

On The Origins Of Divisions Plaguing Today's Ukraine

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Abstract:

With this inquiry I attribute the causes of the divide in the east and west Ukraine to the historical composition, religious affiliations, and political interests of the Ukrainian people.

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Today's Ukraine should be considered divided. This inquiry seeks to establish the origins of divisions plaguing today's Ukraine. Three factors mainly affect institutional composition and promote divisions in the Ukraine. These are historical composition, religion, and political interests. The purpose of this paper is to examine the variables that create this divide within the east and west territories of Ukraine.

Historical Composition

The two very extreme and different regions of Ukraine are Lviv and Donetsk. These represent very nationalized and denationalized views of Ukraine. An average citizen in Donetsk will relate to Russians and will have more pride in the Russian heritage and culture they possess or are accustomed to. Lviv on the other hand, promotes and encourages nationalistic pride. One important factor that differentiates the two major cities, or more broadly, Ukraine's western and eastern territories, is different ethnic backgrounds.

Based on the Ukrainian Census (2001) Ukrainians constitute the largest ethnic group in Ukraine at 77.8 percent of the population. Russians make up 17.3 percent. In addition, Ukraine consists of multiple other ethnic groups including Romanians, Hungarians, Belarusians, Moldovans, Bulgarians, Crimean Tatars, and Poles. Wesley Shoemaker (2008, p. 152) describes the historical origins of Ukraine in his publication of "Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States." He notes that in the seventh century, the first settlement of the current day capital city, Kiev, was built. The city that lies on the hills above the Dnepr River soon became a provincial trading center. Kiev became the capital of the Slavonic State "Kievan Rus" by the end of the ninth century when Oleg, the prince of Novgorod [year 882] moved his retinue to Kiev. Viktor Missan (1997, p. 51), notes that in year 907, Oleg administered an important takeover of the Byzantine city, Constantinople, requiring the emperor to pay high taxes. Following Oleg, there were many great rulers over Kiev and Kievan Rus. Kiev remained a strong city until the Mongol takeover in 1240. The Mongols destroyed the beautiful city. Missan (1997, p. 64) notes that

the population of Kiev was decreased from fifty thousand to only a few thousand. After the takeover of Kiev, Mongols had access to other Slavonic cities which lie on the territory of Ukraine. Southern Ukraine became part of the Mongol Empire. Shoemaker (2008, p. 152) notes that while northern Ukraine was under the rule of Mongols for some time, “the weight of the Mongol yoke brought collapse...by the early fourteenth century.”

Shoemaker (2008, p. 152) points out that the grand duchy of Moscow gained power in the northeast part of Kievan Rus, while Lithuanian Prince Gedymis, led over the northwest part of Ukraine with means to lighten the yoke of Mongols on that territory. The Prince freed Kiev and other western territories from Mongol rule as he gained control over southern parts of Kievan Rus. Thus Kievan Rus was influenced by Lithuanian and Moscovyan rulers from the earlier centuries. The southwestern part of Kievan Rus, although subject to attack from the Mongols, became the asylum for eastern Slavs fleeing from the control of Muscovy and Lithuanian rulers. These Slavs adopted the customs of their neighbors and became fighters known as Cossacks. Cossacks carried nationalistic pride and had to fight for their own freedom and the freedom of the people. Shoemaker (2008, p. 153) states that after the Lithuanian and Polish Union of Lublin [1569], the joined kingdoms tried to take over the southern area of Kievan Rus, but the Cossacks had high expertise in fighting which led the Polish and Lithuanian states to make treaties with them in exchange for their military power. The Polish brought the customs of serfdom to Ukraine and tried to enserf free peasants.

Bogdan Khmelnytsky, the leader of Zaporozhian Cossacks fought the war against Poland, but as Shoemaker (2008, p. 153) states, Bogdan believed that the defeat by the Polish, would mean enserfment of the free people and the end to the Orthodox Church. This led him to seek a treaty with Russia that would put Ukraine under Russian control. This treaty is known as the 1654 Treaty of Pereiaslav, which resulted in a war between Muscovy and Poland. The war ended with a truce [Truce of

Androsovo 1667] which led Poland to recognize Moscovy's control over the eastern part of Ukraine and temporarily the city of Kiev. Nevertheless Ukraine still desired freedom and autonomy.

In a review by Taraz Guzio (1998, p. 341) of Ihor Sevcenko's "Ukraine between East and West", Sevcenko stresses that regardless of transferences in political power, cultural and linguistic continuity between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries remained in Ukraine. He notes that the Cossack rebellions contributed to the realizations of the Ukrainian people that even though their land was part of "Malorossija" [Little Russia], the land held a discrete entity.

After the partitions of Poland, the western part of Ukraine was controlled by Austrians; Transcarpathia was controlled by Hungary, while eastern Ukraine fell under the rule of the Russian Empire. Russians imposed strict rules that would limit the practice of the Ukrainian language and culture, thus making the people adopt the Russian culture. Throughout history one can see that the nationalistic pride still remained in the west and partially central Ukraine. This can be attributed to the fact that a lot of Ukrainian intellectuals, authors, and poets, migrated to the western part of Ukraine where they had less oppression to practice their language. Liudmila Pavlyuk (2009) stresses that cultural attributes of eastern Ukraine can be credited to high assimilation to the "institutional and mental space" of the Russian empire during the tsarist and soviet eras. Western Ukraine on the other hand, served as a "moving frontier" between many civilizations over the course of its history.

Pavlyuk (2009) notes that territories that make up present day Ukraine are traditionally fragments of the "Ukrainian ethnic group", which serves as the basis for territorial validity. However, this ethnic group brought many artifacts of their past identities shaping mentalities into Ukraine's "cultural pot." Although Ukraine went through periods of conquer by Mongols, Austria, Hungary, Poland and Russia, and were influenced by those nations, they maintained their own identity. Roman Szporluk (2000, p. 384) states that "Ukrainian differentiation from Russia and Poland respectively did not necessarily guarantee unity of those Ukrainians who refused to be Russians with those who refused to

be Polish." He refers this to the beginning of 19th century when both west and east Ukraine had to sustain their identity in midst of Russians and Poles controlling their territory. It may also be noted that the western part of Ukraine only became part of the Soviet Union in 1939. This has great impact on west's perception of the Soviet Union and the socialist movement. West Ukraine's late integration to the Soviet Union may also explain the difference between east and west in terms of industrialization.

Pavlyuk (2009) suggests that different territories in Ukraine have different "civilizational identities" based on former imperial entities. This is why the east may have a Soviet nostalgia and have the fear of joining the EU while the west is more accepting to the idea of European integration, based on its anti-colonial views. Pavlyuk notes that based on east Ukraine's colonial policies [east Ukraine being the object and the agent of those policies], the anti-colonial view is absent from the public discourse in that region.

The different ethnic compositions of Ukrainian people, as well as the influences that rose from the imperial conquerors have influenced the current divide between the east and west territories of Ukraine. This can be attributed to the different laws and cultural reforms that were imposed on the people making them conform to certain mindsets and views. However, this does not mean that they adopted all of the ways of the conquering nations. This also led them to form their own distinct identities that differed from the surrounding nations.

Religion

Religion proves an important factor to consider when studying the divide between Ukraine's east and west. Ukraine's principal religions include Ukrainian Orthodox (Moscow Patriarchate, Autocephalous, and Kiev Patriarchate) and Greek Catholic (Uniate). Other religious branches include Roman Catholic, Ukrainian Protestant, Islamic and Judaic. Religious interests are vastly different between the west and east regions of Ukraine. Gretchen Knudson Gee (2001, p. 383) uses survey data (1992) and polls to distinguish the differences in religious affiliation among Ukrainian people. Gee

suggests that religious interests impact the political partitions within Ukraine. Western Ukraine is found to have the highest concentration of religious followers, strongly affiliated with the Greek Catholic Church. Other regions of Ukraine are less religious and are primarily associated with the Orthodox Church. Gee purports that the current nationalistic, political, and regional divide within Ukraine can be associated with one's religious affiliations. The foundations of Christianity in the Ukrainian nation are as follows.

Traditionally Ukraine was a pagan country. Olga, the ruler of Kievan Rus in the tenth century, was among the first of Ukrainian rulers to convert to Christianity. Missan (1997, p.53) notes that in the year 957 Olga traveled to Constantinople and received Holy Baptism. Olga's grandson, Volodymir took it upon himself to explore this religion further and introduce it to the Ukrainian people. He was the youngest son of Sviatoslav so he fought his way into ruling, by killing his brother Yaropolk. During the ruling of Volodymir the Great, Kievan Rus became a strong empire. As Kievan Rus grew, Volodymir developed relations with other empires. The other empires all shared a similar religion in Christianity. They would send priests to Volodymir to change his old pagan beliefs.

Missan (1997, p. 54) notes that after a period of time Volodymir decided to adopt the Christian religion due to Byzantine influence. He became baptized in the year 998 and ordered his wives and his twelve sons to receive baptism. Volodymir got all the Kievans to gather at the Dnepr River, and ordered the people to walk into the water. A priest performed the ritual and as people walked out of the water they became Christians. The people had to abandon their old beliefs. They threw away the images of their gods, and started serving the Holy Trinity. Within time, this religion spread throughout other parts of Kievan Rus, and therefore Volodymir set the foundation for the new faith. Christianity strengthened the ties with surrounding nations.

An issue of religion arose in the sixteenth century. Majority of Ukrainian people were Orthodox, while the Polish who increasingly gained control over west territories of Ukraine were Roman Catholic.

Shoemaker (2007, p. 153) states that the patriarch of Constantinople recognized the authority of the Russian patriarch over all Orthodox churches in the Slavic regions when he accepted Moscow as a discrete patriarchate. This included those regions that were Orthodox under Polish-Lithuanian control. This served as an opposition to the Polish-Lithuanian government; therefore, they refused to accept Moscovyan jurisdiction over their region and outlawed Orthodox churches within their area of control. What is currently the Uniate Church was created by the Polish-Lithuanian government in place of the Orthodox Church. It had similar principles as the Orthodox Church, but acknowledged the Pope as the head of the Church. Shoemaker (2008, p. 153) notes that the loyalty to the Orthodox Church was perhaps what caused the Ukrainian people to seek ties with the Moscow during the mid to late sixteenth century.

At the rise of the Soviet Union, all religions were outlawed. Orthodoxy, considered the main religion in Ukraine was replaced by atheism. People, who opposed to the idea of atheism and stood for their faith, underwent many prosecutions. It can be noted that the Soviet Union had more control over east Ukraine, thus had a bigger influence on its religious views in the long run. This is an important factor that influenced religious affiliations and faith in the eastern Ukraine, thus it can be attributed to the fact that interest in religion is lower in the eastern Ukraine. As noted earlier, western Ukraine only became part of the Soviet Union in 1939. This played a role in the religious freedom of that region. Soon WWII broke out. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, mainly prominent in west Ukraine, was outlawed in the year 1946 after the war. Yaroslav Bilinsky (1964, p.110) purports that “institution that most bound Ukrainians to the West, was the Greek Church.” This Church is noted to have strong ties to the nationalistic movement. Gee (2001, p. 388) suggests that due to high persecution of Catholics by the state, loyalty to their faith may depict interest in nationalism and/ or religion.

Although the Uniate and Orthodox Churches were able to reestablish themselves after the fall of the

Soviet Union, a significant difference can be noted in Ukraine's east and west religious practices. East Ukraine became part of the Soviet Union in 1922, while west Ukraine only came under Soviet power in 1939. This constitutes almost a two decade difference in the leadership of the Ukrainian people.

Nationalistic interests as well as religious associations may also explain political splits between the east and west.

Political Interests

One of the prominent differences that can be noted within Ukraine's east and west territories are political interests. Both of these regions hold strong political arguments. Pavlyuk (2009) suggests that the outcome of belonging to the "cultural spaces" of the east and west can be seen in the geopolitical stances taken by the citizens. Opinion polls reveal that westerners are keener to the idea of European integration, while citizens in the eastern Ukraine are more likely to approve Euro-Asian projects. West Ukraine is politically nationalistic and more connected to Ukraine as an independent state, whereas eastern Ukraine is politically more in favor of closer ties to Russia. Eastern Ukraine also has higher concentration of Russian minority compared to the west, thus certain political interests are inclined to be in favor of Russia.

After the fall of Soviet Union in 1991, the first Ukrainian president elected was Leonid Kravchuk. He consolidated all political powers and mended relations with neighboring countries and past soviet republics. He was able to withstand pressures from Russian government and became the head of a new democratic state. Kravchuk lead the country in the direction of European integration. The president following Kravchuk was Leonid Kuchma. He was able to keep Ukraine's autonomous republic Crimea, as part of Ukraine without war interference. Although he had a good start, it is under his presidency that the country experienced high growth of corruption. Kuchma's presidency lasted two terms.

In 2004 perhaps the most controversial election took place in Ukraine. The two candidates receiving stronger votes in the November 21 run-off election were Viktor Yanukovich at 49.42 percent and Viktor Yushchenko at 46.69 percent. These elections were claimed to be flawed by voter intimidation, electoral falsification and massive corruption. Shoemaker (2008, p. 161) notes that Yushchenko's supporters in particular, were enraged with the electoral results based on the two separate exit polls that shown Yushchenko's very likely possibility of winning the election. This led thousands of people to come out to protest the next day, also vowing to keep up the protest until Yushchenko was declared president. This led to a country wide revolution that came to be called "The Orange Revolution." The supporters who came out to protest were not only those who supported Yushchenko, but also those who stood against corruption of the state. Pavlyuk (2009) suggests that in the time of the Orange Revolution, "regional differences were replaced by moral ones." One of the prominent things one can see in the media during the time of the Orange Revolution was the divide between the "honest citizens" and "corrupt government power." Whereas usually there is high debate over the different interests each side pursues. This perhaps shows a potential for unity between the two regions, although their stand for moral democratic norms may not signify their willingness to forfeit their beliefs about westernization or Russification.

Over the past three elections (Yanukovich vs. Timoshenko, Yushchenko vs. Yanukovich, Kuchma vs. Simonenko), the polls show a significant geographical split that can be marked by the Dnepr River. Often the electoral votes come very close to the 50% mark; being only a few points away from each other. The basis for these differences can be attributed to the different aspirations and economic goals of these regions. Pavlyuk (2001) notes that if one was to interpret the European Union or the Common Economic Area [two opposing unions] as manifestations of old imperial identities, it becomes clear why different parts of Ukraine have different "civilizational identities" and seem to be split between a "mood of Soviet nostalgia" and "fantasies of joining the West." The divide is great between the two

regions and the people of Ukraine are split between the thoughts of reconciliation and unity or autonomy and division of the Ukrainian state.

Conclusion

It's necessary to look at historical background to understand Ukraine's current divide between east and west. The influence of Mongols, Austria, Hungary, Poland and Russia has played a role in defining modern day Ukraine. Because these empires/ nations introduced their own culture, religion, and laws to the Ukrainian people, this served as the basis for Ukrainian opposition to these nations, thus forming the Ukrainian identity. It's not necessarily that the east and west oppose to each other, it's the fact that they have such different backgrounds which makes it hard for them to identify with each other. Religion plays an important role in the country's nationalistic or denationalized views. In the west the Greek Catholic Church (Uniate) has strong ties to the nationalistic movement thus receives the support of the westerners. In the east, Ukrainians associate with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) because centuries earlier the Polish have oppressed the Orthodox religion in the western region, therefore causing them to seek closer ties with Russia. Ukrainian's loyalty to the Orthodox Church was the primary reason for east's closer relations to Russia. Political differences are also prominent in the east and west regions of Ukraine. Past presidential elections show a regional split, nationalists voting pro-western and left-bank voting pro-Eurasia. The historical influences, religious affiliations, and political interest all intertwine and work in ways that divide the country. Historical influence is perhaps the factor that played the biggest role in creating the identity of Ukraine today.

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