

## **Chapter 9: The Infant Democracy's First Steps**

During the years of Yugoslav Communism the Serbs kept tight reins on the development of non-Serbian politics and public relations. It's not surprising that newly independent Croatia made a number of cardinal mistakes in these sectors. Croatia was unable to help its cause abroad because it didn't have an image-projecting body to combat Serbia's sophisticated propaganda apparatus.

At the onset of hostilities in Croatia, the few foreign journalists who had gone to Zagreb found Croatian sources uncooperative. Zagreb had no viable press bureau to liaison with the foreign press. Croatian government officials were neither readily accessible, nor politically equipped to handle questions. The fact that Western journalists were viewed with suspicion as a carry over from the Bolshevik days didn't help matters. Croatia had and continues to have little understanding of the direct relationship between media reportage and political actions. The only bright spot in the media's coverage in Croatia came after the establishment of the Foreign Press Bureau (FPB).

Before the birth of the FPB most news coverage about Croatia originated from Belgrade or TANJUG (the official Yugoslav news organization) press releases. Without exception, the media reported whatever the Serbs wanted to project. HINA, the official Croatian news organ, was looked upon by the world's reporters as self-serving and lacking in credibility. For some strange reason, TANJUG remained above reproach.

George Bush's nominee for the post of Ambassador to Croatia, Mara Letica, and a few other Croatian-Americans helped found the Croatian American Association (CAA). The CAA became the only viable organization that represented Croatian-American interests in Washington, D.C. Acutely aware of the problems the media faced in Croatia, Letica was instrumental in establishing the FPB to help get objective facts from Croatia to the press. Letica hired J. P. "Pat" Mackley, who had, among his other diverse talents, a solid background in journalism; and sent him to Zagreb. His expertise in military strategy (which he had learned in Vietnam and the Gulf War) and his deftness in dealing with often belligerent Croatian government officials uniquely qualified him to direct the FPB. While he ran the FPB, the Croatian military used another of Mackley's multi-talents; as a master marksman he taught a cadre of Croats to become skilled snipers. Their newly learned expertise played a major role defending Vukovar.

After observing Mackley over the years, I believe that his true forte was political analysis. In a Washington Post Op-Ed piece *The Balkan Quagmire Myth*, on March 7, 1993, Mackley persuasively refuted every one of the American military's arguments against using strategic air strikes and logically showed why unmanned aircraft, like missiles, were better suited. He not only predicted what NATO would do in 1995, once it got its act together, he also named the exact strategic targets. When NATO destroyed those important targets with missiles, it led to the Dayton Accords. The Post article was the only one of entire conflict that described the true status of the Serb forces. Alone among other writers, Mackley destroyed the myth of the Serbs' fighting ability.

Mackley molded a cadre of more than 70 dedicated volunteers, mostly second and third generation Croatian youths from the United States, Canada, and Australia, but also a number of native Croats, into a force that earned respect from even the most jaded members of the world's media.

The Bureau opened in August, 1991, and set about presenting the situation in Croatia, warts and all, to the international press. The elusive trait of credibility became the hallmark of the FPB. Reporters turned more and more to the FPB to gain access to Croatian governmental sources. Although doing so placed its volunteers in great peril, the FPB proudly escorted reporters to the front lines. Pulitzer Prize winning reporter Roy Gutman praised the young men and women of the FPB for their indispensable help in getting the true story out. He said,

"They are the real heroes."

The FPB played a decisive role in dispelling a number of media preconceptions. For example, the media had been under the impression that the JNA was serving a peacekeeping role in Croatia. This faulty notion disappeared when the FPB took reporters to see the JNA carnage and destruction firsthand. Journalists soon came to depend on the FPB for hard information.

The success of the FPB made many officials in the Croatian government uncomfortable because the FPB staff's Western habit of expressing free thinking and self-initiative threatened the existing order. Although the Croatian government was democratically elected, many officials still thought like Communists, or more specifically, Bolsheviks. Many couldn't relate to the new system and were intolerant of any criticism no matter how well intentioned. Despite animosity expressed by some in the Croatian government, Minister of Information Branko Salaj, head of Hrvatska Matica Iseljenika (Croatian Heritage Foundation) Ante Beljo, and Minister of Defense Gojko Susak cooperated and backed any decisions regarding the FPB. These three new leaders had lived in exile for over 75 years collectively. Only after Croatia declared independence were they able return home and assume positions in the government. In sharp contrast to many of their colleagues, they were well aware of the value of truth in the media and democracy.

As the FPB increasingly discredited information coming from Belgrade, the Serbs began targeting members of the press for acts of violence. During this relatively short war, more reporters have been killed than had been during both the Vietnam and Salvadoran wars. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 44 journalists were killed in the Balkans between the onset of hostilities in 1991 and September, 1994. Another 12 credible reports remain unconfirmed. The Committee's executive director William A. Orme Jr. asserted that many of the journalists were victims of deliberate targeting.

Once its initial funding dried up, the undercapitalized FPB became a shadow of its former self. Although expatriate Croatian organizations in the United States had allotted funds for the FPB, the organizations found a variety of excuses to avoid dispensing the promised money. For example, the Los Angeles-based Croatian National Foundation withheld funds that were budgeted for the FPB because of personality clashes some of its board members had with certain members of the Croatian American Association. Los Angeles-based Croatian-American activist Mike Volaric explained the situation with convoluted logic: "Our organization rescinded its decision to give money to help the Foreign Press Bureau because they were appalled that the Croatian president, Franjo Tudjman, had squandered other donated funds on an airplane for his personal use."

But the seminal reason why Croatian-American organizations pulled the rug out from under the FPB was because certain Croatian officials in the United States were sabotaging the FPB. The Croatian diplomats felt threatened by the FPB on two scores. They believed that the success of the FPB stole their thunder and, more importantly, that the FPB and they were competing for the same donor pool. Without financing, the FPB collapsed.

The failure of the FPB may sound like an isolated example of squabbling among immigrant Croatian groups. But unfortunately, within Croatian communities this type of conflict is typical. Unlike Serbian immigrants in the U.S. and Canada, Croatian immigrants are deeply divided. A large number of Croatian immigrants who had embraced the Yugoslav concept have clashed with those Croats who rejected it. Among the Serbs, Yugoslavism was never seriously considered. They have considered themselves Serbs first and foremost and therefore remained united.

Los Angeles is home to a sizable number Yugoslav immigrants. Until recently they remained aloof to the internecine squabbles that pervaded their homeland. But as battle lines were drawn between Serbs, Croats, and Muslims in former Yugoslavia, the immigrant communities of Los Angeles developed similar divisions, shattering a long-lived symbiosis. So far Balkan inter-ethnic violence hasn't spread to North America, even

though almost every American with Croatian or Bosnian roots has been touched by personal tragedy.

Yet Yugoslav politics have caused a number of criminal acts in the Los Angeles area Croatian community. Most of the acts predated the present conflict by decades. Such incidents have included a car bombing that killed two men and the concurrent bombing of several businesses, including a renowned restaurant. Police disarmed six sticks of dynamite found by a Los Angeles city official, the target, seconds before the dynamite would have detonated. In other cases through the years, arsonists torched social clubs; the most recent was an arson attempt on the Croatian Hall soon after Croatia became independent. Despite substantial rewards offered, none of the perpetrators of any of these crimes were ever caught.

The victims of these assaults were ethnic Croats. But the city official and restaurant owner proudly proclaimed themselves to be Yugoslavs instead of Croats.

These intra-ethnic conflicts occurred in the Los Angeles port of San Pedro, an enclave that is home to the highest per capita percentage of Croats outside of Croatia. The split among the Croats hasn't been limited to my San Pedro, but has been typical in most Croatian immigrant communities. I've talked with Croatian-American leaders from Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, Dallas, and New York City. They all suggested that whether a person considers himself a Croat or a Yugoslav tends to depend on whether he immigrated to the United States before or after World War II. Suspicion, mistrust, and hatred defined by this divide have even permeated some Croatian-American families.

UDBA (Yugoslav secret police), which infiltrated all émigré groups, played a major role in sowing intra-ethnic dissension. Once Croatia became independent archives, long held secret by UDBA, were opened. In San Pedro's Croatian community rumors circulated that between 32 and 51 individuals had operated as UDBA agents locally. I asked Franjo Golem, Croatia's Plenipotentiary representative to the United States: "Now that the archives are open, which can identify the agents that had worked in San Pedro, when will the names be made public?" His tongue in cheek answer: "In order to prevent retribution or not to create chaos in the immigrant community, the Croatian government will not make public the names at this time," was followed with a wink. Since there haven't been any major discernible changes in the community, I suspect that the Croatian government is now using some of them as their own resources.

In an incident that required police intervention, the Croatian-American father of Los Angeles City Councilman Rudy Svorinich was attacked verbally by a member of the Croatian community who accused him of being a Communist. The assailant was a member of the Croatian Club who couldn't comprehend that in the United States political affiliation is a matter of choice. A March, 1994, LA Weekly article reported that after the attack Councilman Svorinich allegedly characterized the Croatian Club members as radical, nationalistic, Nazis in disguise--on whose arms, if you rolled up their sleeves, you'd find swastikas. Svorinich didn't deny the allegation that his father was a Communist, and the Croatian-American Club members didn't demand an apology for the councilman's insults.

The pre-World War II Croatian immigrants came to Los Angeles in three waves: from a Croatia under Austrian domination, from a Serbian-ruled kingdom, and from a Yugoslavia that imposed draconian measures on non-Serbs. They were, at best, semi-literate, patriarchal, politically naive, and provincial. These hardworking, honest to a fault, immigrants settled mostly in San Pedro. They remembered the old country as an idyllic fantasy. Tied to the once flourishing fishing industry, the community prospered, adjusted to American mores, and, for the most part, lost its ethnic identity.

Aside from teaching the faith, the Catholic Church in Croatia has perpetuated cultural values. Because the Croatian immigrants in San Pedro were unable to receive the Church's teachings in their first language, they maintained neither faith nor culture. In addition, because many of the males were commercial fishermen who were out at sea for months at a time, the community became matriarchal within a single generation.

Official Yugoslav sources supplied most of the news from the homeland to the San Pedro community. With rare exceptions, the pre-World War II Croats of San Pedro were ignorant of the fact that the Serbs ruled all political and economic infrastructures of Yugoslavia. Similar ignorance existed wherever Croats had settled. A majority of the Yugoslav diplomatic corps was made up of Serbs who eagerly provided official, Serbian-slanted news to the local immigrant communities.

Consequently, the mostly uneducated Croatian émigrés learned "their" history from the Serbian viewpoint. The Serbian propagandists effectively brainwashed the non-Serbs émigrés to look upon the noun Croatian with abhorrence and to call themselves Slavs; a term no Serbian nor anyone used in Yugoslavia. Nonetheless, many émigrés proudly embraced the new term. With the emergent post-war Yugoslavia, under communism, most of the Slavs readily identified with the new regime, heart and soul, since many pre-war émigrés had communist leanings anyway. They embraced Yugoslavia's agenda to an extent that San Pedro's Yugoslav Club was labeled a subversive organization up to the early 1960s, and which had preceded Macarthyism.

Unlike the Croatian Club members, the pre-war Slavs had to assimilate into American society. Prior to World War II America percolated with fears of "the red menace" and economic chaos. Anyone with funny sounding names was looked upon disparagingly. The "greenhorns" had to adjust to survive; so they became as "American" as possible, and thrived. The Slavic community emerged from the 1930s' depression without any member having resorted to welfare. Many became lawyers, teachers, judges, or captains of industry. Their sons had fought with valor for America.

Martin Bogdanovich's small fish packing plant became the biggest employer in San Pedro and ultimately the largest cannery in the world--Star Kist. But an obituary upon his daughter's death in early 1994 epitomized the prevailing attitude of Slavs. The article proudly proclaimed that she, a Croat, had been the confidante of Tito, the Communist dictator, and that her father was a supporter of the Serbian king, both of whom were great enemies of the Croatian people.

The end of World War II ushered in an era when ethnicity was non-stigmatizing. As a result, newly arrived Croats weren't pressured to adjust to American mores and therefore made no effort to identify with American society. The Croatian Club and most of its members avoided involvement in American civic affairs and institutions. In contrast, the Yugoslav Club members actively supported service clubs and charities such as the Boys Club, Lions, or Kiwanis.

The way Yugoslav and Croatian Clubs reflected political party lines of former Yugoslavia and newly independent Croatia are remarkably similar. Any Yugoslav Club member that acknowledged himself a Croatian (despite 95% of its members were de facto Croatian) or criticized communist Yugoslavia was ostracized. On the other hand, before independence, anyone proclaiming himself a Croatian was welcome at any Croatian Club.

During Croatia's self-determination effort there was a proliferation of new political parties. Astutely, the only Croatian political party which actively courted émigrés world wide was the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). Consequently, most of the émigrés, committed themselves to the HDZ party. In attempting to consolidate the party's position, the leaders made certain that any émigré who was not for the HDZ felt uncomfortable in the Croatian Club.

To the detriment of the Croatian community, both locally and in Croatia, the émigré hierarchy, rather than devoting themselves to helping Croatia in a generic sense, spent their energies consolidating personal power and ingratiating themselves with the Zagreb government. To this end they resorted to backbiting and character assassination against non-HDZ members or those that stepped out of guidelines they instituted. Besides being counterproductive, it caused a great deal of dissension.

Because most post World War II immigrant Croats made little effort to assimilate into American society they never became part of the American mainstream. Although the isolation was self imposed, many developed a lower self-esteem. But the independence of Croatia gave those émigrés a cause. For example, a physician with marginal healing skills and who has never formulated an original thought, suddenly found direction when he was appointed a position in the HDZ organization in the United States.

Pedigrees, genetic and political, have become the prevailing criteria for legitimacy in all the republics of former Yugoslavia. Following the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav Club largely ignored the issue of pedigree, but the Croatian Club followed the party line and took it one step further. Their most important criterion for bona fide acceptance was predicated upon whether one became a believer in the Croatian nation before or after independence. Anybody who wanted to join or came to the club for the first time after 1991 was viewed skeptically. The zealots had a favorite refrain: "Where were you before?" Yet the backgrounds of some Croatian Club officers have been questionable. A son of a gendarme (the dreaded enforcers of the Serbian King in Croatia) and a half-Romanian somehow slipped through the cracks to become officers.

Despite their nostalgic feelings for Yugoslavia, the members of the Yugoslav Club viewed themselves as immigrants committed to America. Those Croats opposed to the concept of Yugoslavia felt like exiles and therefore immersed themselves in homeland politics. The infighting among Croats may have been a blessing in disguise for Los Angeles. By focusing their chauvinism on each other, they've avoided aiming their hatred at other ethnic groups.

A healing process may have begun, though. After heated debate, the Yugoslav Club changed its name. A reconciliation banquet spearheaded by Cardinal Mahoney brought all the protagonists, the hierarchies of the Croatian and former Yugoslav Clubs, and Councilman Svorinich, together at the Mary Star of the Sea parish center. With the older, hard-liner Slavs fading out of the picture, and the younger generations feeling indifferent about old country politics, the split among Croats in San Pedro may die a natural death--of course, only if there are no further acts of local violence.

Perhaps not surprisingly the conflict in former Yugoslavia has spilled over onto the basketball courts of the NBA. Star players Vlade Divac of the Los Angeles Lakers and Drazen Petrovic of the New Jersey Nets had been close friends in Yugoslavia when they played together on the Yugoslav National Team that won the silver medal at the 1988 Olympics. Divac is a Serb, and Petrovic a Croat.

Divac was quoted by the Associated Press as saying that he couldn't understand why Petrovic hadn't talked to him since the European Cup championship in 1990. Divac seemed to have forgotten that after the game he had grabbed a Croatian flag from a fan, slammed it to the floor, and trampled it. Shortly thereafter the Serbs initiated hostilities in Croatia. Another Croatian ex-teammate, Stojko Vrankovic of the Boston Celtics, ignored Divac when his team played the Lakers. After Divac tried to rekindle old friendships, Vrankovic said, "I can never forget what you did to my flag." No doubt he couldn't forget recent Serbian atrocities either.

Despite the great differences in attitude among Croatian immigrants, many have backed the fledging Croatian state. In fact, support from overseas Croats allowed Croatia to survive its first year of existence. Aside from the fact that it had no allies, Croatia was virtually bankrupt when it declared independence. Whatever federal funds the republic had before the war were held in Belgrade banks, and therefore, Serbia immediately confiscated them. In order for the country to function fiscally, the government had to rely on overseas Croats for a majority of its financing.

Athletes also helped rescue Croatia fiscally during the first few critical years. Former Yugoslavia had no shortage of talented athletes, particularly in soccer and basketball. Because Europe takes soccer seriously, it didn't hesitate to tap the Croatian pool of players. According to Soccer, between 1992 and 1996 Croatia sold an incredible 1,553 player contracts abroad for millions of much needed dollars.

Loath to lose their privileged status, the Serbian minority in Croatia campaigned vigorously to maintain the status quo. The Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) won the early 1990 elections and then ousted the Serbs who had ruled under the Communist Party. While the HDZ prepared to take over the reins of government, rebel Serbs fought back by orchestrating a number of incidents.

Serbs had either supported the Serbian Democratic Party (SDP) or the Party of Democratic Changes, the rechristened Communist Party. The Serbian parties couldn't accept the fact that they had lost the election. So incited by propaganda, which included the belief that the Croats had already slaughtered thousands of Serbs even before they had taken over the government, the rebel Serbs took to the streets, burning Croatian symbols and flags.

A staged provocation in the small Croatian town of Benkovac ranks with the Polish border guard "attacks" on Germans that "justified" Germany's invasion of Poland prior to World War II. Miroslav Mlinar, the president of the local SDP, was attacked by unknown assailants. He was immediately taken to a hospital in Zadar where his injuries were evaluated as not serious. But Mlinar and his family wouldn't accept the diagnosis of Croatian physicians. So they elected to get a second opinion at the hospital in Knin. The hospital's director Milan Babic, a dentist who later became the Serbian rebel leader, declared Mlinar's injuries life threatening and grave.

Believing the attack was genuine, Croats overwhelmingly condemned it and urged the authorities, who at the time were still Communists, to investigate. But Serbs from the whole spectrum of Yugoslavia, including the media, had identified the recently elected "genocidal Croatian entity" as Mlinar's attackers.

Dr. Jovan Raskovic, a psychiatrist and president of the SDP, made a number of pronouncements that concluded Mlinar's attack resulted from Croatian nationalistic forces. His arguments convinced the SDP to boycott the Parliament of the Socialist Republic of Croatia. Consequently, the Serbian population that supported the SDP weren't represented in the parliament.

The newly installed government pursued the Mlinar investigation. A commission made up of Zagreb's medical school professors established that Mlinar's injuries were negligible. Although the commission was made up mostly of ethnic Serbs, the Serbian community gave no credence to the commission's report.

The Serbian media and Belgrade threatened the newly elected government with a variety of reprisals and officially demanded that the election should be annulled and a new government installed in Croatia. The Mlinar affair became a cause celebre. Its rallying cry has become a slogan for the Serbian people: "An attack on every Serb, no matter where, is felt as an attack on the whole Serbian people."

Once the dust settled, the Croats were found innocent of the allegations. But the damage caused by the Mlinar affair had irreversible consequences. The SDP refused to settle differences between the Serbs and Croats in Croatia democratically and demanded autonomy. Although Serbia denied autonomy to the majority Albanians of Kosovo, it demanded autonomy for Serbs in Croatia where they comprised only about ten percent of the population. Despite the Serbs' lack of cooperation, in a conciliatory move, President Tudjman offered Raskovic a cabinet position, but was summarily rebuffed. After the SDP refused to cooperate with Zagreb and flatly rejected all government positions, it set about establishing an independent Serbian state within Croatia, the illegal Serbian Autonomous Region (SAO) of Krajina.

Milan Babic succeeded Raskovic as head of the SDP and was named president of SAO Krajina. The head of Knin's police station, Milan Martic, organized the arming of local Serbs with weapons sent from the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs and distributed by the JNA. The commander of the JNA garrison was Ratko Mladic, who later went on to better things in Bosnia. Barricades were set up on highways and railroad lines.

These barricades effectively suspended traffic between Zagreb and the coast, severely curtailing the tourist industry, one of Croatia's major sources of foreign currency. Meanwhile, the Serbian parliament in Belgrade pledged support for its brethren in Croatia and requested that the JNA enforce their decision. Martić became president after Babić was ousted for daring to question the authority of Milošević. Martić was later named a war criminal by an international tribunal for ordering the missile attack on the center of Zagreb in May, 1995. Babić was demoted to the post of mayor in Knin after his attempt to usurp Milošević's authority failed. Later, he was one of the first to leave Krajina prior to the 1995 Croatian offensive.

The newly elected government in Croatia was at a distinct disadvantage by every measure. Aside from being woefully unprepared to govern and faced with an armed insurrection supported by the federal army, they had to contend with a bureaucracy whose members were vehemently opposed to the new order. Prior to 1990, the criteria for appointment for positions in the hierarchy and middle management, from accountants to zookeepers, had been based on Communist Party affiliation rather than personal qualifications. Since the new order was elected on an anti-Communist platform, formerly entrenched bureaucrats found the new order's agenda threatening.

In all communist countries, vocal opposition, or even suspicious activity, could lead to imprisonment or disappearance. Croats coined a catchy phrase to characterize those whose whereabouts had become unknown: "The night ate them up." And if the "disappeared" resurfaced, it was usually because they had safely escaped to the West.

Following the euphoria and bravado set in motion by the crumbling of communism in Europe, would-be democratic leaders were rudely awakened to the reality of running governments. The virgin administrations contained few individuals with political experience and no cadre to draw upon for support. The new order had no practical knowledge of running anything, let alone countries. Because the old regime's political and economic infrastructures were predicated on Communist Party membership, there were very few non-communists to take over. But in Croatia a pool of highly qualified individuals existed outside of the old establishment.

Yugoslav Communism tacitly allowed the development of a sub-culture of entrepreneurs who were highly skilled in management. As long as they didn't challenge dogmatic issues, kept a low profile, and most importantly, greased the palms of the officials, they were left alone. Using methods that would make Karl Marx turn over in his grave, yet are considered laudable in a capitalistic society; they took advantage of the system. Their skill in exploiting the system allowed Yugoslavia to have the highest standard of living in the communist world.

The new government begged these entrepreneurs to join and fill key posts, but found few takers. The most enduring quality of these individuals was survival. Among many Croats, uncertainty about whether Croatia would remain a viable state and fear that Serbia would eventually crush them influenced their decision making. The fear was so real that many talented Croats fled the country. Others held onto the security of their old positions, hoping they could avoid the almost certain pogroms that would visit the nation if Serbia successfully thwarted Croatia's independence efforts. As a consequence, most government posts were filled by second or third choices, particularly by holdovers from the old regime or people whose only talent was patriotism. Despite the shortcoming of having individuals that lacked qualification that filled important positions, the government is surviving by trial and error.

For example, one individual, after having lived in the United States for several years but had learned how to exploit the American system returned to Croatia. Before he left, he incurred huge debts, declared bankruptcy and absconded. Apparently this uneducated, former tradesman had no qualms about jeopardizing his American citizenship since he readily accepted his being "elected" a deputy member of parliament and installed as an assistant director to a ministry that deals with sensitive high finance decisions. His only qualifications were

loyalty to Tadjman and that he had personally delivered funds collected by émigrés which Tadjman used in his first election campaign. Apparently this money carried the tide, since no other political party exploited professional public relations in their campaigns.

The predominance of Bolshevistic mentalities remained an enduring problem within Croatia's government and state run enterprises. Such anachronisms weren't unexpected, because many in the new government were former members of the Communist Party who had simply switched party labels. Although many Communist bureaucrats originally lost their positions, they were reinstated to give the new government a semblance of efficiency. Despite its best intentions, the new regime couldn't entirely dispense with the skills and knowledge of the old hands, including members of the security services who had for years busied themselves amassing files on internal opponents and external enemies of the state. As long as they swore allegiance to the new order and had no visible blood on their hands, all were welcomed back. It was a classic Hobson's choice. But mores can't be changed with a stroke of the pen. Suspicion and intolerance permeated the new regime.

When the JNA invaded Slovenia in June, 1991, Croatia's military was limited to a police force. Even after the invasion of Slovenia, most Croatian politicians didn't believe the Serbs would turn on Croatia with such brutal force. Lacking *realpolitik* experience, the Croatian government naively believed the rhetoric of self-determination espoused by the United States and other Western nations. They believed that help, such as the Sixth Fleet, would come to their aid. The survivors of the Tito period had idealized Western democratic principles and beliefs learned from Voice of America. They couldn't comprehend that the West had no intention of helping their fledgling democracy.