Resisting Occupation

Mass Schooling and the Creation of Durable National Loyalties

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This book provides an explanation for the origins, durability, and effects of national loyalty. Drawing on a nested research design and a broad range of primary sources, the book argues that the national loyalties instilled in a population during the introduction of mass schooling—when a community shifts from an oral to a literate mass culture—produce a powerful and durable national tie. Once initially established through the schools, national identities are preserved and reproduced over time within families and reinforced by local communities in a way that makes these constructed identities virtually highly resistant to significant change or substitution over time. Even as material or political incentives change, or as states attempt to assimilate these populations for the purpose of securing their allegiance, schooled populations show a remarkable tenacity in sustaining this initial national identity; and they will vote, conceal, kill, or die if need be, to insure that they and those like them are ruled by those they perceive to be their own kind. As a result, if one knows the national content of the initial schooling in a community, one knows the most basic political loyalties of that community. This gives one remarkable power to predict how that community will align even more than a century hence.

Empirically, the book traces political development across Eurasia to show that the national content that a population was originally taught can predict which regions of a country will try to secede, which will engage in insurgencies or resist foreign occupation when others acquiesce, and why some areas vote for nationalist parties when in other districts appeals to nationalism fail to mobilize popular support.

It makes this case using a nested research design and a combination of methods. At the core lies a natural experiment to test for the enduring effects of school content on national loyalty: A comparison of two provinces in the Carpathian mountains. The two neighboring provinces were virtually identical to one another at the time schools were introduced to the area, but because they were divided by a (previously arbitrary) internal boundary within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, they received very different national
content in the curricula when their populations were first schooled. Drawing on archival work, field interviews, and a broad range of census and voting data, I show that while the two provinces remain similar to one another over the subsequent 120 years in terms of social structure, wealth, and other potential variables of interest, the loyalties of the population instilled with initial schooling lead these provinces to diverge at key points in the 20th century: in the initial interwar elections, in whether they take up armed resistance against Soviet or German occupation in the Second World War, whether they support secession from the Soviet union in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and whether they vote against the Communist party in the first free elections. The result is a clear demonstration of the durable effects of school content, controlling for other variables of interest.

The second layer is an examination of the sources and effects of the content of schooling across all of the USSR. Here, again, I trace out how the differences in the identity content of mass schooling, combined with other contextual factors, predict whether Soviet provinces would take up arms against the Nazis during the war or whether they would take up arms to resist Soviet re-occupation in the 1940s and 50s. Similarly, the presence, and national content, of pre-communist schooling allows one to predict which territories in Eastern Europe and the USSR would go on to mount resistance to Communism and/or to press for secession from the USSR in the late 1980s. The ideas about national identity and political loyalty instilled at the onset of mass schooling endure shape the propensity to resist occupation, to support secession, and to vote for nationalist parties across the entire territory of the USSR. Using a broader comparison and multivariate regression, I show that the findings are robust even when controlling for the effects of geography, income, and other variables.

The third layer takes the argument outside of the Soviet context to see how far it travels and how general the argument might be. On the one hand, following the logic of natural experiments, it draws on a set of micro-level studies of sub-national borderlands outside the USSR—Alsace-Lorraine, the Tyrol (Bolzano), Macedonia, and Cyprus—to show how the content of schooling shaped the loyalties of populations in other regional contexts in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The chapters of the book are organized thematically to show how this core insight about the sources of durable national loyalties contributes to the explanation of three significant phenomena: insurgency, secession, and voting. Chapter 1 introduces the volume and contrasts the argument presented where with the arguments that see identity as more fluid. Chapter 2 provides a more detailed theoretical discussion explaining both the initial fluidity and subsequent durability of national loyalties and reviews of some of little-known experimental findings showing the important social and psychological impact of schooling. Part II then addresses the link between schooling, nationalism, and insurgency. An introduction to the section provides theoretical background and contrasts the argument in the book with work on insurgency that assumes that the national loyalties of the population do not play a role in determining whether they take up arms against the state.

The chapters of the book are organized thematically to show how this core insight about the sources of durable national loyalties contributes to the explanation of substantive problems: insurgency, secession, and voting. Chapter 2 provides a more detailed theoretical discussion explaining both the initial fluidity and subsequent
durability of national loyalties and reviews of some of little-known experimental findings showing the important social and psychological impact of schooling. The next six chapters trace out the spread of schooling and show its impact on the politics of Eurasia at critical historical moments. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 look closely at resistance to occupation during the Second World War. Chapter 3 demonstrates in detail how schools spread brought different constitutive stories to identical Slavic peasant populations in the Carpathian mountains (the natural experiment). It begins with a narrow focus on the Carpathian mountains, drawing on prior schooling and using ethnographic and archival research to explain why a massive anti-Soviet insurgency appeared only on one side of the Carpathians and not the other. Chapter 4 then identifies the patterns of insurgent violence in all of the occupied territories of the USSR during and after the Second World War, showing that there were clear spatial patterns in how populations responded to both German and Soviet occupation. Chapter 5 then explains the territorial pattern of resistance to Nazi occupation and to Soviet re-occupation based on prior schooling. It first examines the potential role of urbanization, ethnic homogeneity, and a variety of other potential causes of the insurgency. It then identifies the timing and content of initial schooling in the 46 occupied provinces and shows that where terrain was amenable to insurgent warfare, populations whose initial schooling was Russian or Soviet took up arms against the German invaders and viewed the Red Army as liberators rather than occupiers warranting resistance. In those areas where the populations were nationally schooled, the Germans were welcomed initially as liberators, and there were protracted resistance movements who fought the USSR until the early 1950s. Chapter 6 then takes up the questions of durability, and also of secession. It first shows that initial schooling correlates highly with support for secession from the USSR in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and also provides evidence of the mechanisms which led the national subcultures of different regions to be preserved in families throughout the many long years Soviet rule and to provide the basis for later mobilization. Chapter 7, which draws on joint work with Anna Grzymala-Busse, then extends this argument to all of Communist Europe to explain the communist collapse. We find that national schooling prior to the onset of communism determines which countries/regions voted the Communists out of power in the first free elections across post-Communist Europe and trace out the long causal path linking schooling to opposition to mobilization to the Communist exit. Chapter 8 then extends the general findings, both across space and over time to the borderland cases in Europe, the Mediterranean, and in a more limited way to Asia and Latin America. Chapter 9 concludes.
Chapter 3 then presents the natural experiment of the two Carpathian provinces. It describes their initial similarity, shows the differences in how they were schooled, and then traces how differences in the identity and loyalties of the two populations led to one of those provinces to fight the Soviet occupation into the early 1950s while the other welcomed the Soviets as liberators. Chapter 4 then extends this argument to cover all of the territories of the USSR. It traces the development of schooling across the 46 provinces that were occupied by the Germans, and then re-occupied by the Soviets in World War II. It shows The next four chapters trace out the spread of schooling and show its impact on the politics of Eurasia at critical historical moments. Chapter 3 describes the concept of the “constitutive story” and demonstrates in detail how schools spread brought different constitutive stories to identical Slavic peasant populations in the Carpathian mountains (the natural experiment), the timing and content of initial schooling in the remainder of the USSR and Eastern Europe, and a provisional discussion of the spread of literacy across the rest of the globe. Chapters 4 and 5 look closely at the relationship between nationalism and insurgency, with a study of resistance to occupation during the Second World War. Chapter 4 develops an argument about the relationship between nationalism and insurgency and applies it to all of the occupied territories of the USSR to explain the territorial pattern of resistance to Nazi occupation and to Soviet re-occupation based on prior schooling. Chapter 5 then narrow the focus to a natural experiment in the Carpathian mountains, drawing on prior schooling and using ethnographic and archival research to explain why a massive anti-Soviet insurgency appeared only on one side of the Carpathians and not the other. Chapter 6 explains the variation in popular support for secession and collapse of the USSR in the late 1980s and explains the role of prior nationalism and schooling in explaining which countries/regions voted the Communists out of power in the first free elections across post-Communist Europe. Chapter 7 then extends these findings, both across space and over time. Chapter 8 concludes.