



State Territorial Capacity Building and Trust Relations in Divided Societies

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Abstract. Although it is taken as a given that trust in institutions and trust between citizens is necessary for effective governing, very little is written on actual trust-building processes. This is even truer in the case of post-conflict societies where trust is inexistent but much needed. Most conflict resolution designs emphasize the ways institutions can replace relations of trust. This approach being questioned, this article proposes a research agenda that would contribute to the debate and empirically assess and compare trust-building processes in a set of divided societies. Its contribution is to link this process to the institutional capacity of a state to control its territory and to look into the role of borders as spaces for the potential transformation of interethnic relations.

Keywords: trust building, divided societies, state capacity building, nation building, territorial control, border and borderlands.

The literature has established that trust is necessary in order to ensure the stability of political arrangements in a society (Inglehart 1999, Hardin 2001, Fukuyama 1995, Macedo 1996). However, such trust is non-existent in divided societies (Hooghe 2007). How can we build the trust of the whole population in institutions and in other groups when part of the population resists state authority and without the ‘shared sense that the state is as natural as the rivers and the mountains’ (Migdal 2001: 168)? The goal of this article is to develop a theoretical proposition on the basis of empirical observations made by analysts in Kosovo and Abkhazia (Georgia) and to propose a frame of analysis for subsequent research.

Empirical Puzzle: State Building and Interethnic Relations in Abkhazia and Kosovo

Abkhazia and Kosovo both face the challenge of building interethnic trust. Inter-communal violence in the early 1990s led to the partition of the territories of Georgia and Serbia where the Abkhazian and Albanian minorities, with the assistance of external actors, founded de facto states (King 2001, Lynch 2004). They possess all

the attributes of states, but are not recognized *de jure* by the entire international community (Pegg 1998, Jolicœur et Campana 2009, Petithomme 2010). Even though 104 countries have recognized Kosovo and six recognize Abkhazia, the two entities are still not independent and sovereignty over the territories is contested. Since 2008, when Kosovo unilaterally proclaimed its independence with the backing of Western countries, including the United States, and when Russian forces helped consolidate the *de facto* border between Abkhazia and Georgia, observers generally consider that their external security is guaranteed, respectively by regional organizations and Russia (Gildirova 2008, ICG 2010). They now aspire to international recognition by demonstrating their internal legitimacy. Authorities in both of them, therefore, are trying to strengthen economic institutions and the rule of law as well as to control the territory and the population by underlining the necessity of building a nation that is civic and inclusive. They are implementing policies of state-building aiming at ensuring control over the territory and the population, while simultaneously engaging in civic nation-building. In both cases, however, part of the population consists of the group seen as the enemy (Serbs and Georgians). In fact, a large proportion of their populations consists of enemies from the civil war. Georgians, returning from exile to Abkhazia, are nearly 20% of the population and Serbs in Kosovo are nearly 10%. Does this new institutional context generate trust in institutions and between groups?

Most observers agree: unlike Abkhazia, where the consolidation of the *de facto* border with Georgia allowed a strengthened control over the territory and the ascendancy of state institutions, Kosovo hardly controls its border with Serbia (Andric 2001, Galluci 2010, ICG 2011, Jackson 2011). In Abkhazia, a reduction of interethnic tensions in the bordering region inhabited by Georgians has been observed (HRW 2011), while interethnic tensions persist in the north of Kosovo (Gallucci 2010, OSW 2013). Nevertheless, analysts have noted a difference between the attitudes of Serbs north of the Ibar River, an enclave out of Pristina's control, and those living south of the river, in municipalities that are under Kosovar control (Luta & Draebel 2013, Cattaruzza 2011, Bekx 2012).

The difference in state control over the territories of Abkhazia and Kosovo constitutes the point of departure of my theoretical reflection, which draws on academic literatures that are often unconnected. Since mistrust is seen as a factor of instability and conflict, it is important to identify the mechanisms leading to the development of trust. Research in institutional contexts that are considered least likely to generate trust, unitary states dominated by a 'titular group,' can shed light on mechanisms of trust building other than power-sharing and federalism, favoured by the literature and practice of conflict resolution (Dembinska 2009). While, by stressing physical security as a precondition for building trust, this article follows the institutionalist approach, it innovates by integrating the border as the locus of production of institutional facts and of

new understandings. A state's capacity to ensure the security, both physical and symbolic, of the dominant group within its borders permits the development of inclusive policies with respect to 'enemy' minorities. This capacity over the whole territory of the state constitutes the key factor behind the development of trust in institutions (vertical trust). The delimitation and control of territory make possible the constitution of spaces for sharing (spaces for interethnic participation and dialogue in the public sphere, whether institutionalized or not), which are necessary for the transformation of perceptions of hostility between 'enemy groups' (horizontal trust). Thus, in spite of the agreements signed between Pristina and Belgrade in April 2013, concerning institutional arrangements in the north of Kosovo and the Serbian minority, it is expected that instability will persist and hostile interethnic perceptions will remain since sovereignty is still contested on the territory and the border remains unrecognized by Belgrade. The rest of this article brings together varied literatures in order to conceptualize the different elements of the frame of analysis that we propose in the final section.

Trust and Post-Conflict Institutional Designs

The non-existence of trust is an empirical fact that is largely supported by studies on divided societies. Studies on comparative politics (Lijphart 2002, Tsebelis 2002), international relations (Fearon 1995, Walter 2002) and scholarship, straddling the two fields (Kalyvas 2006, Saideman & Zahar 2008), support this conclusion. In post-conflict societies, external actors propose power-sharing and federalism as institutional solutions allowing actors to co-operate, even in the absence of relations of trust. For some authors, these institutions contribute to making differences legitimate, giving minorities access to power and avoiding domination by the majority group (Lijphart 1977, McGarry and O'Leary 2005). They can also avoid security dilemmas and problems of credible commitment, recurring problems in multinational states (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Meanwhile, some scholars assert that these same institutions can limit interethnic co-operation while providing minorities the institutional resources and the leadership to assert their independence (Cornell 2002, Snyder 2000, Bunce 1999). Numerous specialists agree on one point: Burg (1996) argues that federalism is a viable solution only if the whole political community is legitimate in the eyes of the different groups; Lapidoth (1997) claims that no autonomy arrangement has succeeded in a climate of hostility. In short, recent research casts doubt on the capacity of institutions to make up for a lack of trust (Bieber 2004). Interethnic rapprochement is necessary in divided societies (Kelman 2004, Kaufman 2001, Ross 2007, Crains & Roe 2003).

Even though the impact of mistrust on political interactions has been widely studied in the theoretical literature, the study of trust building is deficient (Dembinska

2010). I invite researchers to fill this gap by seeking to establish links between state institutions, particularly borders and security, and interethnic trust. Cases of political entities in construction, notably *de facto* states, whose populations are profoundly divided between ‘titular groups’ and ‘enemies,’ are well-suited for such inquiry. The development of their institutions and of a sense of shared belonging is strongly influenced by the perception that the minority groups constitute an internal threat to the survival of the state and of the ‘titular’ ethnic group. As a result, policies of state building are considered legitimate in the eyes of ‘the titular,’ but not by groups seen as enemies. A major question thus presents itself: how can divided populations live together and found a common political project?

State Legitimacy and Confidence among ‘Enemies’

Yearning for international recognition, *de facto* states appeal to two arguments: on the one hand, the principle of the self-determination of peoples and, on the other, the internal legitimacy of authorities and of democratic institutions that are considered to be promoting the interests of the population and in which the citizens have confidence (Berg et Molder 2012, Caspersen 2011). Internal legitimacy depends on the strength of feelings of attachment, the efficiency of political institutions, social and economic well-being as well as the degree of security (Soifer 2008). According to the literature, the state’s capacity to ensure external and internal security constitutes the central precondition for the development of state legitimacy (Bakke et al. 2012, Szakonyi 2012). When the external threat (Georgia in Abkhazia and Serbia in Kosovo) can no longer serve as a source of élite legitimation, a reorientation of policies towards internal demands for economic security and political representation takes place. New institutions for the control of the territory and of society emerge in order to ensure ‘the establishment of the administrative, economic and military groundwork of functional states’ (Kolsto and Blakkisrud 2008). Once external security has been ensured (as of 2008 in our two cases; Clogg 2008, O’Loughlin and Kolossov 2011, Szakonyi 2012, Jouanne and Gjoni 2012, De Wet 2009), governments go to work developing their infrastructural power, in other words, ‘the institutional capacity of a central state [...] to penetrate its territories and logistically implement decisions’ (Mann 1984: 113, Soifer and Vom Hau 2008). State capacity thus implies the consolidation of sovereignty over the territory, which, by definition, is limited by the borders of the state (Rosenberg 1994, Anderson 2001, McGrew 2002, Hirsch 2002).

Such new institutions must have the confidence of the public. Otherwise, governments can only impose their decisions by force (Mishler and Rose 1997: 418). When trust is low, governments cannot govern effectively (Mishler and Rose 1997: 419). However, vertical trust in institutions is inseparable from horizontal trust

among citizens (Blind 2006, Offe 1999, Williams 1998). Horizontal trust relations are understood as faith in the good intentions of our co-citizens or at least the belief – however risky by definition – that they are ‘not ill-disposed’ towards us (Dembinska 2010: 314). Soifer (2008) identifies three analytical clusters of infrastructural power: state capabilities, its territorial reach and the effects of the state on society. Soifer and Vom Hau hold that the ‘state infrastructural power contributes to the construction of legitimacy, which can be further subdivided into two complementary but analytically distinct forms, identity legitimacy and output legitimacy’ (2008: 221). The latter is usually a function of socio-economic performance. The former is about instilling a sense of belonging using the organizational machinery and the territorial reach of infrastructural power. This may be accomplished through the ‘construction of a shared identity and a sense of unity in a state’s population, through education, propaganda, ideology, and state symbols’ (Kolsto and Blakkisrud 2004: 8–10). Legitimizing the state thus involves building effective institutions and creating a political community whose members share a common sense of belonging (Lemay-Hebert 2009). Although most *de facto* states proceeded with ethnic nation-building policies, depending on the demographic context or on changing needs, an alternative strategy can be chosen by the *élite*: constructing a new identity category and investing it with groupness (Brubaker 2006). Such an endeavour can be pursued, for instance, by creating an interethnic category, forging identification in civic rather than ethnic terms. Such nation-building is pursued by *élites* who determine who will be part of the *demos* (citizenship), what language and which history manuals will be used in the public space (Anderson 1991, Hobsbawm 1990).

Such construction is, however, limited by the receptivity of society. Breuilly asserts that ‘unless [the] existing features in the political and economic arrangements of the country [are] conducive to [...] a strong sense of national solidarity, [these] politics [...] will have very little effect’ (1993: 276–277). Such receptivity depends as much on the political and socio-economic contexts as on collective memories (Smith 1999, Schopflin 2000, Brubaker 2006). These limitations are most important in multiethnic societies, when recalcitrant minorities live in the territory of a state whose legitimacy they do not recognize (Smith 1999, Schopflin 2000, Brubaker 2006). While the ethnic majority considers state institutions worthy of confidence because they fulfil their needs, a minority can mistrust the same institutions because they do not represent their interests (Askvik et al. 2011). Divergent perceptions of threats and interests prevent the construction of a civic nation. Nilsson, for example, asserts that, for ethnic groups to share a national civic identity, they need to share enemy images: ‘the failure to share enemy images is a clear factor in relations between the Georgian government and the Armenian minority, impeding the prospects for Armenians to become accepted as part of the Georgian national “large group tent”’ (Nilsson 2009). Consequently, are highly divided societies condemned to failure?

Confidence-Generating Institutions and Border-Transformative Power

Unlike approaches stressing the importance of culture (Almond and Verba 1963, Inglehart 1997, Putnam 1993), which assert that ‘trust originates outside the political sphere in long-standing and deeply seeded [sic] beliefs about people that are rooted in cultural norms and communicated through early-life socialization’ (Mishler and Rose 2001: 31), institutionalists hold that trust can be generated by specific institutional forms (Dasgupta 1988, Fukuyama 1995, Levi 1996). Therefore, for culturalists, generating trust between enemy groups is nearly impossible. Institutionalists are more optimistic, arguing that, in fact, trust can be created by specific institutional designs. Indeed, governments ‘dispose of a multitude of political, economic and social tools to empower citizens and foment social trust, inter alia, decentralization, use of technology for better access to information and services, efficient economic policy-making and undertakings that directly fight political distrust such as anti-corruption laws, fighting crime and innovative reforms in public institutions’ (Blind 2006: 6). However, the connection between political and social trust is contested (Mishler and Rose 2005). According to Putnam (1993), horizontal trust leads to vertical trust; Newtown (1999) doubts that any connection exists between the two; Brehm and Rahn (1997) suggest that a reciprocal relationship exists between the two forms of trust. In this article, I support the notion of a reciprocal relationship.

In one of the few studies on the mechanisms leading to the development of trust, Zahar [forthcoming] asserts that institutions contribute to the production of trust if they are capable of maintaining order and security. Two elements are necessary: (1) *deterrence*, the capacity of states to monopolize legitimate force (Weber) and to dissuade groups from using violence, thus avoiding a security dilemma (Posen 1993); and (2) *assurance*, the state’s ability to ensure the protection of groups in the non-violent pursuit of their interests. In her view, federal arrangements and power-sharing are most likely to generate trust. Unitary systems, since they are often controlled by dominant groups, are the worst scenario: they can prevent violence, but they are unable to ensure the protection of minority groups and the pursuit of their interests. Unitary states fail when it comes to building trust.

Given that, in order to generate social trust, governments dispose of multiple political and economic instruments (Blind 2006), and – drawing on the literature on the concept of ‘borders’ – my theoretical proposition runs contrary to such a claim about unitary states. Borders are ‘understood as regulatory instruments’ for ‘populations, their movement, security, wealth, and health’ (Walters 2002). They are loci of production of institutional factors having a categorization function (Cooper and Perkins 2012). Borders give the state and its élites a symbolic ideological marker for the construction of political identity and social

communities (Passi 1996, Anderson et O'Dowd 1999, Anderson 2001). 'The border actually contributes to the production of population as a knowable, governable entity' (Walters 2002). Borders open and close different political possibilities and allow transformative practices (Parker et al. 2009). They are 'placeholders for a set of processes' (Cooper and Parkins 2012: 67). The stability of borders delimits the territory on which the functions of the state are exercised; the consolidation of a border opens potential loci for interethnic interaction.

State Capacity Building, Borders and Trust: A Research Framework

Since policies of state-building and of nation-building are formed on the basis of the perception that one of the groups constitutes an internal threat, the reformulation of policies results from a change in the image of the 'enemy'. When institutions merit confidence in the eyes of the dominant group with respect to their capacity to (1) dissuade violence (*deterrence*) and (2) ensure their protection (*assurance*) on the whole territory (consolidated borders), the perception of threat diminishes and the space is created necessary to transform the perception of the enemy. Deterrence and assurance for the dominant group confer legitimacy on élites favourable to civic nation-building, who can in turn protect the 'enemy' minority and constitute a space for collective sharing. Deterrence and assurance for the minority group generate vertical trust. Trust in institutions offers new opportunities for the participation of minorities in the public space, thus opening up possibilities for interaction between members of majority and minority groups. Therefore, if security is a source of trust, guaranteeing security (deterrence and assurance) of the dominant group over the whole territory can contribute to building vertical and horizontal trust in the medium term. The stability of borders and the control of territory are necessary to build relations of interethnic trust, notably in unitary states controlled by a dominant group.

Two hypotheses guide the research agenda I propose:

1) State's capacity (including the contribution of external actors) to ensure the security (deterrence and assurance) of the dominant group (vertical trust) within (de facto) state borders allows the development of inclusive policies towards 'enemy' minorities.

2) The capacity of the state to ensure the security (deterrence and guarantees) of the 'enemy' minority group within (de facto) state borders contributes to opening spaces for sharing and changing interethnic perceptions (horizontal trust).

Future research should be guided by two objectives: (1) establish whether and how these (de facto) states prevent violence and ensure the protection of groups, and determine which groups they protect; (2) retrace changes in the perceptions

of groups and among them in order to determine whether the internal security of the dominant group and of the 'enemy group' generates spaces for sharing and relations of trust.

In order to assess the first hypothesis, an overview of the policies of internal state legitimation must be made while specifying who benefits from them and who suffers the consequences in terms of deterrence/assurance. These policies are: (1) state building aiming at deterring violence and ensuring security by the consolidation of borders and by the territorial capacity of institutions aiming at economic development, social welfare and daily security; (2) the definition of the demos aiming at ensuring the political interests of the group(s) whose rules govern citizenship and political representation but also potential changes in official identity framings; (3) (civic) nation building seeking to ensure the protection of cultural, linguistic, and educational interests. These policies can be studied by using content analyses of the media, speeches and the laws that have been implemented.

To verify whether such institutions and activities generate relations of trust, changes in the perceptions of groups and of spaces for interethnic coming together in the public sphere and in civil society must be analysed. The first step consists in conducting an analysis of surveys (for example, the Caucasus Survey, the Caucasus Barometer, the Eurobarometer, the World Values Survey, Households in Conflict Network), which informs us on ethnic distance and on the perceptions of groups in general. The link between these perceptions and institutional changes in matters of security would then be studied using two methods appropriate for tracking changes in identifications, behaviours and institutional memberships: semi-structured interviews, and focus groups.

Semi-structured interviews, used in combination with quantitative data and secondary sources, can lead to causal inferences and are particularly useful in post-conflict situations (Brouneus 2011, Beaud 1996). They are an essential source of data on unrepresented minority populations, appropriate to measure the receptivity of minority populations to the dominant discourse. According to the recent literature, this method is most appropriate to shed light on the most striking and recurring identity categories in order to reveal new forms of identity as well as their fluctuations over time, and to explain the receptivity and correlation between feelings of belonging and policies (Reuel 2013). Focus groups are the other method that is useful for studying opinions and attitudes, perspectives and experiences, behaviour and motivations (Morgan 1997). They complement interview data by allowing researchers to compare and contrast the positions of participants, to understand the production of meanings (vocabulary used to describe a phenomenon), to better identify the key moments in the transformation of perceptions in function of events, policies and institutions (Soderstrom 2013: 147). Direct interaction among participants allows to clarify their opinions. In

the sensitive post-conflict context, this tool makes respondents feel more at ease since they are surrounded by peers (Soderstrom 2013: 149). Group composition has to be controlled in order to make each group as homogeneous as possible, but at the same time to contrast the groups that are studied.

Conclusion

This article is the beginning of a set of empirical studies aimed at uncovering the mechanisms that may contribute to the development of trust in divided societies. Although it is taken as a given that trust in institutions and trust between citizens is necessary for effective governing, very little is written on actual trust-building processes. This is even truer in the case of difficult scenarios, such as post-conflict societies, where trust is inexistent but much needed. Most conflict resolution designs emphasize the ways institutions can replace relations of trust. This approach, however, is questioned in both academia and in practice (for example, in the case of Bosnia). The objective here was thus to propose a theoretical proposition and a research agenda that would contribute to the debate and empirically assess and compare trust-building processes in a set of divided societies. This article's contribution was to link this process to the institutional capacity of a state to control its territory and to look into the role of borders as spaces for the potential transformation of interethnic relations.

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