

East Prussia 2.0: Persistent Regions, Rising Nations

Maria Polugodina

Theocharis Grigoriadis

The phenomenon of border persistence is well established. Especially the research focusing on economic, political and social legacies of the pre-WWI empires in their successor states has gained momentum in the past decade, and there is numerous evidence for persistence of the differences in values, behavioral traits and institutions once a border is removed (see e.g. Dimitrova-Grajzl, 2007; Grosfeld and Zhuravskaya, 2015; Grosjean, 2011). One can however ask an inverse question. What influence will an imposition of a border and respectively different cultural and institutional systems have on a homogeneous region? Like borders that vanish *de jure* but are *de facto* visible in the socio-economic data for decades, regions that vanish through such dissolution might remain visible for quite long. Especially in terms of geographically small regions like East Prussia, one can ask if there is a trade-off between nation building, which culminated in the development of nation-states during the 20th century, and preservation of regional ties, both economic and cultural, which have existed for centuries.

In this paper, we explore the socioeconomic effects of the breakup of the former German province of East Prussia into what is today Poland, Russia and Lithuania. Rather than concentrating on the long-run effects of the historical borders, we explore the effects of a dissolution of imperial regions into the boundaries of the modern states. Our question is how much the legacy of the former German province influences the development in Poland, Russia and Lithuania today. We hypothesize that German imperial legacies in the form of advanced human capital, interethnic tolerance and conservative political preferences persist in the territories of former East Prussia in Poland, Russia and Lithuania, compared to the neighboring regions in their respective countries (for Kaliningrad as neighboring we identify the regions of Leningrad, Smolensk, Bryansk, Pskov and Kursk in Russia). East Prussia is a unique case in this setting. It was, as a whole, much more homogenous than other eastern provinces of the German Empire, with non-German territories showing no massive prevalence of either ethnicity, which was conducive to more intense cultural exchange and less interethnic conflict. One can also safely say that the province was quite homogeneously agricultural and politically conservative. At the same time, the modern borders were drawn exogenously and rather determined by the balance of power, military considerations and physical geography of the region. This lends support to our hypothesis and our approach, which is based on the regression discontinuity design. We utilize the electoral and schooling data in 322 Lithuanian, Polish and Russian counties to proxy for political preferences and human capital and to test whether East Prussian values persist in the region and whether the three modern parts of former East Prussia are still similar to each other.

It turns out, however, that persistence is highly dependent on the scale of the demographic shock of the Second World War. We find that legacies of the former East Prussia only partially persist in the region and are highly dependent on how much of the original East Prussian

population is left in the area and who filled the demographic vacuum created by the Second World War and the partitioning of the province. The population resettling to the former East Prussia might have had value sets *a priori* different from those of the population left behind in the source regions. This migration bias, given migration scale, has important implications for both the source and the host regions. If people moving to East Prussia tended to be more liberal-minded, this would not only be conducive to more liberal voting in the former East Prussia itself, but also leave the source regions with more conservative population. With the rising literature on the border persistence in Eastern Europe, this finding advocates caution in interpretation of persistence in this region. With massive population movements in the mid-20th century, one might easily run into a problem of calling culture persistent where it is rather determined by a selection bias of migration.

Dimitrova-Grajzl, Valentina. 2007. "The Great Divide Revisited: Ottoman and Habsburg Legacies on Transition." *Kyklos* 60 (4): 539-58.

Grosfeld, Irena, and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya. 2015. "Cultural vs. Economic Legacies of Empires: Evidence from the Partition of Poland." *Journal of Comparative Economics* 43 (1): 55-75.

Grosjean, Pauline. 2011. "The Weight of History on European Cultural Integration: A Gravity Approach." *The American Economic Review* 101 (3): 504-8.