

Democratization and Ethnic Communities: Conflict, Protection, and Accommodation

Munk Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto

Oded Haklai and Jacques Bertrand

Tentative date: April 24-25, 2009

Description of Workshop

While movement from an authoritarian to a democratic regime usually improves the situation of ethnic groups in general, and minorities in particular, recent scholarship has shown that the process of democratization can sometimes be accompanied by high levels of violence against or between ethnic groups, resulting in less favourable conditions for ethnic communities. Transitions to democracy frequently produce procedural rather than liberal or substantive democracies, with sometimes an overly strong emphasis on elections. Many of these new regimes are characterized by majority dominance and ethnocentrism. They are frequently premised on a specific relationship between the nation and the state, whereby the nation is cast as an expression of a particular group, for example, Romanians in Romania, Serbs in Serbia, Turks in Turkey, Malays in Malaysia. In spite of being democratic, these states often times fail to provide protections and rights to minority groups. Varying paths or transitions toward democracy create very different outcomes for how ethnic identities, communities and politics are recognized and treated in new democracies, and, in particular, how minorities are treated under these new regimes.

The aim of the workshop is to explore empirical, theoretical, and policy-relevant questions regarding processes by which ethnic communities, particularly minorities, gain better recognition, protection and rights under newly democratizing regimes. We seek to map the various experiences of ethnic communities in democratizing countries comparatively and explain the variation in ethnic recognition, status, protection and community rights. On these foundations, we aim to address normative and policy-relevant questions about when and how far ethnic recognition and group rights protection can be pressed during fragile transitions to democracy. The conundrum is that advancing ethnic recognition and collective group rights is easier where liberal democracy is already well-established. In countries undergoing regime transition, some level of democratic consolidation might be needed before it is feasible to address the question of minority rights. Yet, it is precisely in countries where democratic institutions are not consolidated that the problem of violent ethnic conflict and lack of subordinate group protection are most acute.

Guiding questions:

- Under what conditions have ethnic minorities suffered during democratization and when have they benefited?
 - What are the various factors that explain why inter-group **violence** and **repression** against subordinate ethnic groups occurs during an unstable period of democratic transition, while in other cases it does not?

- What are the factors that explain **beneficial outcomes**, in terms of recognition, rights or institutional protection?

Furthermore, arising from empirical conditions as well as other principled considerations, it is not obvious whether, or how ethnic communities should be protected or minority rights should be introduced in new democracies. The workshop therefore aims to probe as well:

- How should ethnic communities be recognised and accommodated in the process of regime transition?
- Under what conditions is the sequential introduction of collective group rights a desirable strategy?
- What has been/should be the role of international institutions in ensuring that ethnic recognition/accommodation, and minority rights are preserved during this process?

We are looking for two types of papers for the workshop:

- i) empirical analysis: we are encouraging participants to draft papers focusing one (or more) analytical process(es) relating:
 - a. the period of democratization, i.e. the relatively early years after the end of an authoritarian regime and during which a still fragile new democracy is being crafted.
 - b. **AND** one or more conditions leading to **either** i) violence/non-violence ii) repression/non-repression, or iii) protection of minorities/loss of protection; iv) extension or denial of communal rights.

Some analytical processes that interest us in particular include the effects of:

- certain types of state institutions and their strength/weakness before and after regime transition
- pre-existing types of political culture and conceptions of minority identity and national identity on minority status
- societal fragmentation of particular configurations/strength of civil society
- Intra-group politics and mobilization
- sequencing in the introduction of certain types of institutions or democratic mechanisms; or sequencing of introduction of certain kinds of protections/rights for ethnic minorities in the process of democratization (e.g. before/after elections; alongside constitutional reform; etc...)
- international actors, regional organizations, and the immediate neighbourhood on the treatment of minorities.
- economic environment, including international economic factors

We very much encourage comparative analyses around particular analytical points above. We are hoping that authors will address systematically and extensively how

democratization alters particular analytical factors in order to produce the possible outcomes of violence, repression, rights/protection, and various mixed possibilities.

ii) Normative papers: We are also looking for theoretical papers that deal with the normative questions that arise, particularly with the notion of gradual introduction of communal and minority rights, or other normative aspects relating to processes empirical processes noted above. We are interested, for instance, in potential normative trade-offs that might arise between introducing group or minority rights and alleviating other important problems faced by a society under democratic transition, such as poverty and social inequalities.