# Nationalism and Ethnic Politics

# Paths to Peace and Violence: Democratization and Conflict in Senegal and Nicaragua

Sanjay Jeram

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# Paths to Peace and Violence: Democratization and Conflict in Senegal and Nicaragua

SANJAY JERAM
*University of Toronto*

*Democratization has been heralded as both a "curse" and "cure" for ethnic conflict. Using a comparative analysis of ethnic conflicts in Senegal and Nicaragua, this article makes the case that the breadth of accommodation provided by a central government following democratization is a key variable that can provide a deeper understanding of why conflict sometimes worsens and sometimes ameliorates. By adopting a framework that conceptualizes the range of accommodation provided to territorial minority ethnic groups in advanced capitalist democracies as falling into three general categories, "loyalty," "voice," and "recognition," the article illustrates that using a combination of these three strategies helped Nicaragua quell violent ethnic conflict. On the other hand, the conflict in Senegal continued because the newly democratic government refrained from using strategies to provide "voice" and "recognition" for the Diola minority.*

## INTRODUCTION

Democratization has been heralded as both a "curse" and "cure" for ethnic conflict. Since it is not a given that the democratizing process will either ameliorate or exacerbate ethnic conflict, it is important for empirical work to identify the conditions under which democratization is likely to dampen or heighten ethnic violence. In Nicaragua, legitimate democratic elections in the early 1980s coincided with a rapid petering out of the violence between state forces and MISURA (Nicaraguan Coast Indian Unity)—an armed separatist group representing the indigenous peoples of the Atlantic Coast. On the contrary, violence by armed factions of the Movement of

Address correspondence to Sanjay Jeram, Department of Political Science, University of Toronto, Room 3018, 100 St. George Street, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 3G3, Canada. E-mail: sanjayjeram@gmail.com

Democratic Forces in the Casamance (MFDC) has continued in Senegal despite the emergence of a stable electoral democracy. In both cases, there have been significant attempts by elected governments to manage ethnic differences, yet the outcomes have been different.

In most cases of democratization, there is a negotiation phase that attempts to address issues raised by ethnic tensions. The literature relating to the democratization–ethnic conflict nexus has been weak at specifying which types of institutional options can best incorporate minority ethnic groups into the political system. An often ignored fact is that the survival of an insurgent organization depends on its ability to recruit new members.[1] If the democratization process undercuts popular support for an ethnic insurgency, it is likely to opt for participation in the political process rather than continuing to use violence as its primary strategy. Democratization can reduce the capacity of ethnic separatist movements to mobilize a broad coalition of popular support because democracy can provide the voice that the ethnic minority seeks within the polity.[2]

This article proposes an explanation for the divergent outcomes in Senegal and Nicaragua that draws upon a framework that distinguishes between the types of strategies democratic states use to accommodate territorially concentrated ethnic groups. Based upon Albert O. Hirschman's famous work on "exit," "voice," and "loyalty," Nicola McEwen and André Lecours have suggested that states confronting minority ethnic groups aspiring to statehood within their borders have four general options to appease these groups: nurturing loyalty to the state-nation, providing voice at the center, providing voice at the periphery, and symbolically recognizing the presence of multiple ethnicities within the state.[3] The different outcomes in these two cases point to the importance of employing a mixture of strategies in order to cut off support for the use of violence. Relying too heavily on the ameliorative power of one of these options is likely to result in protracted conflict because the risk of alienating large numbers of militants and civilian supporters is high. While it is true that organizational survival and maintenance can become the raison d'être of an ethnic insurgency, it is difficult to accomplish these goals over the long term without a supportive constituency to provide resources and "safe havens" from state forces as well as a steady stream of new recruits.[4]

This article is divided into four sections. The first provides a brief survey of the extant literature that assesses the impact of democratization on ethnic conflict in order to highlight its shortcomings. The second section specifies the range of options available to states during democratization and makes the argument that combining all of them is the most effective way to alleviate the grievances of a territorial ethnic minority, thereby reducing the capacity for sustained violence by an armed insurgency linked to the ethnic group. The third section turns to the cases of Senegal and Nicaragua and shows

that despite similar starting points, Nicaragua was able to quell the armed insurgency by MISURA through an effective combination of accommodative strategies whereas the Senegalese state missed its opportunity by denying voice and symbolic recognition for its Diola minority. The concluding section provides some tertiary reasons as to why newly democratic regimes choose different strategies of accommodation and offers some general suggestions regarding the future study of democratization and ethnic conflict.

## DEMOCRATIZATION AND ETHNIC CONFLICT

The statistical literature on whether democratization reduces ethnic conflict has produced some contradictory findings. A study by Demet Mousseau concluded that democracy does appear to suppress ethnic conflict, but conflict is most intense during the transition phase rather than under autocratic regimes.[5] On the other hand, Steven Saideman, David Lanoue, Michael Campenni, and Samuel Stanton found that ethnic groups are more likely to rebel in democratic systems than in autocracies because it is easier to organize an armed insurgency in an open political system.[6] At the same time, the authors contend that younger democracies have experienced less violence than all other kinds of regimes, which challenges the notion that newer democracies are more susceptible to ethnic violence.[7]

The concepts "political opportunity structure" and "ethnic security dilemma" have been employed to advance the argument that democratization is likely to exacerbate ethnic conflict.[8] The former suggests that ethnic groups with a collective sense of injustice will use the tools of protest and violence when an existing political system is vulnerable. Democratization generally involves the relaxation of societal repression, making it easier for insurgents to organize and express their discontent through violence. The latter assumes that ethnic groups—minority ones especially—fear that other groups will capture the state and its apparatus to discriminate against them. From this perspective, democratization creates a high level of uncertainty that motivates groups to mobilize and use whatever means necessary to capture the state.

While these arguments offer useful understandings of why the potential for conflict is heightened during the democratization process, they cannot adequately account for the variance in observed outcomes because they ignore the consequences of the negotiation phase during which ethnic grievances can be rectified and compromises between minority and majority elites can be made. Soon after democratization began in Indonesia in 1998, the violent clashes between the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and state forces escalated because GAM was buoyed by increasing popular support and new recruits on account of the lack of concessions made by the Indonesian state

to the Acehnese nationalist movement.[9] On the other hand, the democratizing Indonesian government swiftly offered autonomy to the Papuans as well as provisions for a referendum on independence; this allowed moderate Papuan organizations to overtake insurgents as the legitimate representatives of the Papuan people, resulting in a significant decline in violence during the transitional period.[10]

A related body of literature also conceptualizes the transition period as one of uncertainty that results in heightened conflict, but places more emphasis on the role of self-serving elites. Jack Snyder has argued that ethnic elites purposely galvanize their co-ethnics and foster interethnic hatred in order to block the democratization process and protect their status as elites.[11] Using the specific case of the civil war in Burundi, René Lemarchand identified the polarizing actions by political elites as a central cause of conflict leading up to the first competitive elections in Burundi in several decades.[12] Similarly, Dan Posner demonstrated that elites tried to reinforce specific ethnic cleavages to help them win elections in Kenya and Zambia following the shift from one-party to multiparty elections.[13] What is missing from these arguments is an explanation for why nonelites follow their leaders; individual group members are not mindless followers and will shift their support to another party or organization if they feel misrepresented.[14] An examination of whether or not state elites genuinely address the grievances that an ethnic group shares can help fill in this theoretical gap.

Beyond the straightforward argument that democratization mitigates ethnic conflict by providing opportunities for ethnic groups to voice their discontent without the use of violence, it has been suggested that the outcome following democratization is highly determined by how rapidly ethnic issues are addressed.[15] According to Al Stepan and Juan Linz, democratization is likely to be a much more turbulent process in cases where there is little agreement upon the legitimacy of the state itself; therefore, it is imperative that the state command the loyalty of the vast majority of citizens early in the democratizing process to avoid protracted conflict.[16] In order to foster this loyalty, Stepan and Linz recommend that polities explore "a variety of non-majoritarian formulas" such as federalism, consociationalism, proportional voting systems, and statewide elections prior to regional ones early in the democratizing process.[17] While these are laudable suggestions, there is no mention in their work that institutional solutions will mitigate conflict best if adapted to quell the specific grievances of the ethnic minority. In fact, employing some of the various strategies they suggest may exacerbate conflict if ethnic insurgents are able to demonstrate to their constituency that the state is unwilling to compromise or ignorant of their legitimate grievances. The emphasis on matching solutions to grievances highlights the fact that ethnic violence can be reduced if the state can undercut support for an insurgency during the crucial transitional phase when the intensification of conflict is a strong possibility.

## MANAGING ETHNIC CONFLICT WITH "LOYALTY," "VOICE," AND "RECOGNITION"

While McEwen and Lecours translated Hirschman's idea to advance an understanding of the accommodation of minority nationalism in advanced capitalist states, the logic is also useful when applied to cases of violent ethnic conflict in less-developed regions of the world. Authoritarian regimes often deny the existence of ethnic diversity, but the period of democratic transition coincides with increased international scrutiny that makes it more difficult for an elected government to continue using a strategy of repression and denial.[18] Moreover, even if an authoritarian regime had placed great emphasis on the tight relationship between the state and majority ethnicity, democratization as a process weakens the previous institutional order and allows for new terms of inclusion (and exclusion) to materialize.[19]

Appealing to the loyalty that ethnic minorities feel towards the larger state is a potential strategy because dual allegiances are possible in multinational and multiethnic states. In other words, some members of minority ethnic groups feel at least some allegiance to the state identity even if they primarily identify with their smaller ethnic group.[20] Postcolonial elites have used the raw materials inherited from their former European administrators such as maps, artwork, categories, and standardized languages that demonstrate the antiquity of specific, tightly bounded territorial units to foster allegiance to a nation-state.[21] Obviously, such nation-building projects have not been uniformly successful, hence the various challenges to state integrity by separatist movements and violent insurgencies worldwide, and the democratizing period offers a chance for the state to foment abstract notions of national solidarity. A strategy to obtain loyalty that has been used in advanced capitalist states is the development of extensive statewide social policies such as social security, child care, and pensions.[22] Similarly, in the less-developed world, research indicates that fiscal redistribution and other types of state-funded development projects can foster loyalty to the state because minorities are often concentrated in poorer areas.[23] State strategies that seek to obtain the loyalty of ethnic minorities can be very effective during the transitional period because the uncertainty and rapid changes allow the central government to distance itself from the authoritarian legacies of repression. The development of dual identities is unlikely, however, to successfully reduce conflict unless used in conjunction with strategies that offer voice and recognition for minorities.

Another strategy to mitigate ethnic tensions that a democratizing state has at its disposal is to provide greater voice to minorities within existing state structures. This can be done according to two distinct dialectics: "voice at the center" and "voice at the periphery."[24] Exclusion from central institutions can be a source of grievance for ethnic minorities because the central government is the primary distributor of most goods, such as protection from

arbitrary violence, jobs within the bureaucracy, infrastructure, projects, and public contracts. Even though a lower level of government may represent the minority and control policy areas that are relevant to the reproduction of its language and culture, most developing states simply do not have the capacity or resources to distribute public goods equitably. Consequently, the state elites develop client–patron relations with their co-ethnics.[25] Enhanced voice for minorities at the center through guaranteed civil service posts, parliamentary seats, or vetoes can offset the sense of exclusion that drives the group toward extrainstitutional strategies such as protest and violence.

States can give more voice to regionally concentrated ethnic minorities via territorial autonomy.[26] Territorial autonomy can take the form of classical federalism, where all regions have equal powers that are constitutionally entrenched. Even in a classically federal setting like Canada, informal practices of asymmetry are not uncommon in order to accommodate the culturally and linguistically distinct province of Quebec. Regional autonomy that is asymmetrical in nature may be more appropriate if the need is to accommodate one or two ethnic groups, as seen in the United Kingdom through its relationship with Scotland and Wales. The policy areas of the autonomous regions are likely to be focused on cultural matters such as education, language, and religion, but ethnic groups have become increasingly focused on noncultural matters such as social policy and economic development.[27] The logic supporting this strategy is that policy outputs will be consistent with the distinctive values of the ethnic group, thus inhibiting elites from galvanizing co-ethnics to opt for violence against the state. At the same time, numerous studies have observed the potential for territorial autonomy to fuel conflict and violence by entrenching ethnic identities.[28] Autonomy is, therefore, likely to be more effective when used in conjunction with state strategies that attempt to gain the loyalty of ethnic minorities.

Political philosopher Will Kymlicka has famously suggested that accommodating ethnic groups with nationalist aspirations with the symbolic recognition of diversity is just as important as more tangible concessions such as autonomy.[29] In other words, ethnic movements in favor of autonomy or independence are about more than obtaining power and resources: They represent a "politics that is fundamentally about identity and the aspiration to have their community recognized as a nation."[30] Recognition of multiethnicity or multinationalism may be specified in the state's constitution or through regular legislation. Generally, constitutional recognition is the preferable option for ethnic minorities because it is difficult to reverse. A good example of such recognition comes from the Spanish case, where the constitution states that the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia are each "historic nationalities." Interestingly, China and other former socialist countries also have constitutions that officially recognize the multinational character of their states. This can be an effective strategy for reducing support for separatism and ethnic insurgency because it signals a significant change

in how the state defines its terms of inclusion. Symbolic recognition offers the collective minority identity the ability to pursue collective goals within the state.

## CASE ANALYSIS

A comparative analysis of how democratizing Senegal and Nicaragua employed distinctive strategies of ethnic conflict resolution can enhance understanding of why the conflict between Senegal and the MFDC lingered on whereas the organizations representing the Miskito Indians in Nicaragua disarmed and shifted towards participation in the political system. The case narratives below highlight the similar challenge that each state confronted in the midst of democratization: a violent ethnic insurgency that challenged territorial integrity. Contrasting these two cases helps us gain insight into the importance of using strategies of loyalty, voice, and recognition in conjunction rather than in isolation.

### Senegal

The Diola ethnic group make up 60% of the population in Casamance, but only account for 5% of all Senegalese. The Diola are predominantly Christian and animist, whereas the majority in northern Senegal is Muslim. The cluster of dialects commonly known as the Diola or Jola language is widely spoken by the Diola ethnic group in Casamance, whereas Wolof is the dominant language in northern Senegal even though the Senegalese Constitution identifies Wolof as one of six national languages with French designated as the principle *lingua franca*. Using the Diola language is a form of resistance against the process of "Wolofization": the state-sanctioned and societal promotion of Wolof as a first language among non-Wolof ethnic groups. This process has been quite successful because 80% of Senegalese speak Wolof in spite of the fact that only 43.7% belong to the ethnic Wolof group.[31] Diola resistance to Wolofization has been extreme in comparison with other ethnic groups in Senegal,[32] in part because of the geographic isolation of Casamance from northern Senegal.

The MFDC was founded in 1947, not as a separatist rebel organization, but as a political party with a mission to protect the economic interests of Casamance and to support the indigenous cultures and languages of the region. The Diola are the main group driving separatism in Casamance, but other indigenous groups also identify with the cause and participate in the MFDC. Following independence from France, the MFDC was absorbed into the single party state of President Léopold Senghor and remained quiescent for two decades.

It has been said that President Senghor promised to review the status of Casamance and the terms of its inclusion in the Senegalese state 20 years after independence in 1962. In 1982, prominent members of the MFDC met and proclaimed that the time had come for Casamance to become independent because it had been unjustly annexed at the time of Senegal's independence.[33] The reconstituted MFDC held its first major demonstration in the regional capital of Ziguinchor on 26 December 1982, the timing of which was clearly linked to Senghor's unfulfilled promise. It is estimated that anywhere from 1,000 to 100,000 Diola took to the streets and replaced Senegalese flags with a new flag symbolizing Casamance independence.[34] The literature distributed by the MFDC called on all inhabitants of Casamance to protest in favor of independence because repeated good faith attempts to coexist with the Senegalese state had resulted in the economic, social, and cultural deterioration of the region. Senegalese elites denounced this rhetoric, claiming that Casamance intellectuals were exploiting the situation to develop an autochthonous identity that could be mobilized for their own purposes.[35]

After being chosen as Senghor's successor in 1981, Abdou Diouf maintained an authoritarian one-party regime for 20 years, severely restricting political competition and abolishing presidential term limits.[36] Diouf publicly presented himself as the guardian of the republican ideal: "the territorial integrity of a single and indivisible Senegalese nation."[37] Diouf's commitment to maintaining Senegal's territorial integrity was expressed in his handling of the prosecution of the "separatists" involved in the demonstrations of December 1982: He supported the verdict that charged nine MFDC members with violating territorial integrity and advocated harsh penalties.[38] State repression had an unintended consequence: MFDC ideologues ended up in prison and its new vanguard were in favor of military rather than political tactics of agitation. Violence between MFDC members and state military forces occurred sporadically throughout the 1980s. The military wing of the MFDC primarily attacked military targets but also civilians who were known to collaborate with Senegalese authorities. In retaliation, the army arrested, tortured, and executed hundreds of Diola for sympathizing with the separatist cause.[39] The Senegalese military was subsequently deployed in Casamance and given much leeway to arrest potential rebels and supporters of the MFDC.[40]

By the early 1990s, Diouf was faced with undesired international attention and domestic criticism for his management of the conflict. Consequently, his regime negotiated ceasefire agreements with the MFDC in 1991 and 1993. Negotiations occurred during this period with the intent of permanently solving the conflict, but talks floundered over the question of sovereignty; Diouf's government was unwilling to recognize the right of Casamance to be a nation or to hold a referendum on sovereignty.[41] A rift within the MFDC occurred on account of the 1993 negotiations because a significant

minority of members were in favor of accepting less than independence so long as the government assisted with the reintegration of rebels into society.[42] Subsequently, the MFDC split into the Southern and Northern Fronts—the former remained committed to independence and retained the moniker of MFDC while the latter shifted its focus to the economic development of the Casamance region.

The 1993 presidential elections featured multiple candidates and parties, but competition was limited and no significant challenger emerged to contest Diouf and the Socialist Party. The MFDC expressed discontent with Diouf prior to the election because of his firm stance on an indivisible Senegalese nation and declared that anyone in the Casamance voting or in possession of polling cards would be considered traitors. Journalists reported that the MFDC went so far as to set up landmines to prevent people from getting to the polls because of the inevitable victory of Diouf.[43]

Following the election, the Senegalese government and MFDC engaged in another round of negotiations. The two sides agreed to allow a French expert on Senegalese issues to conduct historical research in order to determine whether Casamance had been an integral part of Senegal prior to independence. The expert's report concluded that indeed Casamance was rightfully part of the Senegalese state and the central government restated its position that the Senegalese nation and state should remain unified.[44] The Secretary General of the MFDC publicly denounced the report's legitimacy in early 1995 and intense violence resumed shortly thereafter.

War weariness and the high-profile kidnapping of four French tourists near the Casamance regional capital of Ziguinchor brought about a lull in fighting in late 1995. The Senegalese government used the opportunity to create the National Commission for Peace in Casamance while the MFDC elite issued a call for peace on Senegalese television and suggested a timetable for discussions with the government. The two parties agreed upon a ceasefire in 1996; in May of that year, President Diouf travelled to Ziguinchor and made a public speech that outlined his plans for regionalization that would provide Casamance with some degree of self-government.[45] Diouf's vague promises were not taken seriously by the MFDC because he stopped short of agreeing to recognize the national character of Casamance and interpreted regionalization to mean administrative decentralization rather than genuine autonomy. It is not clear which side broke the ceasefire, but army sweeps of MFDC bases and suicide attacks by the MFDC military wing ushered in a particularly violent period of the conflict in late 1997.[46]

The turnover of the presidency from the incumbent Diouf to Abdoulaye Wade of the Senegalese Democratic Party in 2000 marked the end of 40 years of one-party rule and created domestic and international optimism that democratic consolidation in Senegal was not far off.[47] Upon his accession to power, Wade declared that solving the Casamance conflict was a top priority and that he would negotiate directly with the military wing of the MFDC to

ensure long-lasting peace. To demonstrate his good faith, he sent recorded messages to the various units of the MFDC military wing in which he stated that he had called off the military offensive and expressed his openness to negotiations. His next move was an offer of funding for development projects in Casamance as well as funds earmarked for militants who cooperated in the peace process.[48] Perhaps sensing that fiscal rewards would not be sufficient to win the loyalty of militants, President Wade initiated a motion that was passed in the Senegalese National Assembly to provide amnesty for any act committed as part of the conflict between 1 June 1991 and that date of 6 July 2004. Nevertheless, Wade did not change course from his predecessors with regard to political autonomy and nationhood. He has held steadfast to the concept of a single Senegalese nation and has dismissed any notion of special status for the Casamance.[49] In fact, one could argue that Wade is more intransigent in this respect than was Diouf who at least discussed the possibility of political decentralization.

There is no doubt that criminal elements have infiltrated the armed wing of the MFDC, but many within the organization remain committed to the causes of independence and nationhood. Interviews with combatants carried out by Martin Evans and his colleagues yielded responses such as "we joined for a good reason: total independence—life or death" and "independence will come—the day we strike hard, it will come."[50] Had President Wade made credible commitments to provide political autonomy and recognition for the Casamance early in his term, it might have led to the permanent disarmament of the MFDC. The government's intransigence towards the MFDC's grievances, however, hardened attitudes towards conflict within the organization and its support structures.

## Nicaragua

The Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua is home to several indigenous groups, one of which is the Miskito Indians. Miskitos are the dominant ethnic group in the northern Atlantic Coast region, numbering around 67,000, while African descendants (25,000) are the majority group in the central and southern zones. Also of note are smaller ethnic groups that form small settlements across the region such as the Sumo (4,851), Carib (1,287), and Rama (649).[51]

Throughout the colonial period, the Miskito Indians successfully resisted Spanish colonization with the aid of the British. The British had an interest in maintaining a trade alliance with the Miskitos but did not wish to administer the territory. Its status as a British protectorate allowed the Miskitos to use their native language and to practice their customs with minimal interference from the Nicaraguan state until the mid-nineteenth century. Britain and the United States finally recognized Nicaragua's sovereignty over the territory in 1860. Repeated attempts by the newly independent Nicaraguan

state to integrate the Miskitos into the Nicaraguan national identity were unsuccessful because of the marked cultural differences between the majority of Nicaraguans (who are ethnically mestizos) and the Miskitos.[52] This period of relative freedom from foreign interference ended for Nicaragua in 1912 when the United States began another occupation of the country. This once again provided the indigenes of the Atlantic Coast with relative autonomy from the central state.

As the United States began to withdraw, Nicaraguan military commander Anastasio Somoza García consolidated his power. He was inaugurated as president on 1 January 1937, thus beginning the lengthiest dynastic dictatorship in the history of Latin America. The Somoza regime took a primarily economic interest in the Atlantic Coast region. The regime built infrastructure and financed many development projects in the 1950s and 1960s in an attempt to both modernize the Atlantic Coast and to exploit its abundant natural resources for the benefit of the Nicaraguan state.[53] This intrusion by the state on their territory fostered feelings of resentment among Miskitos because many of the projects involved the expropriation of Indian communal lands. The Miskitos organized to stop these incursions and petitioned the government through the minimal political channels that were available but also used extrainstitutional tactics such as burning tracts of forest to prevent the state from accessing pinewood on their ancestral lands.[54]

In 1974, the Miskitos coalesced with another prominent indigenous group on the Atlantic Coast to form Alliance for Progress of Miskitos and Sumus (ALPROMISU).[55] Initially, the primary goal of ALPROMISU was the economic development of the Atlantic Coast, but the organization soon shifted toward matters of cultural preservation and began to attract widespread support from indigenous groups across the Atlantic Coast.[56] The initial response by the Somoza regime was to provide some voice at the center and periphery for the indigenes by allowing ALPROMISU representatives to participate in local government and setting aside one seat for the organization in the national congress.[57] At the same time, the policy-making apparatus of the Somoza regime was highly centralized and it closely monitored the activities of ALPROMISU via the Atlantic Coast wing of the National Guard.

The Miskitos were insulated from the Sandinista revolution that swept away the Somoza regime because of the remote location of the Atlantic Coast. Few, if any, Miskitos took part in the revolution or had any association with the Sandinistas. Consequently, the revolutionaries were ignorant of Miskito culture and treated them in a paternalistic manner: as economically backward and exploited peoples who would benefit from the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) program of national liberation and social emancipation. The revolutionary viewpoint was expressed in a declaration in 1981 that affirmed the "territorial and political unity of the Nicaraguan nation."[58] The Sandinista leadership believed in a top-down approach to politics but did allow

some participation by grassroots organizations representing various interests such as women, youth, and rural workers in decision-making bodies such as the Council of State. Because of its commitment to national unity, the revolutionary government was at first opposed to ALPROMISU participation in the Council of State but decided to grant it a seat in 1980 under the condition that the organization recognize the principle of national unity. MISURASATA (Miskitos, Sumus, Ramas, and Sandinistas Working Together)—the successor of ALPROMISU——worked from within the Sandinista institutions in 1980 to promote indigenous demands. For a short period thereafter, MISURASATA appeared content to pursue modest goals such as improving access to education on the Atlantic Coast, but the organization soon turned to a nationalist agenda. Drawing upon the doctrine of the right to self-determination, MISURASATA argued that the Nicaraguan state had no right of sovereignty over indigenous homelands because the formation of the Nicaraguan nation-state came after that of the indigenous nations. This turned into a demand for outright independence for a territory that made up over one-third of the Nicaraguan state. The radicalization of MISURASATA's demands heightened tensions between the organization and the Sandinistas.

The fact that the United States provided support to MISURASATA because it associated the organization with the broader anti-Sandinista movement was not the main reason that the conflict became violent.[59] The leaders of MISURASATA effectively built on preexisting communal and religious structures in Miskito communities to garner an avalanche of popular support. As their social base grew, MISURASATA elites became increasingly confident that they could pursue a political program centered on ethnically defined demands, in direct defiance of the Sandinistas.[60] The threat that MISURASATA posed to Nicaraguan sovereignty became strong and the Sandinistas began to crack down on the organization in early 1981, interrogating and arresting its members. Within days of the first arrests, thousands of MISURASATA supporters banded together to form the armed group MISURA (Miskitos, Sumus, Ramas) and crossed the Honduras border to prepare for war with the Sandinistas. A period of intense violence between MISURA and the Sandinista forces began in December 1981 when MISURA insurgents conducted a series of offensives, killing 60 people associated with the Sandinistas. The government responded by evacuating Miskitos from the Rio Coco region along the Honduras border in order to use it as a base to wage its counterattack. In doing so, the Sandinistas increased the generalized resentment towards the state among Miskitos, greatly increasing support for the MISURA.[61]

In the midst of simultaneous wars with the Contras and MISURA, the Sandinista regime buttressed Nicaragua's legitimacy as an electoral democracy in 1983 by passing both the Parties Law and the Electoral Law modeled on Western European practices. International observers noted that the 1984 election of FSLN candidate Jose Daniel Ortega Saavedra to the presidency

and a FSLN majority to the National Assembly was the result of a legitimately open electoral contest.[62]

The position of the Sandinista government towards the Atlantic Coast began to change during the lead-up to the 1984 elections. In 1983, the FSLN embarked on a more conciliatory path by admitting its previous mistakes—in particular, the forced evacuation of some 8,500 Miskitos from the Atlantic Coast and the destruction of their villages, churches, and crops.[63] In addition, the FSLN recruited greater numbers of Miskitos and other indigenes into the party hierarchy and granted a general amnesty to 307 Miskito rebels who had been arrested in previous years.[64] These events coincided with a deepening of the rupture within the leadership of MISURASATA and MISURA. The former sought to cooperate with the FSLN and the latter became more intransigent in its anti-Sandinista position. The enthusiasm among the local population of the Atlantic Coast for war began to diminish as more Miskitos came to believe the FSLN was genuine in its willingness to address their grievances. Moreover, the leadership of MISURA became more dictatorial in its practices, forcing the local population to participate in the war and showing little concern for human rights abuses, which was also a factor leading to its declining popularity.[65]

Following the 1984 election, the Sandinistas accepted the legitimacy of the right to autonomy for the Miskitos and other indigenous peoples.[66] A new indigenous organization—United Miskito People of Nicaragua (MISATAN)—formed in 1984 with the support of the government. It was hoped that MISATAN could act as a mediator between MISURA and the government, but the MISATAN leadership had difficulties establishing a broad support base among Miskitos because of its ties to the FSLN.[67] The government also initiated informal conversations with MISURA and MISURASATA concerning issues such as autonomy, natural resources, welfare, and cultural rights.[68] Because MISURA and MISURASATA were pleased by the qualitative change in the viewpoint of the Sandinistas, the negotiated ceasefire of 1984 was respected and armed conflict nearly disappeared.[69]

The peace process was formalized in mid-1984 when the FSLN organized the National Autonomy Commission and invited representatives of MISURASATA and MISURA to take part in a dialogue with the hope of ending the conflict. The National Assembly approved the Autonomy Statute for the Regions of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua in September 1987 with the intention of empowering regional governments to execute policies that would cater to the interests of the various indigenous communities of the Atlantic Coast. Importantly, the autonomy statute specifies that new regional governments control the full range of cultural issues, a key demand of the Miskito organizations. Moreover, Nicaragua's new constitution, promulgated just prior to the autonomy law, declared that "the Nicaraguan people are multiethnic," marking the end of the Nicaraguan nation-state project. In

response to receiving both autonomy and symbolic recognition, MISURA and MISURASATA abandoned violence and committed to working within the autonomous institutions and central state to pursue indigenous interests.

Since the defeat of the FSLN government in the 1990 elections, Miskito and other indigenous leaders have experienced some setbacks and some victories as they attempt to consolidate the powers invested in the two Atlantic Coast regional governments. The neoliberal governments led by the National Opposition Union (UNO) in 1990, Liberal Alliance (AL) in 1996, and the Constitutionalist Liberal Party (PLC) in 2001 have all been wary of losing control of the resource rich Atlantic Coast, but over time they have shown a greater willingness to respect the spirit and letter of the Autonomy Statute. The re-election of Ortega and FSLN's victory in the National Assembly elections in 2006 bodes well for autonomy because the FSLN initiated the project and its members were critical of attempts to undermine it by the neoliberal governments.

The Miskito organizations—including the formerly armed MISURA—unified in 1987 under the name YATAMA (Sons of Mother Earth) and officially converted to a political organization in 1990 in order to participate in the first regional elections. YATAMA had its best results in 1990, winning 22 of 45 seats in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) and 4 seats out of 45 in the South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS). YATAMA has been involved in the organization of protests and seizures of government property in recent years, but there is no indication that a return to guerrilla activity will occur unless the central government seriously undermines autonomy.

## CONCLUSION: MANAGING ETHNIC CONFLICT THROUGH UNCERTAINTY

This article has highlighted a contrast in types of accommodation employed by two democratizing states and argued that this contrast can help account for the divergent outcomes. The MFDC and MISURATA emerged as a result of similar grievances with their respective states. Elites were able to galvanize supporters by pointing to economic grievances and powerful historical narratives to illustrate that their respective nations had existed since time immemorial. Authoritarian regimes in both countries were unresponsive to group demands for autonomy and recognition, which crystallized resentment towards the central state and majority group. Armed rebellion was a consequence of this resentment, as ethnic elites were able to recruit fighters and to maintain support structures within their ethnic community.

The transition to free and fair elections, in both cases, led to a phase of negotiation, as it does in most examples of protracted ethnic conflict. In the Senegalese case, the central government maintained a strong commitment to

the notion of a unified nation-state and thus only offered concessions aimed at trying to win the loyalty of the people of Casamance and MFDC. Measures such as amnesty for combatants and development funds for the separatist region are often necessary to dampen violent ethnic conflict, but it is unlikely that a violent conflict will end on account of policies aimed solely at garnering loyalty among the minority group. On the other hand, the democratically elected government in Nicaragua capitalized upon the opportunity of regime change to alter the course of its relations with the Miskitos of the Atlantic Coast. Instead of continuing the emphasis on the Nicaraguan nation-state, Ortega and FSLN approved autonomy for the Atlantic Coast and constitutionally entrenched the multiethnic character of the Nicaraguan state, thereby unequivocally responding to two long-held grievances of Miskito nationalist organizations. A small minority of hardliners within MISURASATA felt that the autonomy agreement did not go far enough, but the agreement was more than sufficient to convince most members to begin channelling their grievances through legitimate institutions rather than through violence.

Why, then, are some transitional regimes reluctant to combine strategies of loyalty, voice, and recognition to manage internal ethnic conflicts? Many scholars have suggested that territorial autonomy provides minority ethnic groups with additional resources for mobilization and therefore is more likely to lead the state down a "slippery slope" to dissolution than to foster interethnic harmony.[70] According to this logic, reinforcing the primacy of the state by trying to obtain the loyalty of ethnic minority groups is a more useful strategy if the end goal is to maintain state integrity. Moreover, the uncertain period that follows democratization is a critical juncture that provides significant opportunities for changes to the structure of ethnic relations in a state.[71] Following or preceding transitional elections, then, anxieties rise on both sides of a conflict because of the potential for losses and gains in relation to their goals (e.g., autonomy, territorial integrity). A central state facing hostile territorially concentrated minorities may choose to avoid strategies of accommodation that include autonomy and recognition because of the heightened fear of separatism during a critical juncture.

While fear of the slippery slope to separatism may be a legitimate concern, democratizing states have more reasons than not to accommodate minority ethnic groups with a combination of strategies to obtain loyalty and provide voice and recognition. The principle of self-determination in international law does not entail a right to secession in cases where states are democratic and provide a range of special rights to accommodate their internal minority groups.[72] Newly democratic states, therefore, can depend on the support of the international community to support their stance against separation if it is demonstrable that internal minorities are provided the necessary degree of autonomy in certain policy areas and recognition required for their communities to prosper within their respective states.

As I have endeavored to demonstrate in this article, the breadth of accommodation strategies employed by a new democratic government is an important factor that can help account for the continuation or cessation of ethnic conflict. In particular, policies aimed at securing the loyalty of minorities to the central state are more effective if complemented with territorial autonomy, guaranteed representation at the center, and symbolic recognition. Nevertheless, other factors such as elite intransigence or the infiltration of ethnic organizations by criminal elements seeking material benefits can undermine accommodative efforts. Therefore, the argument presented here is suggestive rather than conclusive and should be subject to further testing and elaboration in other cases. Nevertheless, the suggestions made here should contribute to the literature that seeks to understand the relationship between ethnic conflict and democracy, as well as help guide practitioners seeking to manage ethnic conflicts in emerging democracies.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## NOTES

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**Sanjay Jeram** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto and a member of the Canadian-based Ethnicity and Democratic Governance Project. His dissertation research focuses on how immigration changes the boundaries of belonging in nations without states such as the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Scotland.