

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

**Main Point:** Gagnon challenges primordialist notions of ethnic violence by arguing that ethnonationalist feelings are created and mobilized by threatened elites. Given the costs of domestic ethnic violence, elites prefer to engage in conflict that takes place outside of the borders of their state. Thus, they minimize the costs to their key supporters who are located within the state. Although the DV is international conflict, the explanations for conflict are not systemic but domestic. The state should be experiencing only a mild to moderate level of external threat; if it is subjected to severe external threat, it will not mobilize along ethnic lines.

**Summary:** Conservative elites feel threatened by challengers to the status quo who try to mobilize the population to press for change. Since these elites have monopoly over the flow of information and can manipulate identity, they make ethnically defined identity the only politically legitimate identity. Thus, by inciting ethnic violence threatened elites can preserve the status quo. Empirical illustration provided by examining the sources of ethnic conflict in Serbia, starting with the 1960's and leading to the breakup of Yugoslavia.

**Problems:** First, it is not clear why elites will choose to mobilize along ethnic lines (as opposed to class, religion, party ID, or geographical region). Clearly, this is an argument that works only sometimes in some multinational states (witness peaceful divorce of Czechoslovakia). Does it matter whether the challengers to the status quo are representatives of the minority of the majority? What if there are multiple minorities? What characteristics of the minority will make mobilization along ethnic lines more likely? Geographical concentration, large proportion of the population (over 5 per cent say), presence of a putative homeland and concomitant desire for secession will all make the process of domestic mobilization more likely.

Second, are the findings from this case generalizable? Gagnon seems to think that we can tell a similar story about the Soviet Union, which exported ethnic conflict to Moldova. Yet he fails to look at all the dogs that didn't bark –states that had significant ethnic minorities and where conflict did not emerge (Baltics, Ukraine, Belarus, most of the Inner Asian republics, parts of Yugoslavia –Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Vojvodina, the rest of Eastern Europe).

Third, we will only observe ethnic mobilization in countries where elites can use nationalist rhetoric with impunity. In some cases, however, nationalism could be a taboo subject. Thus, in Germany post-WWII no political party can run on a platform against immigrants, whereas in France and Austria anti-immigrant parties have gathered double-digit votes. Similarly, in Switzerland multiethnic federalism is deeply enshrined in the political system, and no party can run on a platform limiting the rights of the different ethnic groups. Clearly, not all federalisms are alike.

**Commendable features:** Focus on domestic politics as sources of international conflict. Detailed process tracing. Knowing the history of the place you are studying. Reading documents in the language of the country you are writing about.