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Valery Dzutsati
May 26, 2021

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1	Recommendation from Prof. David Siroky	Confidential Letter of Recommendation or Evaluation	3 pages	CONFIDENTIAL
2	Recommendation from Prof. Carolyn Warner	Confidential Letter of Recommendation or Evaluation	2 pages	CONFIDENTIAL
3	Recommendation from Prof. Michael Hechter	Confidential Letter of Recommendation or Evaluation	2 pages	CONFIDENTIAL

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September 1, 2020

Letter of Reference for Dr. Valery Dzutsati

Dear Search Committee:

It is a pleasure for me to write this letter on behalf of Dr. Valery Dzutsati, who received his Ph.D. Political Science at Arizona State University in 2017, and is currently a postdoctoral researcher in the Institute of Behavioral Science at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

I am tremendously pleased and enthusiastic to recommend Valery to you for consideration. I have known Valery since he entered the PhD program and feel that I can comment on his application. With Michael Hechter, I served as co-chair of his dissertation committee. Valery and I have also had the opportunity to co-author four peer-reviewed articles together, and have a fifth paper currently under review. In sum, Valery is an extraordinarily promising scholar and instructor, and also a wonderful person who would make an amazing colleague. He is always ready to address hard questions and to pick up new skills. He comes to you ready to contribute.

His most recent publication is a single authored article - 'Ethnicity or Religion? A Theory of Identity Choice,' in *Nationalities Papers*, which tackles a central question in nationalism and identity politics, develops new theory and provides original evidence concerning the conditions under which individuals emphasize their ethnicity versus their religion. By focusing on within-group income inequality and the social role of the group, he highlights how ethnicity and religion are comprised by distinct levels of inequality and serve different functions, and thereby advances the emerging literature on language and religion as two of the most politically influential and consequential areas of cultural difference.

He has two new articles that are forthcoming. The first is another single authored article on the geography of hybrid war, with unique crowd-sourced evidence collected from Ukraine (forthcoming in *Small Wars & Insurgencies*). This article seeks to explain spatio-temporal variation in violence during Ukraine's ongoing civil war, and again develops new theory and offers original data to assess it. The other forthcoming article is co-authored with one colleague (Carolyn Warner) and builds on Valery's earlier work about Muslim attitudes towards shari'a. We analyzed this topic together in an earlier article published in *Politics and Religion*, with evidence from an original survey in the North Caucasus. Valery's forthcoming article extends this research agenda in innovative ways and assesses the new hypotheses using a global survey. This article is forthcoming in *Religion, State & Society*.

Allow me please to discuss Valery's dissertation, which he is now working to transform into a book manuscript. It focused on the important security problem of secession, developed a new theory of secessionist violence and provided compelling quantitative and qualitative evidence to test it. Whereas the Cold War prevented most self-determination movements from becoming states, the post-Cold War period has seen a proliferation of new and aspiring states in all corners of the world. Catalonia and

Scotland are two of the more recent places to hold referenda that would separate them from their respective states, and both votes transpired without state-sponsored violence, though neither have thus far produced new states. Whereas some states have broken apart peacefully, such as Czechoslovakia and much of the former Soviet Union, many other secessionist movements have fought violent wars of secession. Ukraine responded with violence to the attempted secession of the Donbass region in Eastern Ukraine, but not in Crimea earlier in the year. Russia responded with violence to Chechnya, but not Tatarstan; and Moldova used violence in Transdnistria but not Gagauzia. Drawing on these types of comparisons, Valery's dissertation asks the crucial question - why do governments sometimes respond to secessionist movements with violence, whereas at other times they opt for more peaceful solutions to secession.

Valery's work builds upon and represents a marked advance on previous research, which has emphasized, *inter alia*: the value of the secessionist region, the state's fear of a domino effect, internal factions, and the political power structure of the state and the secessionist region as the primary explanations shaping the government's propensity to use violence in response to secession. He acknowledges the importance of these factors, but provides a more comprehensive theory by integrating different levels of analysis. He argues that the state's response to secessionist claims depends on three factors: the state's regime type, the degree of economic redistribution, and the international security of the state. The state is less likely to use violence against secessionists when it has a participatory political system, a high degree of economic redistribution (which is more likely when the region is culturally similar to the core) and it enjoys a high level of external security.

Valery developed these propositions into a coherent theory and then creatively and rigorously assessed them in four empirical chapters. The first exploits cross-case variation using an original dataset, and the next three chapters examine within-case variation at the sub-national level and focus on different aspects of the theory. Valery provides compelling evidence in support of the theory. First, he analyzes 271 secessionist movements since 1945 in a large statistical analysis. Then, he explores the theoretical predictions using new data from online text analysis of constitutional negotiations and crowdsourcing covering the conflicts in Ukraine, Georgia and Russia, as well as new surveys. A final chapter provides a computational model with Bayesian updating to simulate these processes and explore the effects of the theorized parameters on the likelihood that the government uses violence in response to secessionist movements. It was an impressive dissertation and it is certain to become a brilliant book.

Valery's skills in the field of quantitative and computational research methods are diverse. He has worked in machine learning, natural language processing, agent-based modeling, Bayesian statistics and experimental methods. He received a distinction on the methods exam, and is the only person in my time at ASU to do so. In addition to the standard sequence, he also took advanced courses at the university and beyond (e.g., a multidisciplinary summer school program at the Santa Fe Institute). He has also become an advanced user of R, Python, and other relevant software, and has collaborated on a package for CoMSES Computational Model Library and related paper for computational social science using intrinsic dimensionality analysis. He has expertise and passion for computational social science that the students at U of C would value.

Valery has also gained quite a bit of experience designing his own surveys and conducting survey experiments. We jointly designed and conducted list and endorsement experiments in Dagestan on

support for the Caucasus Emirate, an organization that pledged allegiance to ISIS. The resulting article has been resubmitted after R&R at a top journal. Valery has also served as the Head Research Assistant on a large, multi-year NSF-funded research project that I conducted as co-PI together with two colleagues (Carolyn Warner in political science is the PI, and Steven Neuberg in social psychology is the other co-PI). The project analyzes how religion shapes asymmetric inter-group conflict. Valery did an absolutely terrific job and was a wonderful team player. He gained proficiency in questionnaire design, survey sampling, lab and field experiments and related online software.

I have also witnessed Valery in the classroom, where he displays a natural ability to connect with students of many different backgrounds. I have seen him guest lecture in my class on several occasions, and witnessed how he can awe the students, elegantly interweaving concepts and theories covered in the class with concrete examples and humor. He has served for me in various capacities as a teaching assistant, including for my graduate level classes in methodology, where he has provided a first rate experience for the students and led sessions and labs with empathy and aplomb. He has already given numerous talks at conferences and at invited workshops, and is at ease speaking in public to large and small audiences.

I am convinced that Valery Dzutsati would make a wonderful colleague. I urge you to give his application careful consideration. I would be honored to answer any questions and to provide further information.

Respectfully,



David S. Siroky

Associate Professor, School of Politics and Global Studies
Core Faculty, Center for Social Dynamics and Complexity
Graduate Faculty, Complex Adaptive Systems Science
Faculty Affiliate, Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict
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Aug. 30, 2020

Dear Selection Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Dr. Valery Dzutsati, who has applied for your position. He completed his Ph.D. in Political Science in 2017, with a dissertation on the logic of violence in state responses to secessionist movements. He is already an active contributor in the areas of violence and ethno-nationalism, and on Islamic movements, with multiple peer-reviewed articles and a working paper published in the Computational Model Library. He has been a recipient of a very competitive Smith Richardson Foundation fellowship and holds a research post-doctoral fellowship at the Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado, Boulder.

I have known Dr. Dzutsati since Fall of 2011, when he was a student in my Religion and Politics graduate seminar. He has clearly flourished since then, publishing seven peer-reviewed articles, presenting papers at conferences and workshops, and establishing his own research agenda. He was a Research Assistant for over two years on an interdisciplinary NSF project on religion and asymmetric conflict of which I was the PI, and he and I have also worked closely on a paper that is forthcoming in *Religion, State and Society*. I was also on his dissertation committee.

Dr. Dzutsati has tackled an ambitious and significant research question in his dissertation. While most of the literature on secessionist movements has focused on accounting for their emergence, and on civil wars, Dr. Dzutsati brings attention to the question of why some states allow secessionist groups to secede in peace, and why other states fight secessionist movements violently. He diverges from the literature that has explained state responses in light of state concerns to prevent a domino effect and state interest in retaining valuable territory, by incorporating the variables of costs of violence, state estimates of an external threat to its security, and the state's capacity to mobilize the dominant majority in support of a violent reaction to secessionist movements. Using a statistical analysis of all secessionist movements from 1946 to 2011, and a closely focused study of events in two regions in the Ukraine and in the North Caucasus region, and public opinion surveys in Azerbaijan, Dr. Dzutsati develops a robust test of his argument. The results are persuasive. I expect the work to yield at least three peer-reviewed articles as Dr. Dzutsati moves forward, and to be revised as a book manuscript.

Dr. Dzutsati has a number of strengths that warrant giving his file a close look. He is already contributing to the literature on state counterinsurgency strategies and ethno-nationalism peer-reviewed publications. He has seven peer-review publications and an R&R from a well-ranked International Relations journal. Our piece, forthcoming in *Religion, State and Society*, on Muslims' support for sharia, using cross-national survey data, reflects his creativity and analytical abilities. He is the lead author of the paper, in which we find that support varies according to state welfare capacity and the economic status of individual Muslims. He has given twelve invited talks at prominent universities in the U.S. and Europe. Dr. Dzutsati has advanced

methodological training and also in-depth knowledge of Russia, the Caucasus region and the Ukraine. He grounds his research in theory and tests dynamics within and across cases, with multiple methods. His research speaks to broad issues in Comparative Politics and International Relations. I expect he will make his mark in the fields of ethno-nationalism and violence, as well as in religion and politics. In addition, he is collegial and responsible. I am pleased to recommend him.

If I can provide further information, please do not hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carolyn M. Warner', written in a cursive style.

Carolyn M. Warner
Chair and Vail Pittman Professor
carolynwarner@unr.edu
775-682-6462



August 29, 2020

Valery Dzutsati

Strictly Confidential

I was a co-chair of Valery's dissertation at ASU. A native South Ossetian, Valery came to the United States after extensive experience as a journalist covering political developments in the Caucasus and Russia. He was a student in my graduate seminar on nationalist and ethnic conflict. As a participant in this seminar, Valery was exposed to most of the significant general theories of nationalism and ethnic conflict. In other course work, he learned comparative politics, multivariate analysis, database management and some agent-based modelling. Additionally, he also took an introductory course in complex adaptive systems and participated in the Santa Fe Institute's summer program. He also gained valuable experience by serving as the lead Research Assistant on a million dollar NSF grant on the religious bases of minority political mobilization.

Valery thus combines general theoretical and analytical skills with a very comprehensive understanding of politics in the Caucasus, a region often beset by violent conflict, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Russia. He also is well-versed in the comparative politics of Eastern Europe.

Valery was a mature, determined and extremely serious student. He works very hard and is eager to learn. As a consequence, he won a number of pre-doctoral fellowships, including one from the Smith Richardson Foundation. Valery has been especially assiduous in locating obscure sample surveys from the Caucasus and elsewhere and analyzing them. He already has written one solo-authored and five co-authored journal articles (I am a co-author on one that came out in *Post-Soviet Affairs*) and several more have been submitted for publication. He is likely to continue being a productive scholar.

Valery's dissertation was about the determinants of secessionist violence. In it he analyzed why some secessions occur peacefully, whereas others entail violence and sometimes end up as civil wars. The burgeoning literature on civil wars is obsessed with questions about their onset and duration, but since most such studies sample on the dependent variable, they cannot tell us why some secessions do *not* end up as civil wars. This is an important question about which very little is known systematically. Therefore, Valery's dissertation is a significant addition to the literature on ethno-regional conflict as well as civil war.

He argues that core populations are less likely to support military action against potentially secessionist peripheral regions that are relatively wealthy and culturally similar. Other factors affecting secessionist violence in his model include the relative poverty of the region, the extent of redistribution and the state's regime type, as well as the geopolitical environment. The dissertation tested these ideas by using mixed methods: a large cross-case data set, several apposite case studies and field research.

Since these conflicts are now a principal source of political instability in the world, we need many more students of this subject who are well versed in cutting-edge theory, methods and have detailed knowledge of largely unfamiliar societies. Valery promises to be one of the best ones.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Hechter

Foundation Professor of Political Science
Center for Social Dynamics and Complexity
Fellow, American Academy of Arts and Sciences

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