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## Non-democratic revolutions and attempts at state breakup: is there a connection?

**BYLINE:** Katz, Mark N.

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Not all revolutions are followed by attempts at state breakup (much less successful ones). This pattern has occurred, though, in many states where there are regionally dominant minorities (groups that are a minority in a country as a whole but form a majority in a particular region) or where there are otherwise distinct regional identities.

This article argues that a revolution in a country containing regionally dominant minorities or otherwise distinct regional identities that does not deliver on democratic promises can eventually lead to an avigorous attempt at state breakup. The article begins with the elaboration of a five-stage theory explaining how this type of revolution leads to an attempt at state breakup. It then examines four case studies--Russia, Yugoslavia, Indonesia, and Iraq--in light of this theory. Finally, it discusses the implications of this theory for other countries with regionally dominant minorities that have experienced nondemocratic revolutions but no efforts at actual democratization.

### REVOLUTION AND STATE BREAKUP: THEORIZING THE CONNECTION

There are many countries that have first experienced revolution and subsequent attempts at state breakup. These include: the U.S., China, Russia, Yugoslavia, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Ethiopia, Czechoslovakia, and Sudan.

This pattern of revolution followed by attempted state breakup has occurred with sufficient frequency to raise the question as to whether there is a relationship between these two events.

The argument against the connection between these two events is straightforward. Many countries have experienced a revolution. Many countries have also experienced attempts at state breakup. Some countries have experienced both, but there is no necessary connection between these two events.

The argument supporting the connection between revolution and state breakup is more complex. To begin, there is a tremendous degree of variation in the revolutions listed above that make them very difficult to compare. Some revolutions were violent, whereas others were nonviolent (or largely so). In addition, some were democratic, whereas others were nondemocratic. Further, the attempt at state breakup followed soon after the revolution in some cases, and after many years or even decades in others. Some attempts at state breakup, of course, were successful, while others were not. Finally, some of these attempts occurred peacefully, while others were violent.

Given the great variation in these cases, it would be difficult to devise an all-encompassing theory of revolution and state breakup. Different theories are needed to explain different cases. Indeed, there may be no necessary connection between these two events in some cases. This article does not, therefore, provide a general theory applicable to these

cases.

Instead, this article provides a theory that explains revolution followed by an attempt at state breakup meeting two specific criteria: 1) a revolution occurring in states where regionally dominant minorities or otherwise distinct regional identities exist and where the revolutionary regime claims to be democratic and inclusive but is not; and 2) an attempt at state breakup later taking place when a serious attempt at democratization is being or has recently been made.

For cases that satisfy these two criteria, this article proposes the following theory:

1. When a revolution occurs in states where there are regionally dominant minorities or otherwise distinct regional identities, among those seeking political change are those who want the existing state to remain intact but also those who want to break it up by obtaining independence for a regionally dominant minority.

2. Revolutionary forces opposed to state breakup seek a combination of continuity and change. They seek to change the regime. They often seek to change the nature of society, or even of the human being. But they also seek continuity by maintaining the country's territorial integrity. As a result, they seek to prevent any region of the country from becoming independent.

3. Before the revolution, the old regime usually makes no pretense about the state being democratic or a voluntary union. The revolutionaries seeking to maintain the unity of the state claim--both before and after coming to power--that their new regime is both. This claim attracts key minority figures into the ranks of the revolutionary movement that seeks to maintain state unity and splits the movements that seek regional independence.

4. The revolutionary regime's democratic pretense proves false. The new regime's attempts to maintain this pretense, though, heighten resentment among regionally dominant minorities.

5. When the opportunity arises, disaffected regionally dominant minorities seek state breakup through independence for their regions. Ironically, the opportunity that has allowed them to seek this in recent years has been the attempt to democratize the revolutionary regime that previously claimed to be democratic but actually was not.

This theory does not attempt to explain why some attempts at state breakup following a non-democratic revolution succeed while others fail. There are many factors--including external dynamics--that influence whether attempts at state breakup succeed or fail.

The democratic revolutions from the above list (the U.S., India, and Czechoslovakia) do not satisfy the first criterion of being non-democratic revolutions. Three revolutions that do satisfy this first criterion (China, Ethiopia, and Sudan) do not satisfy the second one because no serious attempt to democratize them has yet been made. Only four cases satisfy both criteria: Russia, Yugoslavia, Indonesia, and Iraq. I will now attempt to demonstrate that the theory set forth here explains each of them.

## RUSSIA

Over the centuries, Russian tsars extended their rule over a wide variety of ethnic groups. World War I and the Russian Revolution gave many, including Finland, the Baltic states, Ukraine, the Caucasian states, and Central Asia, the opportunity to assert their independence from Russia.

The Bolsheviks were extremely ambitious revolutionaries. They sought to change the nature of government, of society, and even of the human being. On the other hand, they wanted to maintain the territorial integrity of the Tsarist empire. Their policy on this, however, was complicated.

Well before the revolution, Lenin denounced the Tsarist empire as the "prison house of nations," and declared that any nation could leave it after the revolution. This gained him a crucial following among non-Russians. Yet he also

maintained, especially after the revolution, that because the workers' state would be beneficial for all nationalities, minority regions would not want to secede (Nahaylo and Swoboda 1990, 14-17). This was a position non-Russian Communists supported, because the secession of their region from the USSR would severely limit their ability to exercise authority. Non-Russian Communists and sympathizers played a key role in helping the Bolsheviks reassert their authority over most of the former Tsarist empire (Nahaylo and Swoboda 1990, 18-59).

After the relatively mild New Economic Policy (NEP) era in the mid-1920s, when the non-Russians experienced a cultural flowering, the achievement of full power by Stalin in 1928 ushered in the period of collectivization and purges. Stalin was especially brutal toward the non-Russians. Suspecting them of seeking secession, he introduced harsh measures to prevent them from doing so. He even adopted harsh policies toward non-Russian Communists who had helped establish Bolshevik rule in their regions earlier by firing, imprisoning, or killing them. Stalin also replaced many non-Russian officials in the non-Russian republics with Russians (Nahaylo and Swoboda 1990, 60-106).

Non-Russian Communists made a comeback in the party and government bureaucracies of their republics under both Khrushchev and Brezhnev. However, Moscow's continued claims about ethnic equality in the USSR were belied by the universal indication of individuals' nationality on their internal passports and the widespread perception (based on reality) that one's nationality could play a crucial role in determining eligibility for university admission and employment. In other words, by claiming that nationality was unimportant but acting in ways that emphasized its importance, the Soviet state helped promote non-Russian nationalism (Nahaylo and Swoboda 1990, 109-220).

Moscow, however, managed to keep non-Russian nationalism firmly under control for decades until the Gorbachev era. It was Gorbachev's policies that inadvertently contributed to their strong reemergence. Further, Gorbachev appeared to assume that his policy of *glasnost* (openness) would result in grateful Soviet citizens supporting him against his conservative Communist opponents who opposed change. In the non-Russian republics, though, *glasnost* led to the airing of long pent-up grievances against Soviet rule and Russian domination. Gorbachev also assumed that democratization would result in the majority of Soviet citizens voting for supporters of his reform program and against its conservative opponents. But in many non-Russian republics, democratization led to growing demands for independence (Nahaylo and Swoboda 1990, 260-350).

By 1991, it was becoming clear that the Soviet Union could not both democratize and remain unified. The leaders of the abortive August 1991 coup were willing to sacrifice democracy for the sake of unity. Their failure only further inflamed the demands of non-Russians for independence. The crucial act, however, was the decision by Russian president Yeltsin (first in cooperation with just his Ukrainian and Belarussian counterparts, later with the leaders of many other non-Russian republics) to disband the Soviet Union at the end of 1991 (Matlock 1995).

Russians form a much greater share of the population of Russia than they did of the Soviet Union when it disbanded. Nevertheless, the Russian Federation has not escaped this problem either, with Chechen rebels fighting for independence from 1994 to 1996, and then from 1999 to the present. The 1996 agreement that ended the 1994-1996 conflict called for the immediate withdrawal of Russian forces (which took place) and a referendum on independence in 2001. Moscow unilaterally abrogated this agreement when it invaded Chechnya in 1999, forestalling this referendum (Trenin and Malashenko 2004, 15-48). Putin in particular is willing to preserve the unity of the Russian Federation at the expense of democracy not just for Chechens, but for Russians too.

## YUGOSLAVIA

Yugoslavia (or the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as it was called until 1929) came into existence at the end of World War I, unifying two independent states (Serbia and Montenegro) along with other provinces (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo, and Voivodina) that had been ruled by the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. Serbs constituted the largest group in this new state, though not a majority. In addition, there were regionally dominant minorities elsewhere, including in Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, and Kosovo (Albanians). There was also a mixed population in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Muslims, Serbs, and Croats), and large numbers of Serbs in

Croatia (Jelavich 1983, 143-57).

Croatian and Slovenian politicians agreed to join the new state ruled by the Serbian royal family. They did this less because of fellowship with the Serbs than because of fear that their territory would be absorbed by Italy and illusions about their role in the new state (Jelavich 1983, 124). From the beginning, however, the existing Serbian administrative and military structures dominated the new state (Jelavich 1983, 147), setting the stage for Croatian discontent. The redrawing of internal boundaries in 1929 as well as the authoritarian rule of King Alexander led to general discontent among non-Serbs (Jelavich 1983, 200-01).

The situation was aggravated during World War II when the Axis powers recognized an "independent" Croatia whose nationalist leaders oppressed Serbs (Jelavich 1983, 262-67). A Serb-dominated resistance movement associated with the royal government-in-exile, the Chetniks, sought not just to restore the prewar Serb-dominated status quo, but also to strengthen the position of the Serbs. This movement had no appeal to non-Serbs and did not compete effectively with the Communists even among Serbian supporters (Jelavich 1983, 268).

Unlike the Chetniks, the Communists appealed to all of Yugoslavia's nationalities for support. Its leader, Tito, was of mixed Croatian and Slovenian heritage. As historian Barbara Jelavich put it, communism appealed to the young and idealistic because it "offered an ideology that promised a pure and humane future society" that the proponents of the old regime did not (1983, 299). To allay the ethnic conflicts of the past, Tito and the Communists reorganized Yugoslavia after the war into a federal republic consisting of six constituent "republics" and two autonomous provinces (Jelavich 1983, 296).

Despite this rhetoric about Communist respect for the equality of Yugoslavia's constituent nations, Serbian domination over the Yugoslav Communist movement began during World War II. Because Serbs living in non-Serb regions were treated especially badly and the Chetniks did little to aid them, Serbs flocked to join Tito's Partisans (Jelavich 1983, 269). As a result, Serbs came to dominate the army and police forces after the war (Jelavich 1983, 393). Indeed, this domination only increased afterward; by the time Yugoslavia started to break up in 1990-1991, its army was "almost entirely officered by Serbian communists" (IISS 1992, 35). Interethnic tensions, which Tito controlled by giving greater autonomy to the governments of the constituent republics, arose, especially between the Serbs on the one hand and the Croats, Bosnian Muslims, and Albanians on the other. The result was that authoritarian rulers' appeals to nationalist sentiments thus hindered cooperation between the republics (Ferfila 1991). The differential economic growth rates among the Yugoslav republics (which pursued different economic policies) also increased antagonisms, especially between the economically stronger but politically weaker Croats and Slovenes on the one hand and the economically weaker but politically stronger Serbs on the other (Ferfila 1991).

After Communism collapsed in most of the rest of Eastern Europe in 1989, the first free elections were held in the Yugoslav republics shortly thereafter, resulting in the election of nationalist leaders. Resentment of the Serbs led to the election of governments seeking secession in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia. Serbian nationalists were not so much interested in preserving Yugoslavia as allowing land inhabited by Serbs in seceding non-Serbian republics to secede in turn and join Serbia (IISS 1991, 164-68; IISS 1992, 33-37). Serbian nationalists believed just as vehemently, albeit inconsistently, that Serbia should retain Kosovo because a Serbian kingdom ruled this region centuries ago before losing it to the Turks, despite the fact that 90 percent of its inhabitants were Albanian. Kosovo's Albanian inhabitants, not surprisingly, did not share this viewpoint (Sletzinger and Gelazis 2005). The growth of nationalism among both Serbs and non-Serbs fueled greater regional fervor. The result, of course, was ferocious conflict over whether certain republics would be able to secede or where their borders should lie.

The communist claim that Yugoslavia's constituent nations were equal, accompanied by the perception among each group that it was not being treated equally, led to the election of nationalist forces when free (or relatively free) elections were finally permitted in the constituent republics.

INDONESIA

Before the Dutch conquest, the Indonesian archipelago was not a unitary state, but an agglomeration of many states and ethnicities. Indeed, the Dutch did not succeed in subduing the entire region until the early twentieth century. The vision of an independent, unitary Indonesia developed during the first half of the twentieth century among the small, Dutch-educated elite on the most populous island, Java. The Japanese occupation during World War II cultivated not only a sense of Indonesian nationalism, but also of Javanese dominance. The Japanese deliberately cultivated Indonesian nationalists on Java where they ruled with a relatively light hand, whereas their occupation of Sumatra and the "Outer Islands" (i.e., everything else) was much harsher (Reid 1974, 1-18).

With the acquiescence of the Japanese occupation forces at the very end of the war, the nationalist leader Sukarno declared the independence of a unitary Indonesian state in August 1945. From 1945 through 1950, nationalist forces and the Dutch battled each other for control of the archipelago both militarily and diplomatically before the new United Nations. Nationalist revolutionary forces were strongest on Java and parts of Sumatra, whereas the Dutch were strongest in the Outer Islands (Reid 1974, 19-58).

The nationalist revolutionary forces sought not just to oust the Dutch, but to establish one independent republic over all the territory, which had been under Dutch colonial rule. To counter the appeal of the nationalists, the Dutch attempted to promote different ethnic and religious groups that might fear Javanese domination. This backfired, however. As Anthony Reid observed,

Far from experiencing Javanese domination ... revolutionaries [in the Outer Islands] looked longingly to that island for inspiration and assistance, and accepted what little guidance came from the capital more enthusiastically than that which came from their own older leaders. The emphasis placed by the Dutch on ethnic fears, moreover, had associated the profession of such fears with treason against the independence struggle. (1974, 166-67)

Due to the failure of Dutch military campaigns and the success of the republic's diplomacy, Dutch influence in Indonesia ended in 1950, except in Western New Guinea, which Holland retained temporarily (Reid 1974, 162). Very soon thereafter, secessionist struggles broke out in Aceh, South Sulawesi, and elsewhere. President Sukarno associated democracy with threats to Indonesia's territorial integrity. He reacted to these conflicts, as well as to the results of the one democratic parliamentary election held during his tenure in 1955, by marginalizing Parliament, concentrating power in his own hands, and cracking down on secessionists (Ricklefs 1993, 237-56). After the bloody conflict between the army and the Communists (the two groups whom Sukarno had come to rely on most) in the mid-1960s that led to Sukarno's ouster, his successor--General Suharto--pursued a similarly authoritarian policy (Taylor 2003, 340-85). He remained in power until a democratic revolution ousted him in 1998. Three important secessionist struggles had nevertheless continued for several years before this in Papua (former Dutch New Guinea), East Timor, and Aceh (MacDonald and Lemco 2001).

The existence of armed movements seeking secession from Indonesia in these three regions before its democratic revolution might appear to belie the theory presented here. However, Indonesia's 1998 democratic revolution had a

powerful impact on all of them, especially East Timor. The new Indonesian president, Habibie, agreed to hold a referendum in East Timor in 1999 and grant it independence if the majority did not favor remaining part of Indonesia. Although it is unclear why he did this, his motives appear to have included a desire for acceptance by established democratic governments (which were pressuring Indonesia about East Timor) as well as a false expectation that the East Timorese would want to remain part of Indonesia. The East Timorese, however, overwhelmingly voted against remaining part of Indonesia. The Indonesian army then went on a destructive rampage in East Timor, but withdrew when the UN Security Council authorized an Australian-led military intervention on behalf of the new state (Huxley 2002, 33-34).

Indonesian democratization and the events in East Timor also had a profound impact in Aceh and Papua. It soon became clear that the demand for independence in these regions was not limited to small guerrilla groups, but was widespread within them. Large numbers of people demanded referenda on independence in both regions. Determined not to allow any more East Timors, the Indonesian armed forces responded with repression in both cases. Democratic presidents, though, also sought to reduce the demand for independence by making concessions, especially in Aceh. A factor working against the secessionist cause in Papua is that over 30 percent of the population there are now immigrants from elsewhere in Indonesia who oppose independence (Huxley 2002, 34-45). The January 2005 tsunami not only had a devastating impact on Aceh, but also reduced the demand for independence there (Aspinall 2005, 109).

Whether either Aceh or Papua will remain part of Indonesia or secede remains unclear. It should be noted, however, that the secessionist movements in these two regions affect the balance of power between the democratic national government and the armed forces. The argument that the armed forces are the only force preventing the breakup of Indonesia would not be particularly strong if there were not ongoing secessionist movements in these regions. The continuation of these conflicts also provides numerous opportunities for the armed forces to make money (Huxley 2002, 45-46). The Indonesian armed forces, then, may not only have powerful incentives to prevent these regions from seceding, but also from preventing the success of peaceful conflict resolution even if this would result in their remaining part of Indonesia.

## IRAQ

Due to the tremendous news coverage Iraq has received since the 2003 American-led intervention and increasingly problematic occupation, Iraq's demographic breakdown is well known: Shi'a Arabs are a majority and are located primarily in the south; the Sunni Arab minority is located in the middle; and the Kurdish minority is located in the north, where it forms a majority. But, as is also well known, the backbone of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime was the Sunni Arab minority--especially Sunni Arabs from his home region around the town of Tikrit. The post-Saddam elections resulting in a Shi'a Arab majority in the Iraqi Parliament, as well as leadership of the Iraqi government, have threatened Sunni Arab dominance--something that many Sunni Arabs want to restore.

Sunni Arab dominance was not only a characteristic of Saddam Hussein's "revolutionary" regime, but of previous (including prerevolutionary) regimes as well. In the late nineteenth century, the declining Ottoman Empire relied on Sunni Arabs to maintain its rule in the provinces that would become Iraq (Batatu 1978, 37-43).

The British created Iraq within its present borders at the end of World War I and established a monarchy from the Hashemite family to rule it. Similar to the Ottomans, the Hashemite king relied primarily on Sunni Arabs as officers in his army (Batatu 1978, 319-61). By the time of the 1958 Iraqi Revolution that overthrew the monarchy, the Iraqi army officer corps was almost entirely Sunni Arab (Batatu 1978, 765).

Discontent existed in Iraq under the monarchy. By the 1950s, revolutionary opposition parties had sprung up to challenge it, including both the Communist Party and the Ba'ath Party. The membership of these parties, at least in their early years, reflected the discontent of the non dominant groups in Iraq. From 1949 to 1955, for example, Kurds were overrepresented in the Communist Party, Shi'a Arabs had a strong component in it, and Sunni Arabs were underrepresented (Batatu 1978, 699-705). In the Ba'ath Party, "underprivileged Arab Shi'i" held over half of the

leadership positions from 1952 to 1963 (Batatu 1978, 748).

It was not the Communists or the Ba'thists, however, who fomented the 1958 revolution, but the "Free Officers" instead--who, like most other officers, were primarily Sunni Arab (Batatu 1978, 788). Over the next ten years, there were several coups in which different army officers seized power from one another. In 1963, though, the Ba'th Party came to power for the first time, but dissension soon arose between its military and civilian leaders. These groups were also divided along sectarian lines: the Ba'th's military leaders were almost entirely Sunni Arab, whereas a majority of its civilian leaders were Shi'a Arab (Batatu 1978, 1017).

Between the time when it lost power in 1963 and regained it in 1968, the composition of the Ba'th Party underwent a dramatic transformation. As Hanna Batatu observed, "Up to November 1963 it had, to a large extent, the characteristic of a genuine partnership between the Sunni and Shi'i 'pan-Arab' youth. By 1968, however, the role of the Sunnis had risen sharply, while that of the Shi'is had decisively declined" (Batatu 1978, 1078). In addition, two Sunni Arabs from the town of Tikrit, Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein, took over the leadership of the Ba'th party in 1964. Under their influence, Takritis had become the dominant force within the Ba'th by the time it resumed power in 1968 (Batatu 1978, 1079).

As is well known, the dominance of the Sunni Arabs, especially the Takritis, only increased under Ba'th rule, as did the oppression of both the Kurds and the Shi'a Arabs--especially after Saddam Hussein seized full power in 1978. Both the Kurds and the Shi'a Arabs revolted against Saddam Hussein in early 1991 in the wake of the defeat of his forces in Kuwait at the hands of a U.S.-led coalition. Whereas the Kurdish rebels received some American support in creating an "autonomous zone" outside of Saddam Hussein's control, he moved quickly to quell the Arab Shi'a rebellion once it was clear that neither the United States nor anyone else would intervene on their behalf (Dannreuther 1992, 60-67).

With this tortured history in mind, it is not surprising that the American-sponsored democratization efforts in Iraq since 2003 have resulted in the emergence of both Kurdish nationalism and Sunni-Shi'a antagonism. Kurdish public opinion overwhelmingly supports the creation of an independent Kurdish state, but this is strongly opposed by neighboring states (especially Turkey) and not supported by anyone (including the United States, which does not want to further strain relations with Turkey). Although the Kurds seem to understand that they cannot attain statehood at present, they have worked assiduously to run their own affairs and maintain their own security in the north outside the control of the national government (Barkey and Lippson 2005).

The Shi'a Arabs, by contrast, have not sought secession from Iraq; because they are the majority, democratization will lead to their dominance over the country--an eventuality that the previously dominant Sunni Arabs strongly wish to avoid. A civil war that the United States and its allies appear powerless to halt, complete with ethnic cleansing, has emerged between these two communities. The tremendous distrust that Iraq's three principal communities have for one another, as well as for foreigners, complicates the problem (Inglehart et al. 2006). American efforts encouraging leaders from the two communities to cooperate continue, but they are hampered by the prevalence of hard-line views on both sides as well as the availability of external support for them, and by the ease with which the hard-liners can stigmatize anyone cooperating with the American "occupiers." How this conflict will play out is not at all clear (especially with the war's growing unpopularity in the U.S. raising the possibility of an American withdrawal from Iraq), but the prospects for Iraq emerging as both united and democratic appear poor.

## CONCLUSION

Do these four case studies demonstrate that there really is a connection between revolution and an attempt at state breakup in cases where 1) revolution occurs in a state where there are regionally dominant minorities and where the revolutionary regime claims to be democratic and inclusive but is not and 2) a later attempt at state breakup when a serious attempt at democratization is made in it? Arguments can certainly be made that these cases do not prove causation but only suggest correlation between these two events; that the small number of cases raises doubts about the possibility even of correlation between them; and thus that the alternate theory that there is no necessary connection

between these two events is more likely--especially where there is a long time between the revolution and the attempt at state breakup.

The time between the initial nondemocratic revolution and subsequent attempts at state breakup has been many years in certain instances. The theory presented here does not seek to explain why serious attempts at democratization occur sooner or later after a nondemocratic revolution. I am arguing instead that no matter the length of time between these two events, attempts at state breakup occurred at the same time as a serious attempt at democratization. The Soviet Union is an especially good example. The Russian Revolution of 1917 that brought the Bolsheviks to power occurred many decades before the attempt at democratizing the Soviet Union that resulted in its breakup in 1991. The two events, though, are definitely linked. Non-Russian nationalists pursued independence rather than participating in a Soviet democratic experiment because their nations' historical memory of Moscow renegeing on its promises of freedom and equal treatment.

Further, although the four cases examined here may be the only examples where both parts of the "revolution-attempted state breakdown associated with democratization" pattern have taken place (or are taking place), there are several cases where the first part of this pattern has occurred and where the second part could. There are, in other words, countries with regionally dominant minorities that experienced revolutions promising but failing to deliver democracy and where real attempts at democratization have not yet occurred. These include China, Iran, Sudan, and others. Secessionist movements exist in each of these countries, though their relative strength varies greatly. Although serious attempts at democratization have not yet occurred in any of them, the theory presented here suggests that attempts at state breakup are likely to occur if and when they do. Indeed, their experience with revolution is a serious obstacle to the democratization of states with regionally dominant minorities.

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**Mark N. Katz** is professor of government and politics at George Mason University. His research focuses on revolution in the post-Cold War era.

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