimate. As a result, both Grozny and Moscow considered control over Chechnya an indivisible issue, and war was the result.

### ***Tatarstan: A Fight over Resources***

The Tatars are Turkic-Muslim descendants of nomadic tribes who lived in southern Siberia until the tenth century, when they were conquered by the Mongol Golden Horde. The Tatars eventually joined the Horde as it moved west toward Europe. The Tatars established the Khanate of Kazan near the Volga River in 1445—in and around contemporary Tatarstan—following the

disintegration of the Mongol Empire. In 1552, they were conquered by Ivan the Terrible, and incorporated into the Russian Empire, which brought Russian settlements to the region.

By the late nineteenth century, the Tatars had a large middle class with high literacy rates, a well-developed national consciousness, and a shared commitment to build an educational system that would enable their children to lead materially and spiritually productive lives. Yet the development of that system was plagued by a dilemma: children had to learn Russian to take advantage of economic opportunities in the Empire, but this Russification or “de-Tatarization” threatened Tatar identity.<sup>48</sup> The Tatars engaged in serious debates about language and religion that focused attention on the question of what constitutes, or should constitute, a Tatar. Although there were competing viewpoints on the precise parameters of Tatar identity, by the end of the nineteenth century, it was widely agreed that a distinct Tatar identity existed, and that its homeland was in the Volga region.

The borders of contemporary Tatarstan are the product of Soviet social engineering, designed to divide the Muslim peoples by linguistic and cultural criteria into separate territorial administrative units that could be controlled from Moscow. These borders were explicitly intended to prevent the formation a large Turkic-Muslim nation in the Volga region. As of 1989, this engineering had succeeded in keeping Tatars a minority in Tatarstan: they constituted 48.5 percent, while ethnic Russians constituted 43.2 percent of the region’s 3.6 million population. The Tatars were a dispersed ethnic group whose members were scattered across the Russian Federation: 68 percent lived outside their titular republic.

---

<sup>48</sup> Ronald Wixman, “The Middle Volga: Ethnic Archipelago in a Russian Sea,” in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras, eds., *Nations and Politics in Soviet Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 423.

*Bargaining by Tatars.*

Hard-line groups in Tatarstan did advocate a “Tatarstan for Tatars.” For instance, groups such as Azatlyk (Freedom Youth Movement) and Ittifak (Alliance) wanted complete independence in order to ensure the survival of the Tatar nation. Ittifak condemned inter-ethnic marriages (Tatar-Russian) because the children inevitably ended up speaking Russian rather than Tatar.<sup>49</sup> To re-establish a Tatar majority in Tatarstan, the organization advocated a right of return and citizenship for any Tatar living outside the republic, while denying this right to non-Tatars.<sup>50</sup>

However, the Tatars’ dispersed settlement pattern stifled Tatarstan’s moves toward independence from Moscow by weakening both its capabilities to fight for independence and the legitimacy of its independence claims. As a result, its dispute with Moscow was mainly over control of resources rather than national self-determination.

Although the radical nationalist groups tended to view Tatar independence as indivisible to protect Tatar identity, they did not gain power nor set the agenda for negotiations with Moscow. This was not due to a lack of leadership skills or charisma of Ittifak’s or Azatlyk’s elite. It was a function of settlement patterns: Tatars and Russians comprised almost equal proportions of Tatarstan’s population and there was considerable intermarriage. As the leader of Soglasie, one of the moderate political parties, put it, “There is better chance for peace here because almost half of the families are mixed—Tatar and Russian.... it will be much harder to split the people along ethnic lines here.”<sup>51</sup>

There is abundant evidence that there was little popular support for Tatarstan’s independence. The Tatar Public Center, which effectively served as the popular front and was Tatarstan’s largest national organization, had at most 2000 activists, while Azatlyk had

---

<sup>49</sup> Provided by Dmitri Toropov, *Spravochnik novykh partii i obshchestvennykh organizatsii Tatarstana* (Moskva: Informatsionno-ekspertnaya gruppa “Panorama,” 1992), p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> *The Guardian*, April 20, 1991, Reuters.

<sup>51</sup> *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 23, 1991.



approximately 500, Ittifak around 300, and Soglasie around 50 activists.<sup>52</sup> This can be compared to the strong popular fronts in the Baltics. Among Estonia's population of 1.5 million, for example, the Popular Front had an estimated membership of 300,000 to 900,000. In Lithuania, with a population of 3.7 million, the Lithuanian Restructuring Movement (Sajudis) had an estimated membership of 180,000. In Latvia, whose population was 2.6 million, the People's Front of Latvia claimed as many as 250,000 members. Another indication of support for the independence cause is the size of demonstrations. At the height of the nationalist movement, the largest rally in Tatarstan brought together only 15,000 demonstrators from a total population of 3.6 million, a minuscule proportion of the population.<sup>53</sup> In the Baltics, nationalist demonstrations brought out from 4 percent to 27 percent of their populations during the independence movement.<sup>54</sup> Support for independence in Tatarstan was quite limited by comparison.

Not surprisingly, Tatar leader Mintimer Shamiyev did not align himself with any of the hard-line movements, or even the more moderate ones. In his many public statements, Shamiyev never made the case that Tatarstan was seeking greater autonomy to protect Tatar identity. Time and again he stressed economic issues and that his republic was seeking a relationship with Russia based in "principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and real equality on the basis of a bilateral treaty."<sup>55</sup> Rather than point to differences and divisions between Tatars and Russians, he stressed their common interests. In 1991 he argued that rumors that Tatarstan sought to establish its own

---

<sup>52</sup> Dmitri Toropov, *Spravochnik novykh partii i obshchestvennykh organizatii Tatarstana* (Moskva: Informatsionno-ekspertnaya gruppa "Panorama," 1992), p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> See "Political Parties in Europe," *Radio Free Europe Research* (Munich: Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, February, 1990).

<sup>54</sup> *The Washington Post*, April 8, 1990; *The Washington Post*, January 14, 1991, page A1; and *The Guardian* (London), August 22, 1991. On August 23, 1989, over one million Baltic citizens (13 percent of the population) took part in a 400 mile-long "Baltic Chain": people joined hands to link the three capitals in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which led to their subjugation by the Soviet Union. *The New York Times*, August 27, 1989.

<sup>55</sup> Shamiyev interview in *Pravda*, May 18, 1991. Ann Sheehy points out that, given that the concerns were primarily economic, it was not surprising that Tatarstan's Russian speakers, too, supported greater

border posts, customs checkpoints, an independent army, and currency were nothing more than clumsy provocations that sought to divide Russians and Tatars, who “have lived in happy harmony for many centuries.”<sup>56</sup> A year later he reiterated his position:

I never talked of independence or even of separation. The question was not put that way.... We have not raised any question about the borders, customs, military doctrine or our own currency. We, by all means, intend to strengthen our union with Russia and work out a treaty in the near future, which should stipulate the powers we can exercise together.<sup>57</sup>

The fact that Tatars were dispersed and in the minority prevented Shamiyev from presenting himself as the leader of a Tatarstan exclusively for Tatars and for the protection of Tatar identity. He could not claim to represent the majority of Tatars who lived elsewhere, and in Tatarstan itself he had a large constituency of ethnic Russians.<sup>58</sup>

Russian President Boris Yeltsin was fully aware of the settlement patterns of the Tatars. He warned that Tatarstan’s push for greater autonomy could result in the destabilization of the Russian Federation and could undermine the rights of many citizens within Tatarstan. For example, before Tatarstan’s goals were clear, he warned that, “The latest actions of the leaders of Tatarstan clearly show that their political course is aimed at splitting from Russia.... This is fraught with an infringement upon the rights of the majority of the population and can result in a split among the peoples of Tatarstan.”<sup>59</sup> Yeltsin’s use of the term “majority” here it shows that he

---

independence from Moscow. Ann Sheehy, “Tatarstan Asserts its Sovereignty,” *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 14 (April 3, 1992), p. 2, fn. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Shamiyev interview in *Pravda*, May 18, 1991.

<sup>57</sup> Shamiyev quoted in *Itar-Tass*, February 25, 1992.

<sup>58</sup> See *Izvestiya* of September 16, 1992, for an excellent analysis of Tatarstan’s ambiguous position detailed through its draft of a bilateral treaty. It cites a poll that indicated that 60 percent of the residents of Tatarstan did not want to secede from Russia. No source or time of poll is stated.

<sup>59</sup> Yeltsin’s appeal reported by *TASS*, March 20, 1992 and March 21, 1992 and *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, March 21, 1992, p. 1.

was aware that the Tatars were not a majority ethnic group within their own nominal homeland, and also that he attached a certain sense of legitimacy to the concept of majority-rule.

Thus the Tatars' dispersed settlement pattern explains why Tatarstan did not seek independence from Russia, but instead limited its demands to greater autonomy and control over the region's resources. The Tatars had neither the capability nor the legitimacy to gain statehood. Although they could trace their ancestors back generations and could claim the territory as a homeland, the demographic realities within and beyond Tatarstan precluded a claim for independence. The majority-rule principle was used against the Tatars by Russian elites to delegitimize any Tatar independence claim. The large numbers of Tatars living outside the region compounded the Tatar problem. Many questioned whether the Tatar movement could even be called self-determining. "If this is taken seriously as territorial self-determination, explain to me, what will Tatarstan's independence do for the four-fifths of Tatars who live outside Tatarstan and the 300,000 who live in Moscow?"<sup>60</sup>

All along, Tatarstan had represented its interests as divisible; they hinged on economic issues such as taxation and oil revenues. This left room for bargaining with Moscow. In February 1994, following two years of negotiations, Russia and Tatarstan signed a bilateral treaty that "normalized" relations between them.

### ***Chechnya: Independence as a Matter of Survival***

Unlike the Tatars, almost all Chechens live in the Chechen Republic where they clearly constitute a majority. According to the 1989 census, the districts considered part of the Chechen homeland (apart from what now constitutes the Ingush Republic) contained just over one million people, of which 715,000 were Chechen, 269,000 were Russian, and 25,000 were Ingush. The Chechens are a concentrated-majority group.

---

<sup>60</sup> Professor Valery Tishkov, quoted in *Moskovskiye novosti*, September 27, 1992.

Among Chechens, Moscow has always been viewed as an imperialist power that colonized the Caucasus by force and threatened to annihilate them. In the past, whenever Moscow's power has diminished, the Chechens have fought wars for independence. In the latter half of the nineteenth century the war lasted for three decades.<sup>61</sup> Chechens rose up again during the Bolshevik Revolution, during Stalin's persecutions and purges in the late 1930s, and during World War II. In 1944, Soviet leaders accused the Chechens of collaboration with the Nazis, and deported most of them to "special localities" elsewhere in the Soviet Union, where more than one-fourth of them died, and their republic was dissolved.<sup>62</sup> Yet Chechens returned in great numbers following Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956 that rehabilitated deported nationalities.<sup>63</sup> This return is remarkable considering that the Chechens received no support for the move from the Soviet state. Chechens wishing to return to Chechnya had to bear all of the considerable costs and risks of return themselves. This migration underlines the point that Chechens considered the territory of Chechnya to be their homeland.

---

<sup>61</sup> It took the Russian imperial army over three decades to realize that the way to defeat the tribes of the Caucasus was to attack the terrain. In the 1850s, under Prince Bariatinsky, a massive deforestation campaign was implemented followed by the building of bridges across the huge mountain gorges. Once the tribes were concentrated in a few strongholds, the Russians blasted them out with dynamite and long-range artillery. See John Ellis, *From the Barrel of a Gun: A History of Guerrilla, Revolutionary and Counter-Insurgency Warfare, from the Romans to the Present*, 2d ed. (London: Greenhill Books, 1995), pp. 134–135.

<sup>62</sup> Alexander Nekrich, *The Punished Peoples: The Deportation and Fate of Soviet Minorities at the End of the Second World War*, trans. George Saunders (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978) p. 116. The decree ordering the deportation of the Chechens and Ingush and liquidation of their Autonomous Republic was dated March 7, 1944. Census data reveal that in 1926 the Chechens constituted 76 percent of the population of the Chechen-Ingush Republic, whereas in 1959 this number had declined to just 34 percent. During the same period, Russian population in the region rose from 3 percent to 49 percent. These data were taken from Chauncey Harris, "A Geographic Analysis of Non-Russian Minorities in Russia and Its Ethnic Homelands," *Post-Soviet Geography*, Vol. 34, No. 9, November 1993, Table 4, pp. 554–556.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Nation Killers: The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities* (New York: Macmillan, 1970); and Alexander Nekrich, *The Punished Peoples*.

The Chechens' hostility toward Russia and attachment to their homeland is reflected in speeches and comments of Chechens. In August of 1992, for example, Chechen leader Zhokar Dudayev declared that:<sup>64</sup>

In the future, any armed intervention of Russia in Chechnya's affairs will mean a new Caucasian war, believe me.... For the last 300 years they [Moscow] taught us to survive. To survive not as individuals but as a nation.... Three hundred years of bloodshed are quite enough.... This will be a war without rules.<sup>65</sup>

This statement makes it quite clear that Chechens firmly believed that Chechnya belonged to them and that rule by Moscow threatened their survival as a nation. Under Dudayev's leadership from 1991 through 1994, Chechens demanded an independent state as the only guarantee of their survival as a people. In June 1991, for instance, Dudayev declared that it was necessary for Russia and the North Caucasian Chechen-Ingush Republic to sign a peace treaty before talks could begin on the political and economic relations between Moscow and Grozny.<sup>66</sup> He accused Moscow of robbing Chechnya of its cultural heritage and economic fortunes, and he rejected proposals that would have advanced economic stability over political freedom.<sup>67</sup> Dudayev formally declared Chechnya's independence on November 1, 1991.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Dudayev was born in a Chechen village in 1944 and deported a few weeks later with his family to Kazakhstan. He and his family returned to Chechnya in 1957. This highlights the fact that for contemporary Chechens, the memory of these deportations is still first-hand and fresh, not just some distant story of hardship or the result of interpretation by demagogues. Dudayev entered the Soviet military, joined the Communist Party in 1966, and rose to the rank of major general in the Soviet Air Force. In 1987-91 he commanded the strategic bomber group based in Tartu, Estonia, where he watched and learned how nationalist popular fronts operated. After his election as chairman of the Chechen National Congress Executive Committee, Dudayev retired from the Air Force and returned to Chechnya. Timur Muzayev, *Novaya Checheno-Ingushetia* (Moskva: Informatsionno-ekspertnaya gruppa Panorama, 1992), p. 12; and Edward Kline, "The Conflict in Chechnya," unpublished paper, Andrei Sakharov Foundation (New York), March 24, 1995.

<sup>65</sup> Official Kremlin International Broadcast News, August 12, 1992.

<sup>66</sup> Arguing that this declaration demonstrated that Chechnya had been at war with Moscow since the eighteenth century is Marie Bennigsen Brozup, "Introduction," *The North Caucasus Barrier* (London: Hurst and Company, 1992), p. ix.

<sup>67</sup> Kline, "The Conflict in Chechnya."

<sup>68</sup> Four countries immediately recognized Chechnya: Estonia, Iran, Lithuania, and Turkey. *Izvestiya*, November 5, 1991, p. 2.

Chechnya's position was facilitated by Chechen settlement patterns, which supported both the capability and legitimacy of its independence demand. Chechens were concentrated and constituted a majority of Chechnya's population; as such, their capacity to mobilize was high. The widely accepted notion that "Chechnya must be ruled by Chechens" and the perception that Chechens had an obligation to defend their homeland provided legitimacy. Just as Chechen ancestors fought to overthrow the Russian imperial yoke, so would today's and tomorrow's generations; the past was no different from the present. Dudayev, in other words, was representing the position of a majority of Chechens at the bargaining table. He possessed both the capability and the legitimacy to fight the state, if it came to that.

Throughout the summer of 1994, a Moscow-backed opposition attempted to destabilize Dudayev. With aid and arms from Moscow, a Chechen Provisional Council (CPC) built up armed units and sought to unite others in opposition to Dudayev.<sup>69</sup> By August 2, after declaring itself the only legal governing body in Chechnya, the CPC claimed to be in control of all of Chechnya, except for a few small areas. But the situation on the ground indicated otherwise.<sup>70</sup> Western media reported that Dudayev was firmly in control. At a large meeting held in Grozny on August 10, in which all seventeen administrative districts were represented by religious and clan leaders, the participants voted to launch a holy war in the event of a Russian invasion, and advised Dudayev to declare martial law and order a general mobilization. Popular support remained with Dudayev, and certainly with his objectives.<sup>71</sup> On August 21, a rally attended by 10,000 participants was held to show support for Dudayev. On September 6, an astonishing 200,000

---

<sup>69</sup> Yeltsin admitted creating the Chechen Provisional Council during an interview on Russian television on August 11, 1994. *RFE/RL Daily Report*, August 12, 1994. Also see *RFE/RL Daily Report*, September 8, 1994.

<sup>70</sup> *RFE/RL Daily Report*, August 4, 10, and 11, 1994.

<sup>71</sup> On August 8, 1994, Dudayev stated that he was willing to resign as president on the condition that Moscow and the international community recognize Chechnya's independence. *RFE/RL Daily Report*, August 9, 1994.

supporters—nearly a quarter of Chechnya’s population—attended a speech that Dudayev gave to mark the third anniversary of Chechnya’s independence.<sup>72</sup> In the speech, Dudayev said that the Chechen people should fear no one so long as they remained united to defend their independence.

Although Dudayev would surely have preferred Moscow’s capitulation to war, he held a strong hand either way. If Moscow backed off, then Dudayev could take credit for fending off Russian imperialism and maintaining Chechen independence. If Moscow decided to fight, he could wage a guerrilla conflict of the kind the Russians feared most—another Afghanistan—while benefiting from western outcries at a Russian attack on such a small ethnic group.

### ***Moscow’s Concerns over Precedent***

Russia was a multiethnic state that had numerous concentrated ethnic minorities and therefore faced many potential independence movements. Consequently, Moscow was deeply opposed to granting independence to any of its dissatisfied ethnic groups, fearing it would lead others to demand independence and ultimately threaten to unravel Russia. This concern about precedent-setting explains why Russia viewed all of its territory, including Tatarstan and Chechnya, as indivisible.

This logic is reflected in the Russian response to Tatarstan’s movement towards independence. For example, the Russian parliament’s reaction to an important referendum on independence held in Tatarstan was described in the following terms:

Obviously, the Russian parliament’s concern is prompted not only by the possible complication of relations with Tatarstan and its internal political situation, but also by the dangerous precedent, one that could become an example for other autonomous republics: a precedent that could spur disintegrative and divisive processes in Russia and could make the establishment and strengthening of Russia as a unified, integral state more difficult. The anxiety was justified.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> *RFE/RL Daily Report*, August 22 and September 7, 1994.

<sup>73</sup> *Izvestiya*, March 7, 1992, p. 1.

During the same period of tension between Tatarstan and Moscow, Russian Vice President Alexandr Rutskoi issued a dramatic plea: “The division of Russia is tantamount to death, not only for us, but for humanity. It will mean death to the whole world.”<sup>74</sup>

Russia was also keenly concerned with precedent-setting in Chechnya. President Yeltsin, for example, made it clear that this was a major reason he sent troops to Chechnya. On December 12, 1994, just days before the war began in earnest, in a speech before both houses of Russia’s parliament, he asked: “Should Russia negotiate the status of Chechnya as part of Russia, and is the parliament ready to introduce into the constitution an amendment on the right of Chechnya to secede, in view of the possible domino effect this would have on other secession-minded republics?”<sup>75</sup>

Yeltsin’s speech makes it clear that in his view Chechen territory was indivisible and that using force to suppress the Chechen independence movement was Moscow’s only option. In his memoirs, Yeltsin wrote that when the Russian Security Council decided to use force in Chechnya, “the general position was unanimous: We cannot stand idly by while a piece of Russia breaks off, because this would be the beginning of the collapse of the country.”<sup>76</sup> Russia’s government believed that it had to intervene to prevent others from attempting independence, or else an accumulation of seceding actors could threaten Russia’s very survival.

Although it seems clear that precedent-setting concerns dominated Moscow’s thinking in both Tatarstan and Chechnya, there is a compelling alternative explanation: Russian leaders may have viewed the disputed territories as indivisible due to their strategic and intrinsic worth. Chechnya, for example, is strategically important because it shares an international border with Georgia. Therefore losing Chechnya would have meant a smaller Russia, which would be more

---

<sup>74</sup> *Itar-Tass*, March 11, 1992.

<sup>75</sup> *RFE/RL Daily Report*, December 13, 1994.



vulnerable to external forces. Tatarstan, however, which is located well inside Russia, has no international borders, and thus it would presumably be easier for Russia to control. The problem with this argument is that during the period of negotiations between 1991 and 1994, it was not clear that Russia itself would remain intact. Tatarstan, too, could have had an international border had other regions gained independence.<sup>77</sup> This undercuts the strategic worth argument.

It could also be argued that the presence or absence of natural and man-made resources explains why violence emerged in Chechnya and not in Tatarstan. However, both Tatarstan and Chechnya contained important resources. Grozny, for example, was a major oil-refining center. An important pipeline network transited northern Chechnya, which gave Russia leverage over the entire Caucasus region, and was important to any potential Russian role in exploitation of Caspian Sea energy reserves. Tatarstan was a major hub for transporting oil and natural gas throughout Russia. Thus, both regions had roughly equal resources, and therefore it cannot reasonably be argued that differences in resource levels account for the different outcomes in each case.

Moreover, if the oil pipelines were all that mattered, then the Russian army's job should have been done once it gained control over the part of Chechnya containing the pipelines. The army however did not halt, but pushed deeper in an effort to control all of Chechnya. It is also worth noting that Russia could have negotiated a solution to diminish the impact of loss of control over the pipeline. If Moscow was worried about Chechen control of energy resources, or about being blocked from participation in exploitation of Caspian Sea resources, why was it not just as concerned in the Tatar case? Tatarstan was allowed to sell off fifty percent of its oil wealth, but in Chechnya, Moscow refused even to negotiate about such resources. Given that Moscow had

---

<sup>76</sup> Boris Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, trans. (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), pp. 58-59.

<sup>77</sup> For such a discussion, see *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, November 26, 1991, p. 3.

demonstrated its willingness to divide similar resources with Tatarstan, this argument cannot explain why it was unwilling to compromise with Chechnya.

A second resource-based argument is based on revenues generated by the regions. Russia was under extreme fiscal duress in the early 1990s.<sup>78</sup> The government had almost no income from taxes, because many republics refused to pay them. Under such circumstances, it might be thought that it was the potential loss of revenue from any seceding republic that provoked strong measures from Moscow. The problem with this argument is that Tatarstan was a rich republic while Chechnya was not merely poor, but a net drain on Russia's resources.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, if budget considerations were driving Moscow's thinking, it should have agreed to cut Chechnya loose.

Thus, concerns for precedent best explain why Moscow represented control over both Tatarstan and Chechnya as indivisible. In a new Russian Federation composed of a multitude of ethnic groups that might someday mobilize for independence, Moscow feared for its territorial integrity and survival. The structure of the Russian Federation, with more than one group capable of seceding, precluded Moscow from considering, much less allowing, the secession of any one of them. Russia therefore viewed control over both territories as indivisible.

In sum, both Tatarstan's and Chechnya's negotiations with Moscow over their independence status provide solid support for my theory: settlement patterns largely determined whether each ethnic group had the necessary legitimacy and capabilities to push for independence, while precedent-setting concerns dominated the state's position in both cases.

---

<sup>78</sup> For discussion of Russia's revenue difficulties and distribution of resources, see *Izvestiya*, January 5, 1993, pp. 1-2.

<sup>79</sup> Tatarstan's substantial industrial output ranked it eleventh among Russia's 89 constituencies, while Chechnya contributed less than one percent of total Russian industrial output, ranking at the bottom. Novaya Rossiya, *Informatsionno-statisticheskii al'manakh* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnaya Akademiya Informatizatsii, 1994), p. 265.

## **Conclusion**

The statistical analysis shows a correlation between certain ethnic settlement patterns and violence, and provides strong support for the claim that precedent-setting concerns make states less likely to negotiate over territory. The Chechnya and Tatarstan case studies provide more direct support for the theory's logic of causation. Moscow's principal concern in both instances was precedent-setting. Russian leaders believed that control over both territories was an indivisible issue, because the loss of either might eventually lead to the breakup of Russia itself. Chechnya's concentrated-majority demanded independence and was willing to risk violence to achieve that goal. The dispersed Tatars constrained their demands for independence, and focused on divisible resources rather than indivisible principles. This provided room for compromise, thereby averting violence in Tatarstan.

My theory has implications for both theoretical and policy debates. In the literature on ethnic conflict and violence, while states are often assumed to be rational, ethnic groups tend to be treated as irrational actors, as they are seen as willing to die for a cause that hardly seems to justify such a steep price. I have tried to show, however, that both types of actors act rationally. Ethnic groups calculate and maximize their utility just as states do, but they define utility—or more narrowly, survival—differently than states. While Moscow, for example, seemed to think it was fighting its first Chechen war, the Chechens viewed it as the latest phase in a three-hundred year struggle to save themselves. Ethnic groups may indeed rationally calculate that it is better to risk death than lose their identity.

Although the theory deals exclusively with intrastate conflicts, it has implications for interstate conflicts. Specifically, some wars between states have an ethnic dimension that is linked to territory. In those cases, the dynamics of conflict should reflect, in part, the basic logic of my theory. Consider the recent Eritrean-Ethiopian war that began in February 1999 over the

Badme region.<sup>80</sup> This rocky and sparsely-populated hinterland lies between Eritrea and Ethiopia and is of little material consequence to either. However, the ethnic group that dominates each state views Badme as an integral part its homeland. An Ethiopian merchant put the fight this way, “That area, I think, is desert. It is valueless... [but] it’s territory, you know. We’ll die for our country.”<sup>81</sup> Interstate wars of this kind resemble ethnic wars more than they resemble traditional wars for resources or geopolitical advantage; as such, they are better explained by my theory than more traditional theories of interstate war.<sup>82</sup>

My argument has implications for policy as well. It suggests that intrastate conflicts over territory are likely to be more difficult to resolve than fights over the makeup of the government, such as who runs it or the nature of its political system. The historical evidence of intrastate conflict reveals that fights over territory are three times more likely to end in a cease-fire or stalemate than in an outright military victory or a lasting peace settlement. In contrast, fights over the makeup of the government are just half as likely to end in stalemate as to be resolved.<sup>83</sup> Figure 2 illustrates this.<sup>84</sup> Intrastate conflicts over territory—which are invariably ethnic—are not often

---

<sup>80</sup> Ian Fisher, “New Fighting Along Border of Ethiopia and Eritrea,” *The New York Times*, February 7, 1999, p. 4; and Editorial, “Africa’s Futile War,” *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>81</sup> Ian Fisher, “Behind Eritrea-Ethiopia War, A ‘Knack for Stubbornness’,” *The New York Times*, February 14, 1999, p. 3.

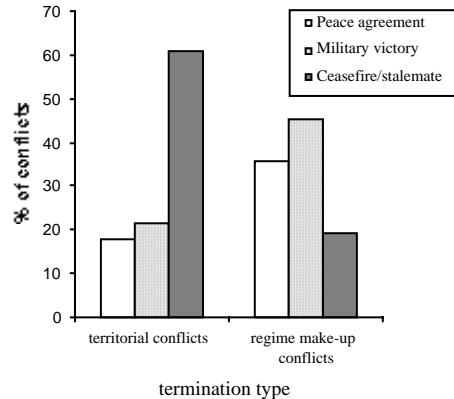
<sup>82</sup> Kalevi Holsti and John Vasquez (using Holsti’s data set) have shown that contests over territory have figured prominently in interstate wars over the last three hundred years. Using a liberal measure of “territorial issues,” Vasquez estimates that 149 of the 177 (84 percent) wars involved issues related to territory. Kalevi Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order, 1648–1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and John Vasquez, *The War Puzzle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chapter 4.

<sup>83</sup> Data taken from Peter Wallensteen and Margareta Sollenberg, “Armed Conflicts, Conflict Termination and Peace Agreements, 1989-1996,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (1997), pp. 339-358.

<sup>84</sup> Pearson  $\chi^2(2) = 12.39$ ,  $p < .01$ . There were a total of 59 armed intrastate conflicts: 28 over territory and 31 over the make-up of the regime. Armed conflicts had at least 25 battle-related deaths during the year. Included in my analysis are only interstate conflicts coded as “terminated.” Terminated conflicts are those that did not exceed more than 25 deaths in 1996 or, if the conflict was active in 1996, fighting ceased by December 31, 1991, by peace agreement or victory. Peace agreements are defined as “an arrangement entered into by warring parties to explicitly regulate or resolve the basic incompatibility.” Victory is “a situation in which one party has been defeated and/or eliminated by the other, or otherwise succumbed to the power of the other (e.g., through capitulation).” Ceasefire/Stalemate refers to “a ceasefire

likely to be resolved through either force or persuasion, and efforts to resolve them must take this into account.

**Figure 2: Armed intrastate conflicts, issue of conflict, and termination type, 1989-1996**



Because in such cases territory is not seen as a divisible asset, attempts to make deals to share control of territory are usually unworkable, both in the period leading up to conflict and at the end of such conflicts. State precedent-setting concerns do not diminish with the outbreak of violence, while the death of ethnic brethren in defending of their homeland may only intensify a group's attachment to its homeland. This dynamic of extended and intensified indivisibility is not found in fights over other issues, such as the make-up of the government, which may explain why on balance the latter are more amenable to negotiated settlements. Resources can be divided and the contending groups can share positions in government. In ethnic wars, the disputed territory may have little material value to either side, compared to the costs of continued fighting, but both sides are willing to spill blood because of precedent-setting or identity concerns.

---

agreement between the warring parties and cases where, by 31 December 1996, the final date of data collection, no armed activity above the threshold had been recorded between the actors for at least one year." See Wallensteen and Sollenberg, "Armed Conflicts, Conflict Termination and Peace Agreements, 1989-1996," pp. 339 and 357.

The difficulty of settling territorial ethnic wars suggests limits to the efficacy of relying on third-party intervention to end them.<sup>85</sup> Intervention in such conflicts may lead to the signing of peace accords, but if the warring parties fail to settle the underlying territorial disputes, these peace efforts will fall apart. The Dayton Peace Accords (1995) are a prime example. The basic territorial issues were not resolved. Instead, peace has been secured by NATO forces, which cannot be removed without violence breaking out again. In non-ethnic wars, by contrast, both sides are more likely to change their minds about the worth of fighting once the war is under way; in such cases third-party intervention may be an effective way to stop the violence and allow the two sides to engineer a peaceful solution.

A second policy implication concerns the controversial issue of partition. In a recent article Chaim Kaufmann argues that in order to stop ethnic violence, it is essential to separate and resettle the rival ethnic groups (even if that means population transfers), and give each group increased political autonomy. He does not advocate granting statehood.<sup>86</sup> However, there are two problems with this kind of partition. First, it does not account for the notion of homeland and the attachment of different ethnic groups to particular places. In fact, partition is unlikely to work unless it pays serious attention to settling ethnic groups in their respective homelands. Second, Kaufmann's policy of separating and concentrating rival ethnic groups in enclaves, without granting them independence, is a prescription for more violence.<sup>87</sup> In effect, it would create multiethnic states with concentrated-majorities, which is the most violent-prone settlement

---

<sup>85</sup> On the role of third-party guarantees, see Barbara Walter, "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement," *International Organization*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Spring 1997), pp. 335–364; and Barbara Walter, "Designing Transitions from Civil War: Demobilization, Democratization, and Commitments to Peace," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Spring 1999), pp. 127–155.

<sup>86</sup> Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Spring 1996), pp. 136–175.

<sup>87</sup> For a similar critique see Alexander B. Downes, "Alexander B. Downes, "The Holy Land Divided: Defending Partition as a Solution to Ethnic Wars," *Security Studies*, forthcoming.

pattern. A better way to make partition work is to settle rival ethnic groups into their homelands, or at least some part of their sacred territory, and then grant them statehood.

The long history of Chechen resistance to Russian rule suggests the benefits of granting independence. Russia has engaged in wars with Chechens in each century; wars that have cost tens of thousands of Russian and Chechen lives. In September 1999, only three years after Russia's defeat, war again ravaged the region and victory is nowhere in sight.<sup>88</sup> Russia's current military strategy of rooting out every last insurgent has been tried before and has never worked. Although attractive in theory, this strategy demands far more troops than Russia can afford to commit, and increased deployment tends only to offer more targets for guerrilla attacks.

Russia has also been unsuccessful in its political strategy of establishing a sympathetic government through aid from Moscow. This strategy failed in Afghanistan in the 1980s and in the 1994-96 confrontation with Chechnya. There may have been a time when Russia could have pursued this option successfully, but that time has long since passed in Chechnya. Chechen civilians continue to suffer at the hands of Russian forces, and the Moscow-installed government has shown little ability, or in some cases willingness, to protect them.

Russia faces three options. The first, and arguably best option, is to declare victory and grant Chechnya independence. It could also opt to prosecute an unpopular war, Stalin style. Finally, Russia could try to live with a counterinsurgency struggle for decades to come. Each of these three courses of action carries risk.

Granting Chechnya greater independence might provoke other regions to seek similar political rights. In addition, it might not have a quick enough impact on terrorism and organized

---

<sup>88</sup> In September 1999 Russia sent troops to Chechnya on the pretext that a series of terrorist bombings within Russia proper were fomented and directed from Chechnya. As in 1994, Russia expected the 1999 war to last a matter of days. As of writing this article the war continues and casualties mount on both sides. In the summer of 2001, Russia, under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin, admitted that war is far from won. It could last years, if not decades.

crime—issues that motivated the Russian public’s support for the war in the first place. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to the adoption of this policy is Russia’s sense of betrayal, which followed the 1996 peace accords, particularly among members of the military. On a psychological level, Russia may simply not be able to accept Chechen independence.

Pursuing all-out war against Chechnya and Chechens is a difficult strategy to implement, even assuming well-trained forces and complete control over information from the battlefield. Escalating the war effort when Russia’s troops are demoralized and the public no longer believes in victory is likely only to increase popular dissatisfaction and bolster support for the insurgents. Moreover, success in the longer term would require the wholesale killing of Chechens amounting to genocide or mass deportation. If historical precedent has any bearing, one might ask Russian President Vladimir Putin what makes him think he can solve the Chechen problem in this manner if Stalin was incapable of solving it.

A protracted counterinsurgency campaign looks as untenable as full-scale war. Russia is losing too many soldiers to maintain a viable counterinsurgency force in Chechnya. Media coverage is becoming more critical, while popular support has seriously eroded. Furthermore, with the war taking up an estimated one-third of the defense budget, Russia simply cannot afford to prosecute, either political or financially, a long and costly counterinsurgency campaign.

In sum, Russia’s best option is to grant Chechnya independence. The risks of independence seem relatively minor as compared to the alternatives Russia currently faces. Although precedent-setting may still be on the minds of some Russian elites, Russia currently faces no other viable independence movements. In part, this is because Moscow’s resolve and brutality in prosecuting the most recent Chechen wars in 1996 and 1999 sent a clear signal that independence from Russia will not easily be tolerated. The independence option may be a bitter pill to swallow, but if Russia is to forge a long-term solution to its Chechnya problem, it must begin by granting independence,



and then offer significant economic aid to help rebuild Chechnya and repatriate the Chechen people to their homeland. Only then can a stable and lasting peace be forged.

We now know more about the dynamics of ethnic violence than we did before. As a first step in better understanding these complex and important dynamics, I have established that how people live together explains the likelihood of violence between and among them. I have done so by means of a general theory that stresses the vital role of territory. I am not advocating a wholesale adoption of this theory to explain all violent ethnic conflicts. I do however advocate a more careful and diligent study of the different motivations of different actors and how these may lead to war. In the cases explored here, territory, both as an imagined homeland and a real material resource, had profound implications about whether people lived or died. Recognizing this simple truth is the first step toward a better understanding of the origins of ethnic violence, and perhaps the resolution of that violence as well.

# Appendix 1: Total Number of Independent States in the World = 191

0=Intermingled; 1=Homogeneous or One Concentrated Group with Dispersed Minorities;  
2=Two Concentrated Groups with or without Dispersed Minorities; 3+=Three or More Concentrated Groups

<b><u>0: (11/6%)</u></b>	Bahrain	Estonia	Bangladesh	Laos	Yugoslavia
Andorra	Barbados	Germany	Belarus	Latvia	Zambia
Burundi	Cape Verde	Israel	Belgium	Lebanon	Zimbabwe
Holy See	Cuba	Kiribati	Belize	Liberia	
Mauritius	Dom Republic	Lithuania	Benin	Libya	
Monaco	Grenada	Netherlands	Bhutan	Macedonia	
Nauru	Haiti	New Zealand	Bolivia	Madagascar	
Rwanda	Iceland	Norway	Bosnia/Herz	Malawi	
Qatar	Ireland	Oman	Botswana	Malaysia	
San Marino	Jamaica	St Kitts/Nevis	Brazil	Mali	
Singapore	Japan	St Vinc/Grens	Brunei	Mauritania	
Trin/Tobago	Korea, North	UAE	Bulgaria	Mexico	
	Korea, South	Uruguay	Burkina Faso	Micronesia	
	Kuwait		Burma	Moldova	
	Lesotho		Cambodia	Mongolia	
	Liechtenstein		Cameroon	Morocco	
	Luxembourg		Canada	Mozambique	
	Maldives		Cent Afr Rep	Namibia	
	Malta		Chad	Nepal	
	Marshall Is.		Chile	Nicaragua	
	Palau		China	Niger	
	Poland		Colombia	Nigeria	
	Portugal		Comoros	Pakistan	
	Saint Lucia		CongoBrazz	Panama	
	Samoa		CongoKinsh	Papua NG	
	Sao Tome/Prin		Costa Rica	Paraguay	
	Saudi Arabia		Cote d'Ivoire	Peru	
	Seychelles		Croatia	Philippines	
	Slovenia		Denmark	Romania	
	Swaziland		Ecuador	Russia	
	Tonga		Egypt	Senegal	
	Tunisia		El Salvador	Sierra Leone	
	Tuvalu		Eq Guinea	Slovakia	
			Eritrea	Solomon Is.	
			Ethiopia	Somalia	
			Fiji	South Africa	
			Finland	Spain	
			France	Sri Lanka	
			Gabon	Sudan	
			Gambia, The	Suriname	
			Georgia	Sweden	
			Ghana	Switzerland	
			Greece	Syria	
			Guatemala	Tajikistan	
			Guinea	Tanzania	
			Guinea-Bissau	Thailand	
			Guyana	Togo	
			Honduras	Turkey	
			Hungary	Turkmenistan	
			India	Uganda	
		<b><u>3+: (127/67%)</u></b>	Indonesia	Ukraine	
		Afghanistan	Iran	UK	
		Albania	Iraq	United States	
	<b><u>2: (18/9%)</u></b>	Algeria	Italy	Uzbekistan	
	Australia	Angola	Jordan	Vanuatu	
	Cyprus	Argentina	Kazakhstan	Venezuela	
<b><u>1: (35/18%)</u></b>	Czech Republic	Armenia	Kenya	Vietnam	
Antig/Barbuda	Djibouti	Austria	Kyrgyzstan	Yemen	
Bahamas, The	Dominica	Azerbaijan			