

**Patterns of Nation Building and Political  
integration in a Bifurcated  
Postcommunist State: Ethnic Aspects  
of Parliamentary Elections in Latvia**

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**Latvian One-community and Two-community Concepts**

With one exception,<sup>1</sup> all former Soviet republics have been proclaimed "national states" or nation-states. They are not, however, homogeneous in the cultural or ethnic sense; all of them have numerous ethnic minorities. In some cases, such as in Latvia, the dominant ethnic group numbers barely half of the total population. In such a situation, any attempt at nation building based on the language, culture, and traditions of the dominant group alone will inevitably clash with the aspirations of the minority groups, the vast majority of whom want to retain their distinct identities and at the same time to possess an equal say in political and social life.

All over the world, "integration" is routed as the ideal solution to cultural conflicts arising in multiethnic societies. This is also true in Latvia. However, in a society in which the minority groups taken together are almost as numerous as the dominant group, the content of this ideal, laudatory in itself, is far from self-evident. Is one half of the society supposed to be dissolved into the other half? If so, how should this be done, and what will be the outcome?

\* The data used in this article were first presented at the seminar on ethnic aspects of parliamentary elections organized by the Moscow Carnegie Center, 31 January 1996.

1. The exception is Russia, proclaimed a "multinational state" by the 1993 constitution.

Generally, it seems, the Russophones in Latvia think about integration in *political* terms, as loyalty toward the political institutions of the state primarily. To most members of the dominant group, however, integration is a much more comprehensive concept. They expect the minorities to learn the Latvian language and partake in "the Latvian culture," that is, the culture of the ethnically Latvian group, which to a large extent is equated with Latvian statehood. The minorities perceive the Latvians' interpretation of integration as dangerously close to "assimilation." They tend to see it as a deliberate attempt to eradicate their distinctiveness as cultural groups; or, if they resist assimilation, as a means to exclude them from political participation on the basis of their cultural distinctiveness.<sup>2</sup> Most Latvians, on their side, claim that it is an indispensable prerequisite for the formation of a Latvian nation-state. In line with Soviet tradition, the ideas of "nation" and "nationality" in Latvia are almost invariably understood in ethnic rather than in civic terms.

In the public Latvian debate the questions of integration and nation building are often presented as a choice between a "one-community state" and a "two-community state."<sup>3</sup> A number of politicians and political commentators refer to these two concepts as if they were clear and unambiguous; in fact their content has hardly ever been spelled out in any official documents. Valdis Birkavs, the future prime minister, warned in March 1993 that "the creation of a two-community state rather than a nation-state will entail the introduction of a second state language, of equal political rights, and . . . the possibility of dual citizenship in the future. [The members of society would feel] responsibility not towards the state, but only towards their own ethnic community. This is in no way acceptable to the Latvians." This is clearly a piece of polemics directed against a scare version of the two-community concept to which few spokesmen for the minorities would subscribe. Nonetheless, Birkavs's statement is revealing. It indicates that in Latvian governmental circles the concepts of nation-state and one-community state are by and large seen as synonymous. This point is even clearer in the declaration of inauguration made by the Cabinet of Ministers formed by Birkavs in July 1993: "We see Latvia as a one-

2. Boris Tsilevich, *Vremia zhestkikh reshenii* (Riga: Insight, 1993), 229-32.

3. See, for example, interview with Einars Cilinskis in *SM-Segodnia*, 28 November 1992.

4. V. Birkavs, "Vlast' i obshchestvo: problema legitimatsii v kontekste perekhodnogo perioda," *Diena*, 11 March 1993.

community nation-state with the right of cultural autonomy for traditional minorities."<sup>5</sup>

Since the dominant group and the Russophone minorities in contemporary Latvian society confront each other as roughly equal groups, the two-community concept may perhaps be seen as an attempt to describe—and preserve—existing social realities. In this sense it is a far more conservative concept than the one-community-ideal, which in the Latvian context appears as a program for a radically transformed society.

One of the most important means to bring about this social transformation is the citizenship legislation. If the minorities today are too numerous to be integrated smoothly into a one-community society, their relative weight in the political processes of the state may be drastically reduced by means of a narrow definition of the original body of citizens combined with stringent naturalization requirements. Formally, the concept of "restored citizenship" adopted by Latvia (and Estonia) was based on legal and historical considerations. However, it seems clear that the strong desire for the establishment of "a one-community state" was a major impetus behind this policy.

The notion of a one-community state crept into the Latvian law-making process when the draft citizenship law was adopted on its first reading in the autumn of 1993. Article 9 of this bill stipulated that naturalization of noncitizens should be conducted on the basis of yearly quotas, to be determined by the government and approved by the parliament, "based upon the concrete economic and demographic situation, as well as upon the necessity of guaranteeing the development of Latvia as a one-community nation-state."<sup>6</sup>

This draft law was met with strong reactions in Latvia, as well as abroad, and was adopted in a substantially amended version only in June 1994. In the new version the quota system was replaced with a system of "windows," which allowed for the gradual inclusion of the noncitizens into the body politic. Ethnic Latvians, graduates from Latvian language schools, and spouses of citizens could submit their applications as soon as the law took effect; persons born in Latvia could start applying for citizenship between 1996 and 1999, depending on their age; persons born outside Latvia could apply only after the year 2000.<sup>7</sup>

5. *Diena*. Supplement, 23 July 1993.

6. *Diena*. Supplement, 27 October 1993.

7. M. Opalski, B. Tsilevich and P. Dutkiewicz, *Ethnic Conflict in the Baltic States: The Case of Latvia* (Kingston, Ontario: Kashtan Press, 1994), 9.

This law means that the vote in the national election in 1995, as in 1993, was restricted for all practical purposes to the same body of citizens defined by the Latvian Supreme Soviet in October 1991: persons who were citizens of the Latvian state in the interwar period and their direct descendants only. In this group ethnic non-Latvians make up approximately 20 percent. Roughly 750,000 permanent inhabitants of Latvia had no voting rights. This law affected the electoral processes in important ways, influencing the political parties and the voters. The non-citizens in Latvia, though existing outside of the political pale, are significantly present in society. Indirectly and involuntarily, they play an important role, often as bogey men used by political actors to frighten voters into support of nationalist parties. In general, the adopted citizenship concept resulted in a shift of the entire political spectrum toward nationalism.

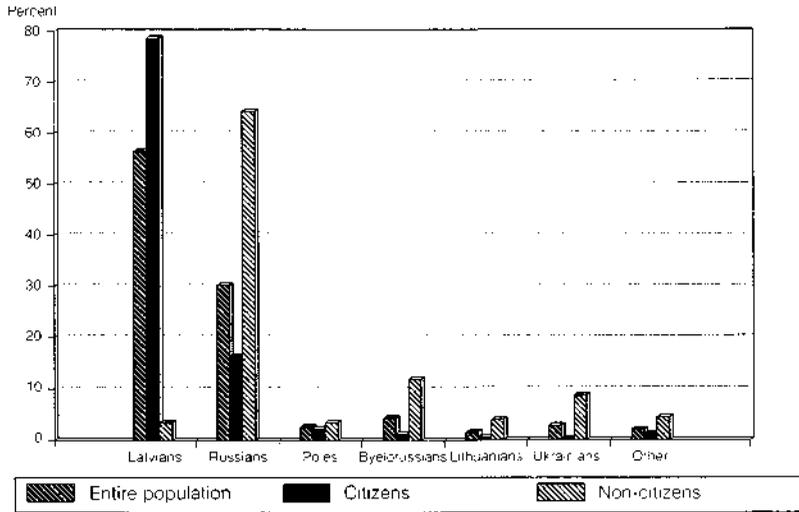
A comparison of regional election results substantiates this assertion. This paper analyses the results of the September-October 1995 Latvian national elections in order to determine how and to what extent the ethnic factor influenced the parties' political program and the voting patterns of the electorate. To put the findings in perspective, we will make three comparisons. We correlate the 1995 election results and those of 1990 and 1993, and we compare Latvia with two other postcommunist states, Estonia and Kazakhstan. These states share many of Latvia's ethno-demographic conditions and their ethnic tensions revolve, roughly speaking, around the titular-Russophone polarity. In all three, the share of the majority nation in the overall population had been drastically reduced in the Soviet period by large-scale immigration from other parts of the USSR, primarily Slavs.

## **Impact of Citizenship Issue**

Latvia restored its previous independence after the collapse of communism. The treatment of the citizenship problem was directly derived from this principle of legal restoration. Detailed analysis of "restored statehood" and "restored citizenship" goes beyond the scope of this article.<sup>8</sup> For our purposes it suffices to point out that the Latvian solution to the citizenship problem has resulted in a clear discrepancy between

8. For an excellent discussion of these concepts as applied to the Baltic situation, see Rogers Brubaker, "Citizenship struggles in the Soviet Successor states," *International Migration Review* 26:2: 269-91.

**Table 1.** Ethnic composition of population, citizenry, non-citizens entity. January 1993



the ethnic composition of the entire population and the ethnic composition of the citizenry.<sup>9</sup>

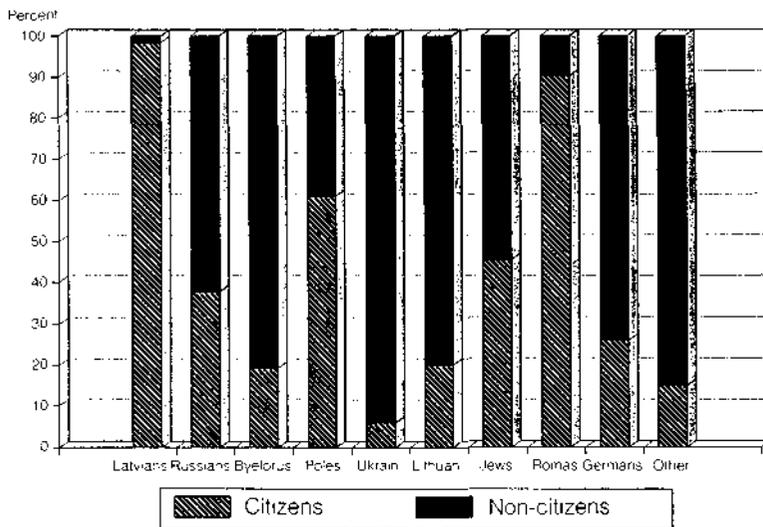
In 1995 ethnic Latvians constituted nearly 80 percent of the citizens, although their share in the population at large was about 55 percent (tables 1 and 2).<sup>10</sup> The majority of the residents of Slavic ethnic origin did not have citizenship. The substantially higher number of ethnic Latvians with citizenship which is a direct result of the adopted citizenship concept, give Latvians as a group the opportunity to wield almost full control over political decision making and appointments to positions of power and influence. They make full use of this possibility.

The patterns of appointments and promotions in the Latvian state apparatus give clear indications of strong ethnic priorities in the state

9. In Lithuania the ethnic composition of the electorate is more or less the same as in Latvia; the minority group makes up approximately 20 percent of the voters. Political life nevertheless has developed differently because in Lithuania the minorities comprise the same percentage among the voters as among the population at large. Only a minor discrepancy exists between the political nation and the demographic nation. A certain discrepancy nevertheless exists also in Lithuania because some minorities have chosen to take Russian rather than Lithuanian citizenship.

10. Data are taken from *Diena*, Supplement, 13 February 1995; and *Demographic Year-book of Latvia*, Riga, 1993; *National and Ethnic Groups in Latvia* (Riga: Ministry of Justice, 1996). Amendments to the citizenship law in March 1995 granted citizenship to all persons of Latvian ethnic origin. This increased the Latvian share of the citizenry even further.

**Table 2.** Share of citizens within different ethnic groups in Latvia, January 1995



leadership. The process of replacing Russian state officials with Latvians started in the late 1980s and was nearly complete before the elections of the 5th Saeima. In many cases this policy was aimed at getting rid of "Moscow's proteges" and well grounded. In many other instances, decisions of this kind were, not without reason, seen by Russian-speakers as overt discrimination on an ethnic basis.

A series of laws adopted since 1990 reserve a number of positions for citizens of Latvia only.<sup>11</sup> Some of these restrictions are quite reasonable, and common in most states; for example non-citizens cannot serve as judges, state prosecutors, and members of a jury. Other restrictions are more curious; one law stipulates that non-citizens are not allowed to transport mail or passengers by air. It is also important to point out that, in addition to the legal restrictions on the non-citizens' choice of occupation, some formal and informal processes are at work that reduce the percentage on non-Latvians in the state apparatus far below their 20 percent share of the citizenry.<sup>12</sup> The emergence of many new state institutions, services, and representative bodies has created a considerable

11. Opalski, Tsilevich, and Dutkiewicz, *Ethnic Conflict*.

12. Nils Muiznieks, "Etniska stratifikacija Latvija: padomju laika un tagad" in Elmars Vebers and Rasma Karklina, eds., *Nacionala politika Baltijas Valstis* (Riga: Zinatne, 1995), 114-21.

number of new jobs in the state bureaucracy. Practically all of them have been occupied by ethnic Latvians. A survey conducted in the spring of 1993 revealed a 91.7 percent Latvian share among employees in the Latvian state apparatus and a 1.7 percent Russian share.<sup>13</sup> In 1994, of 152 judges, 9 were Russians.<sup>14</sup> Since 1990, not a single Russian has occupied a minister's position.

To some extent these discrepancies are produced by the mandatory language tests to which persons working in almost all capacities—both in the state and the private sector—were subjected to in 1992-93. Those who failed these tests could be dismissed for "lack of language proficiency."<sup>15</sup> Persons who had received a Latvian language education were not subject to the test. Since the vast majority of ethnic Latvians had such an education, they were exempt. In many departments and ministries the process of Latvification had, by 1992—93, already been so thoroughgoing as to make the language tests almost superfluous; according to data from the State Language Center, only seven persons working in offices and enterprises subordinated to the Ministry of Economic Reform were required to take the test and in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs only two. These main trends are the context for the political activities of the various ethnic groups in today's Latvia.

## **Political Representation of Ethnic Groups**

In 1990, when Latvia was still a part of the USSR, all permanent residents had voting rights. The Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR was a unicameral parliament of 200 members elected in single-mandate electoral districts in a majoritarian system. In 1993 a new unicameral parliament—the 5th Saeima—was elected on the basis of the restored interwar electoral law. It consists of 100 members elected on party lists on the basis of a proportional system in five electoral districts.

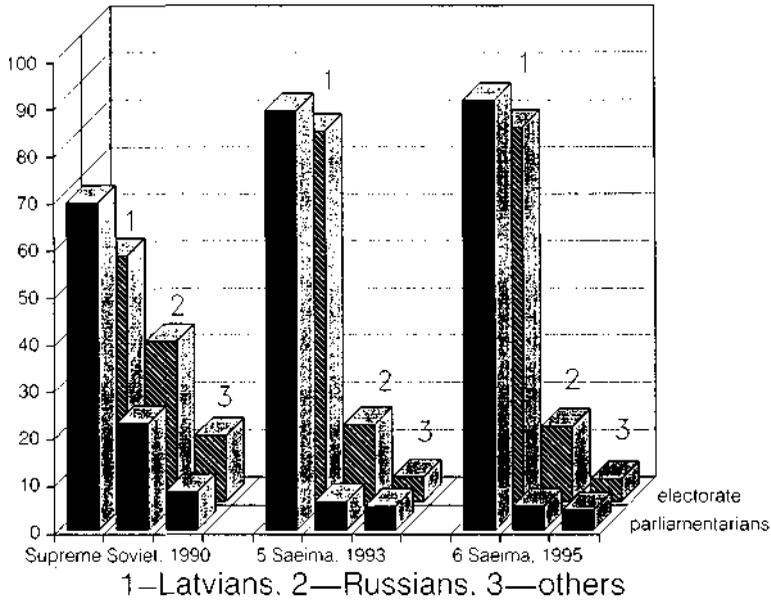
Despite these structural changes, in all three parliaments elected since 1990 ethnic Latvians were disproportionately overrepresented

13. Anton Steen, "Recirculation and Expulsion: The New Elites in the Baltic States," Working paper, the Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, 09/04.

14. *Larvijas Vestnesis*. 29 January 1994.

15. Angelita Kamenska, *The State Language in Latvia: Achievements, Problems and Prospects* (Riga: Latvian Center for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies, 1995).

**Table 3.** *Ethnic composition of electorate and body of elected parliamentarians*



(table 3). The mechanisms creating this phenomenon were not the same in 1990 as in 1993 and 1995. From the very beginning of the "atmoda" (the national "awakening" of Latvians during perestroika), the Latvian national liberation movement, embodied in Latvian Popular Front, was of a dual nature. Along with the dominant nationalistic trends, it included a strong "general-democratic" component. During the struggle for state independence in 1989-90, numerous minority supporters of Latvian independence were apparently attracted, first of all, by the Front's slogans of democratization and transition to market economy. In 1990—at a time when all residents possessed voting rights—a large part of the non-Latvian electorate voted for ethnically Latvian candidates who represented general democratic ideas and programs. The vote of a significant number of ethnic Latvians, on the other hand, was based primarily upon ethnic allegiance. The ethnic breakdown of the deputies was 69 percent Latvian, 22.4 percent Russian, 4 percent Ukrainian, 1 percent Belarusian, 1.5 percent Jewish, and 1.5 percent other.<sup>16</sup>

16. Muiznieks, *Emiska*.

## THE RUSSOPHONES

By the time of the 1993 and 1995 elections the majority of the Russian-speakers were already disenfranchised. This fact goes a long way to explain their reduced representation in the Saeima. But even allowing for this, the proportion of elected non-Latvians was small after both elections, far below the percentage of non-Latvians among the current body of citizens. This is indicative of considerable differences in the electoral behavior of Latvians and of Russian-speakers. One would perhaps expect a high degree of ethnic mobilization among the Russians as a natural response to the broad ethnically based social movements among the Latvians. Nevertheless, the Russians by and large remain politically inactive. The reasons for this, we believe, are several: a high level of fragmentation and a lack of strong social or political networks within the non-Latvian community; the exclusion of Russians from the process of forming new political elites;<sup>17</sup> the absence of common slogans and ideas around which the non-Latvians could rally; disorientation and bewilderment caused by rapid social changes in which they themselves were not initiators or actors; and last but not least, a clear wish on the part of the minority population to avoid open interethnic confrontation.

### Patterns of Political Preferences

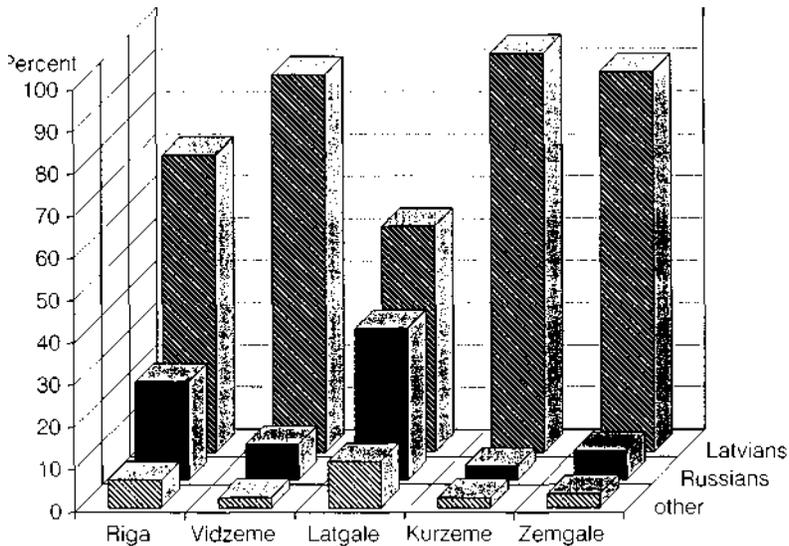
Many Latvian parties tend to do far better in some districts than in others. To a large extent, these geographical variations can be explained by the ethno-demographic factor. It is hardly surprising that elections districts with varying numbers of minority voters yield different results. It is less obvious that significant variations would exist among districts with roughly the same number of minority voters if the number of non-citizens in the area is different. Voters in homogeneous Latvian communities and Latvian voters who live intermingled with large numbers of disenfranchised neighbours tend to support different parties.

A poll conducted on the eve of the 1995 parliamentary elections showed that 70.2 percent of the Latvians were strongly determined to take part in elections and only 10.1 percent did not intend to participate. The corresponding figures for Russian-speaking citizens were 56.8 percent and 19.1 percent.<sup>18</sup> (Most political parties in Latvia, even

17. See Steen, *Recirculation*.

18. *SM-Segodnia*, 29 September 1995.

**Table 4.** *Ethnic composition of electorate in different electoral districts, 1995*



parties with relatively liberal ethnopolitical programs, have very few if any Russian-speakers among their active members. There are only two exceptions to this rule—The Popular Concord party (PCP) and the Latvian Socialist party (LSP.) The outcome of the elections corroborates these figures. Due to the secrecy of the ballot, no accurate data on how Latvians and non-Latvians voted are available. However, because the ethnic composition of the electorate vary considerably among regions, results broken down by electoral districts can supply essential information. In historically multiethnic Latgale in the eastern part of Latvia, ethnic Latvians constitute slightly more than 50 percent of citizenry while in Kurzeme, the westernmost region, they comprise almost 95 percent (table 4).<sup>19</sup> Between these two extremes is the capital city of Riga in which 70 percent of the voters are ethnic Latvians. With a population close to one million, of a total of 2.5 million nationwide, Riga is by far the largest single electoral district.

To be sure, Latvian voters were not presented with a stark choice between pro-Latvian or prominority electoral lists. In the complex and often convoluted spectrum of competing parties, a vast variety of posi-

19. These figures are calculated from demographic data published in *Latvijas Vestnesis*, 22 March 1995 and 23 March 1995.

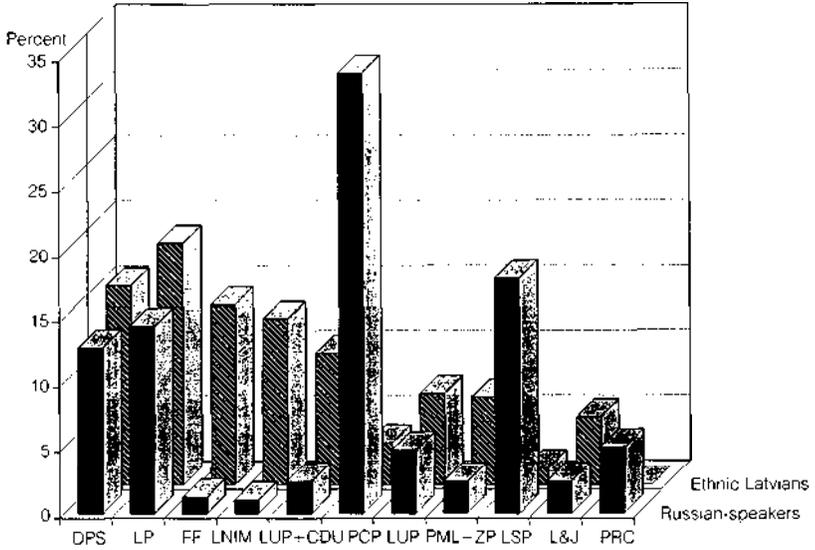
tions on the ethnic issue were represented. Although such issues are salient in the political discourse, they are but one aspect of the political profile of the various parties. Many voters were probably influenced more by other issues, such as economic concerns and the personality factor. Nevertheless, the election results give strong reason to believe that the party plank on the nationality issue weighed heavily for a significant number of voters. This is true of both Latvians and non-Latvians, but in different ways.

One of the peculiarities of the Latvian political scene is the lack of serious ethnically based minority political parties. This situation distinguishes this country from most other Central and East European countries with large minorities, such as Slovakia, Romania, and Estonia. An electoral list containing the word "Russian" in its name did indeed participate in the 1993 parliamentary elections; another, very different one, took part in the 1995 elections. In both elections the list received slightly more than 1 percent, far less than what was required to pass the electoral barrier (4 percent in 1993 and 5 percent in 1995). As non-Latvians constitute about 20 percent of voters, we can estimate that 5 to 7 percent of the Russian-speaking citizens are inclined to vote for "Russian" lists. As the 1993 and 1995 lists were so different in composition and profile, it seems that this holds true almost irrespective of the Russian list's program and candidates. This indicates that the "Russian idea" does not enjoy great support in Latvia. To be sure, neither Russian list contained any well-known names; this partially explains their conspicuous lack of success, but obviously other mechanisms were at work as well.

Only two lists other than the Russian list detailed provisions on this issue in their pre-election programs: on the far right, the radical nationalist party For Fatherland and Freedom (FF) favored speedy "latvification" of the educational system and further extension of special rights for citizens in the fields of employment, social protection, and so forth. The center-oriented Popular Concord party (PCP), on the other hand, campaigned on a platform of broad cultural autonomy for minorities and a removal of restrictions on the social, economic, and property rights of the non-citizens.<sup>20</sup> The reticence of the other parties about

20. Pre-election programs of all parties were published in *Diena*, Supplement, 27 September 1995.

**Table 5.** Electoral preferences of ethnic Latvian and Russian-speaking electors



Source: 26 September 1995

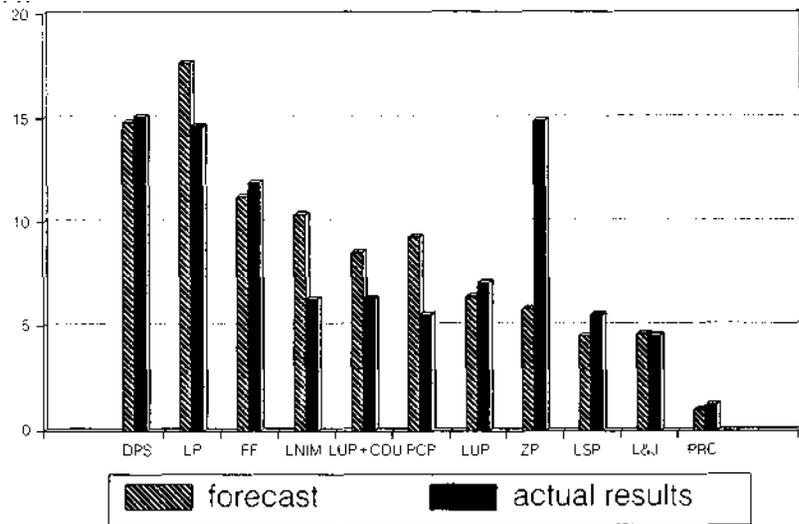
the ethnic issue seems to reflect the general confusion surrounding the official goal of one-community nation building and a desire to hold on to both Latvian and non-Latvian votes. An unambiguous stance on this issue could easily jeopardize this goal. Nonetheless, through statements of their leaders and other spokespeople most parties have developed distinct profiles on the ethnic issue easily identifiable to the voters.

A pre-election survey showed that the electoral preferences of Latvian and Russian-speaking citizens differed greatly (table 5). In most cases this survey fairly accurately forecast the actual outcome of the election (table 6). Yoachim Zigerist's Popular Movement For Latvia (ZP) did better than predicted because of the official media's strongly negative attitudes toward this populist party, which discouraged its supporters from admitting their intention to vote for it, even in a secret survey.

The geographical distribution of votes differed more for some parties than for others (table 7).<sup>21</sup> When arranged according to a criterion of territorial variation, the parties fall into four groups.

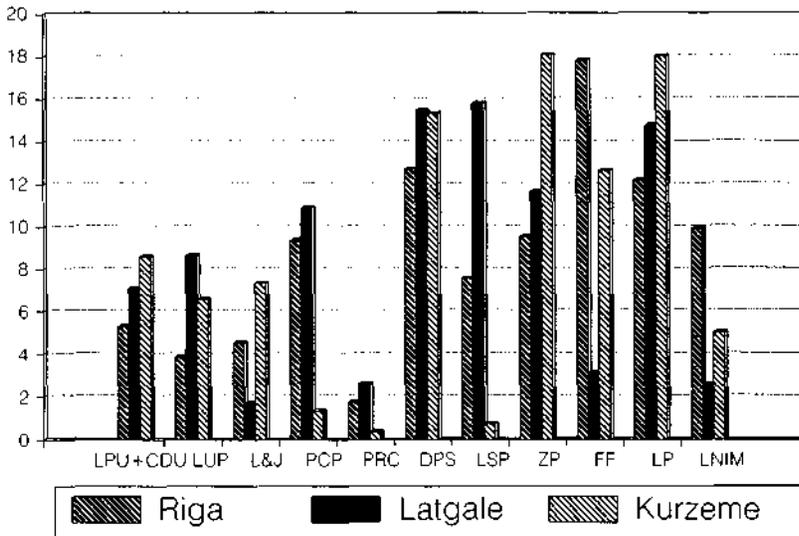
21. All election data are from *Latvijas Republikas 6. Saeimas vešanas* (Riga: Central Electoral Commission, 1995).

**Table 6.** Forecasted and actual results of 1995 parliamentary elections in Latvia



**Table 7.** Results of parliamentary elections in some electoral districts, 1995.

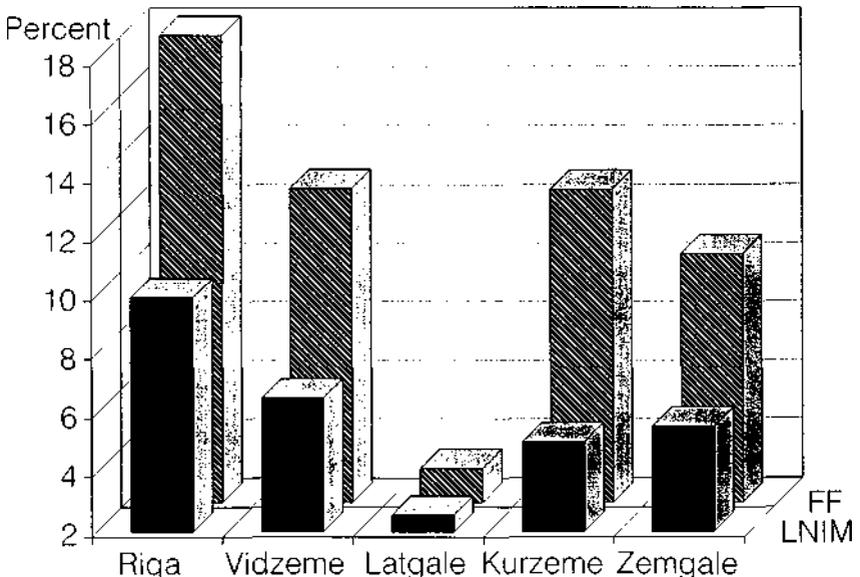
Percent



## RADICAL NATIONALIST PARTIES

For Fatherland and Freedom and a coalition (comprised of the National Conservative party, Latvian National Independence Movement, and the Latvian Green party) led by Latvian National Independence Movement (LNIM) received a negligible number of votes in Latgale where Latvians have been living side by side with Russians, Poles, Jews, and Byelorussians for centuries (table 8). Nationalistic slogans clearly did not carry far. These two parties also gained relatively little support in predominantly rural districts where Latvians constitute an overwhelming majority of the population. Their best showing was in historically multiethnic Riga, probably because ethnic Latvians in Riga encounter more Russians in their daily life than do rural people. Competition for prestigious jobs is harsher, and conflicts at the everyday level arise more frequently. Regardless of whether this explanation is true, one can conclude that the educated classes of Latvians (most of whom live in the capital) on the average are more nationalistically minded than is the rural population.

**Table 8.** Votes for radical nationalistic lists by electoral districts, 1995.



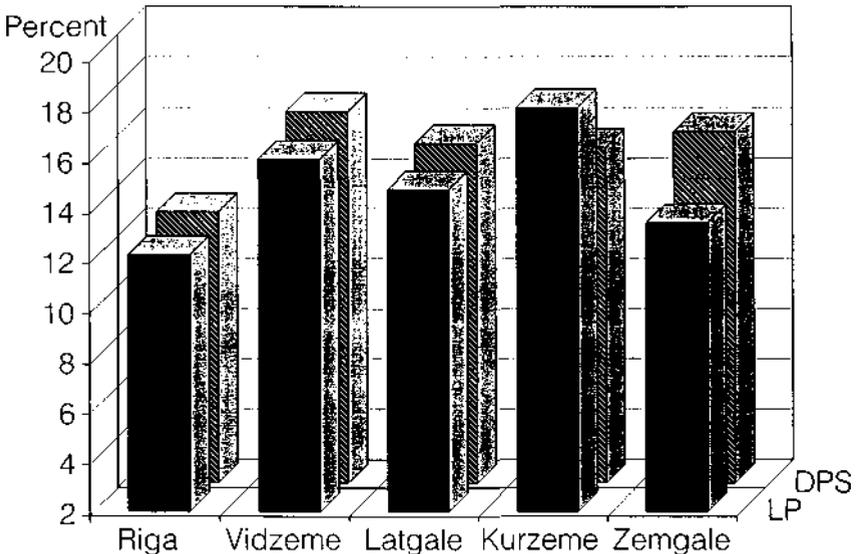
## MODERATE LATVIAN PARTIES

"Latvian Path" (LP) and Democratic party "Saimnieks" (DPS) expressed nationalistic ideas much less strongly than did the radical nationalists and primarily concentrated on economic issues in their pre-election campaign. Their votes, of all parties, were most evenly distributed nationwide (table 9). These parties had the largest number of popular individuals on their lists, a fact probably crucial to their success. Their slight overrepresentation in the countryside possibly reflects the greater reverence toward charismatic leaders in rural districts.

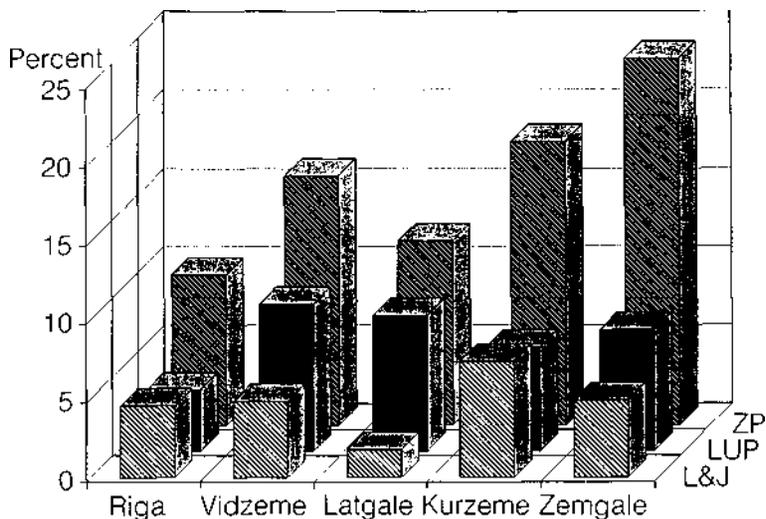
## LEFTIST/NATIONALIST PARTIES

Several lists combined overt leftist ideology with strong nationalist tendencies. Among them, the Latvian Unity party (LUP) surged past its main competitor, the "Labor & Justice" coalition (LJ) (comprised of the Latvian Democratic party, the Latvian Social-Democratic Workers' party, and the party of Deceived Investors "Justice"), with which it shares the same pool of potential voters (table 10). In addition, the new For Latvia-Popular Movement (ZP) led by Zigerist enjoyed a striking

**Table 9.** *Vote for liberal, moderate nationalistic lists by electoral districts, 1995*



**Table 10.** *Vote for leftist and populist nationalistic parties by electoral districts*



success, receiving the second largest number of votes among all parties. The strategies and tactics of this party very much resemble those employed by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic party (LDPSS) in Russia. Even though its overt rhetoric is rightist, we group it with the leftist/nationalist parties because an implementation of its populist promises necessarily would require a large degree of state intervention in the economy. Also, other ideas of this party are intrinsically leftist in nature. Zigerist's party gained its highest numbers of votes in the ethnically Latvian countryside. Its support was less spectacular in multi-ethnic Latgale. Least support for this party was found in Riga, probably because on average, the educational and intellectual level of urban electors is higher than on the countryside. Educated persons are more difficult to influence with populist methods.

In contrast, the Latvian Unity party, which had a number of well-known former kolkhoz chairmen on its list, was almost equally popular in all rural districts, including Latgale. In Riga, however, it received less than 5 percent of the vote. The most clearly leftist of these three parties—LJ—fared particularly badly in Latgale; in fact, its fiasco there was so serious that the party failed to overcome the 5 percent electoral barrier nationwide. This certainly does not mean that voters in multiethnic

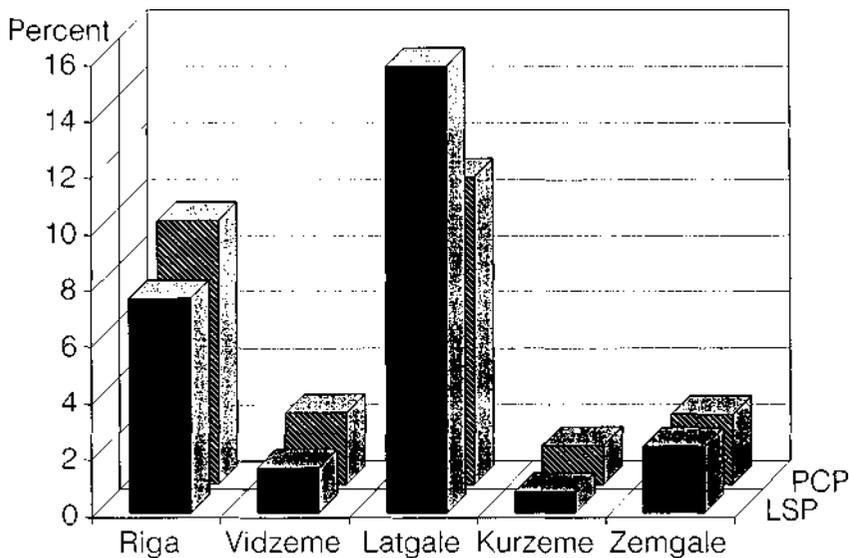
Eastern Latvia are averse to leftist ideas. Rather, Latgalian voters preferred leftist parties with other programs. The nonnationalist, "internationalist," Latvian Socialist party (LSP) carried the day in this district.

"NONNATIONALIST LISTS"

Only two parties explicitly reject nationalistic ideas. The LSP is a direct successor to the Communist party while the Popular Concord party was established by a group of former Popular Front leaders who decried the Front's drift towards nationalism. On economic issues PCP is liberally oriented to the left. Both of these parties passed the 5 percent hurdle solely on the basis of the support they received from the voters in the two "least Latvian" districts—Latgale and Riga (table 11).

The fate of individual candidates also indicates ethnic preferences among the voters. Latvian voting procedures permit a voter to make special marks ("pluses" and "crossings-out") by a particular candidate's name, thereby raising or lowering his/her position on the list. This procedure did not affect the ethnic composition of most parties' parliamentary group because non-Latvians were not on their lists. One or two non-Latvian names were on the lists of the moderate LP, and DPS, and

**Table 11.** *Vote for liberal and leftist anti-nationalistic lists by electoral districts*



Zigerist's party. All non-Latvian candidates of these parties received many more crossings-out than pluses. No non-Latvian candidates from any of these parties were elected, although some of them initially were listed high up. On the other hand, the "non-nationalist" PCP and the LSP had a considerable share of non-Latvian candidates. Those who voted for the LSP clearly preferred Russian candidates; only one Latvian is among its five-member parliamentary group. Three of PCP's six parliamentarians are Latvians, two are Russians, and one is a Pole.

## The Estonian Contrast

Only Estonia and Lithuania, besides Latvia, restored previous independence after the collapse of communism in the USSR.<sup>22</sup> Estonia, like Latvia, chose to give original citizenship rights to prewar citizens and their descendants only. Postwar immigrants from other parts of the Soviet Union had to fulfill specific language and residence criteria in order to qualify for citizenship.<sup>23</sup>

The Estonian solution to the citizenship issue has affected Estonian elections in fundamental ways. In 1992 ethnic Estonians made up approximately 60 percent of the total population; the Estonian parliament elected in that year—the first after the return of independence—was composed exclusively of ethnic Estonians, with no representatives of the minority population at all.

## THE RUSSOPHONES

Gradually, however, a certain proportion of minorities have been included into the Estonian legislature, the Riigikogu. In the 1995 Estonian elections, a coalition of two Russophone parties (United People's party and the Russian party of Estonia) garnered a significant share of the non-Estonian vote, 5.9 percent of the total, and gained six seats in the Riigikogu. To some extent, the improved Russophone representation in Estonia stems from the gradual inclusion of Soviet-era immigrants into the citizenship. Even more, however, it seems to reflect the growing political activity on the basis of ethnic solidarity among mi-

22. In Lithuania, however, the issue of state restoration was linked only formally to the treatment or the citizenship problem. When the citizenship law was adopted in 1989 all permanent residents of this country were given the chance to take Lithuanian citizenship.

23. See Paul Kolsto. *Russians in the Former Soviet Republics* (London: C. Hurst, 1995).

nority voters. Non-citizens in Estonia, unlike those in Latvia, were allowed to vote in local elections, and many of them have. In fact, in the 1993 local elections the Russians voted in larger numbers than did the Estonians.<sup>24</sup> Two characteristics differentiate the Russophones in Estonia from those in Latvia. Russophone voters and community leaders in Estonia are more active, and their political activity is to a larger extent channelled into support of "Russian" political parties and "Russian" issues.

How should these differences be explained? There is no simple answer to this question, but the following facts are obviously relevant. In Estonia, Estonians and Russians are to a large extent living in separate areas of the country. Estonia's Russian population is concentrated in five large cities: 43 percent of them live in Tallinn, accounting for about a half of the capital's population, while another 32 percent live in the three largest cities of the northeast (Narva, Sillamae, and Kõhlar-Jarve) where they make up about 90 percent of the population. In Latvia, the Russian population is distributed more evenly throughout the urban areas (to a lesser extent in the countryside), and the boundary between the Russians and the "natives" is not so sharply drawn as is in Estonia. Even non-citizen Russians are more deeply immersed into a Latvian environment than are the average Russians in the Estonian society.<sup>25</sup>

Further, Russians with ancestral roots in the interwar republic are much more numerous in Latvia than in Estonia, where a "Russian district" for all practical purposes means a "non-citizen district." In the Latvian city of Daugavpils (the second largest in the country) where less than 13 percent of the population are ethnic Latvians, roughly 70 percent of the residents have citizenship. Thus, there are many more "indigenous" Russians in Latvia than in Estonia.

As a result, the level of social integration between Russians and the majority in Latvia has always been higher than in Estonia. In close to 30 percent of all marriages, spouses represent different ethnic groups: therefore, a greater share of the population has a mixed ethnic origin. Finally, among the minorities in Latvia, bilingualism has traditionally been more widespread than in Estonia. According to the 1989 census, 21 percent of the Russians in Latvia were fluent in Latvian. In Estonia

24. *Estonia*, 23 November 1993.

25. Vello Pettai, "The Games of Ethnopolitics in Latvia." *Post-Soviet Affairs* (January-March 1996): 40-50.

only 14 percent of the Russians claimed fluency in Estonian.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the contrast between the majority and the minorities in Latvia is far blurrier than in Estonia. A less bifurcated society, one might think, ought to have lower levels of ethnic tension and greater scope for interethnic compromise and harmony, but, as noted above, the Latvian minorities are only minimally organized, and the majority has monopolized the levers of political power and authority. Obviously, a high level of social integration of ethnic minorities in a country does not necessarily lead to their successful political integration.

Finally, the rules of the game were in place much earlier in Estonia than in Latvia. The prewar Estonian citizenship law was reenacted in February 1992, two-and-a-half years earlier than the corresponding Latvian law. Thus, while the non-citizens in Latvia were left for a long time in a legal limbo, in Estonia early on they could formulate strategies and programs to rally around. Estonian authorities have also taken certain steps to structure the cultural and political organization of the Russian community.<sup>27</sup> In August 1991 the Savisaar government supported the establishment of the Russian Democratic Movement, which in February 1993 became the nucleus of the Representative Assembly, an umbrella organization representing the Russophones vis-a-vis Estonian state authorities.<sup>28</sup> A Round Table intended to serve as a forum for a permanent dialogue between the government and the minorities has been functioning since early 1994 as well. The Russians in Latvia do not have any comparable forums. A Russian community (*Russkaia obshchina*) was established in March 1991, but from the very beginning was treated with great skepticism by Latvian authorities, as were other Russian organizations. This community desintegrated slowly in 1993–94 due to lack of support from without and strong centrifugal pressures from within.

## The Kazakhstani Contrast

While dissimilar to Latvia in most respects, Kazakhstan strongly resembles it in its demographic make-up. Two sociocultural groups of roughly equal size confront each other. In fact, the share of the titular

26. *Natsional'nij sostav naseleniia SSSR* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1991).

27. Neil Melvin. *Russians beyond Russia. The Politics of National Identity* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995).

28. Nelli Kuznetsova, "Chto mozhet predstavitel'naia assambleia?" *Estonia*, 16 February 1993.

ethnic group in the total population is even smaller in Kazakhstan than in Latvia. In the 1989 census its percentage was 40 percent; while it had risen sharply by 1994, it, the only titular nation in a Soviet successor state, still does not form a majority, only a plurality (44 percent). The largest minority groups in Kazakhstan are the Russians (36 percent), the Ukrainians (5 percent), and the Germans (3.5 percent). The distinctions among these groups are largely superficial because all of them, unlike the Kazakhs, are identified as "Europeans" or even as simply "Russians" (practically all of them have Russian as their first language). In addition, these groups are largely clustered in the northern parts of the country (and in the capital, Almaty), which sets them apart from the Kazakhs not only culturally and linguistically, but territorially as well.

As in Latvia, three sets of national elections have been held in Kazakhstan in the 1990s—in 1990, 1994, and 1995. These elections have taken place under three different constitutions and electoral laws; new constitutions were adopted in May 1993 and in August 1995. The 1993 constitution stipulated that 42 of the 177 seats in the unicameral Supreme Soviet should be appointed by the president; the rest were to be elected in single-mandate electoral districts. In 1995 a new, bicameral parliament was introduced. The upper house, the senate, has 47 seats, 7 of which are filled by presidential appointees, while the remainder are elected indirectly by the regional assemblies in the twenty regions of the country. Elections to the lower house, the Majilis, are direct, but, as in the Soviet era, are conducted in single-mandate electoral districts.

## RUSSOPHONES AND EUROPEANS

Unlike those in Latvia and Estonia all permanent residents of Kazakhstan have been granted full voting rights. Nevertheless, the Europeans and other minority groups in this country, as in the Baltic states, tend to be clearly underrepresented in the national assembly. In 1994, 60 percent of the parliamentary seats were filled by Kazakhs. Only 49 Russians (28 percent) and 16 other Europeans (Ukrainians, Jews and Germans) were elected.<sup>29</sup> In 1995, 26 Kazakhs and 12 Russians were

29. *Central Asia Quarterly Labyrinth* 1:2 (Spring 1994): 3-4.

elected/appointed to the Senate, while 42 Kazakhs, 19 Russians, and 5 representatives of other nationalities took seats in the Lower House.<sup>30</sup> These figures show that in spite of the full political rights extended to the minority groups, the Kazakhs clearly dominate political life in the country. One obvious reason for this is the system of single-mandate electoral districts. In culturally heterogeneous societies, majoritarian democracy tends to leave minority groups grossly underrepresented;<sup>31</sup> in the northern regions, however, where Russians together with other Slavs compose compact majorities, they could, if they voted *en bloc* for European candidates, presumably be able to push their candidates to the top. But these areas also elect many ethnic Kazakhs.<sup>32</sup>

Obviously, other factors must be at work. One seems to be widespread political passivity and apathy among the minorities.<sup>33</sup> This passivity is in sharp contrast with the above-average level of political activity of the Estonian minorities but similar to the Latvian situation. In Kazakhstan this passivity is partly brought about by deep-seated mistrust in the political processes and institutions. Numerous reports of election fraud indicate that this skepticism is not unfounded;<sup>34</sup> the Kazakhstani electoral commissions tend to strike from the local ballots potential candidates who represent the interests of the Slav community, particularly if they lean toward Russian nationalist positions.<sup>35</sup> Another factor is a legacy of the Soviet system; rural people, mainly Kazakhs, still tend to see voting as a mandatory civic duty and almost all of them vote. The urbanites, among whom one will find most of the Russians, relish their new right not to participate in elections. Generally, it seems that most citizens of Kazakhstan, irrespective of nationality, tend to regard politics as the domain of the titular group. This attitude predisposes many Russians to vote for moderate, antinationalist Kazakh

30. Bhavna Dave. "A New Parliament Consolidates Presidential Authority," *Transition* 2:6 (22 March 1996): 33-37.

31. Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

32. A. B. Galiev et al., eds., *Mezhnatsional'nie Otnosheniia v Kazakhstane: Etnicheskii aspekt kadrovoi politiki* (Almaty: Institut razvitiia Kazakhstana, 1994).

33. O. I. Brusina, "Russkii vopros i gosudarstvennost' v Kazakhstane," in *Etnicheskii faktor v so vremennom sotsial'no-politicheskom razvitiu Kazakhstana. Issledovaniia po prikladnoi i neolozhnoi etnologii*, no. 94 (Moscow: Institut etnologii i antropologii, 1996).

34. "CSCE gives thumbs down for Kazakh elections." *Central Asia Quarterly Labyrinth* 1:2 (Spring 1994); and *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 11 January 1996.

35. Robert Kaiser and Jeff Chinn. "Russian-Kazakh Relations in Kazakhstan," *Post-Soviet Geography* 36:5 (1995): 257-273. esp. 269-270.

candidates, who have a fair chance of influencing politics at the center, rather than for Russian candidates, who, they suspect, may be easily marginalized in the fierce political infighting in the capital.

As a legacy of pre-Soviet times, power and authority in Kazakhstan, as in most other Central Asian states, run through time-tested clan structures. The three Kazakh superclans (*zhuz'es*)—the Great Horde, the Middle Horde, and the Smaller Horde—compete among themselves for positions and influence. If a member of one group manages to climb high in the hierarchy, he immediately seeks to promote his own kith and kin to prestigious positions. Groups without anyone in the bureaucracy to protect and help them tend to lose out. This is particularly true of the non-Kazakhs.<sup>36</sup> Further, the party system in Kazakhstan is poorly developed, partly because of retention of single-mandate electoral districts. A number of parties or proto-parties do exist, but the candidates' party affiliation is not indicated on the ballots and influences the outcome of the elections only marginally.

Nevertheless, the picture is not entirely bleak. The Russians and other minorities are certainly underrepresented relative to their demographic strength, but not as egregiously as in Latvia and Estonia.<sup>37</sup> The Russians also do not fail to notice that the system of presidential appointments—one of the most questionable aspects of the Kazakhstani political system from a democratic point of view—often enhances their representation. Of the seven appointees to the Senate in 1996, three were Slavs.<sup>38</sup> This lends some credence to President Nazarbaev's assertions that he wants to pursue supraethnic nation building and make all ethnic groups feel at home in Kazakhstan. The Kazakhification processes taking place may be partly the result of social dynamics outside of his control. This too contrasts sharply with the Latvian situation where the indigenization of politics is clearly state-orchestrated.

## Conclusions

The solution to the citizenship problem in Latvia has created political imbalances that impede the establishment of inclusive, representative

36. Pal Kolsto, "Nation-building in the former Soviet Union," *Journal of Democracy* 7:1 (January 1996): 116-32.

37. It is true that while the Russians make up only 36 percent of the population at large, their share of the potential voters is somewhat larger because the number of youngsters and children under voting age is much higher in the Kazakh group.

38. *Kuzakhstanskaia pravda*, 23 January 1996.

democracy. A stark discrepancy exists between the ethnic composition of the population at large and the body of citizens with voting rights. The large proportion of ethnic non-Latvians in the population makes a solution to these problems particularly urgent. The strong overrepresentation of ethnic Latvians in the citizenry tempts many political parties to exploit nationalistic sentiments one way or the other.

Most postcommunist states of Central and Eastern Europe have in recent years experienced a "return to leftism" (with successes of various leftist and socialist parties in parliamentary and presidential elections in Lithuania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Russia, and so forth). This wave has not bypassed Latvia, but has been strongly colored by the peculiarities of ethnic politics in this country. In Latvia, a straightforward return to socialism was hardly feasible since the communist regime of the past is perceived as almost synonymous with the "Russian regime." The nationalist mood remains strong enough to prevent a resurgence of communist nostalgia. At the same time, deteriorating living standards and the hardships of the economic transition produce fertile soil for various kinds of "alternative leftism." Leftist tendencies are represented in several peculiar forms in contemporary Latvia's political spectrum. On the one hand, some radical nationalist parties have a substantial leftist element in their ideology, despite their emphatically rightist phraseology. Their stated goals—such as the redistribution of wealth in favor of "the core nation" and the like—cannot be achieved without serious interference in the economy by "socialist" means. In addition, a number of overtly leftist parties appeal to the destitute parts of the electorate. Some of them reach out almost exclusively to the ethnically Latvian voters, while one party has an overwhelmingly non-Latvian constituency.

Although nationalistic aspirations gradually have lost emotional strength in Latvia, they have not disappeared. The principle of "a Latvian votes for a Latvian," which was clearly in force during the 1990 elections, has been replaced by "a Latvian voter chooses among Latvian candidates."

Ethnic nationalism represents one of the strongest challenges to sustained democratic development in the newly independent and newly democratized states of the former Soviet Union. We believe that such ethnic nationalism continues to be a strong factor informing Latvian politics today. It results in the systematic promotion of one's own ethnic group at the expense of others and the fostering of strong loyalties toward it. These feelings compete with and override loyalty toward the

state. Not only non-citizens, but also citizens of non-Latvian origin frequently claim they feel repulsed by and excluded from the society. This undoubtedly weakens their feeling of affiliation with Latvia.<sup>39</sup> Too, as noted, the predominantly Russian-speaking minorities have failed to mobilize. "Russian" parties are marginal and without parliamentary representation. The votes of those Russians who did vote in 1995 were distributed among three roughly equal groups: the leftist Socialist party; the center-oriented and ethnically mixed PCP, and moderate Latvian parties.

In Kazakhstan, the partial exclusion of the ethnic groups from the sphere of politics largely results from the failure of representative democracy to root itself. To be sure, the Kazakhstani constitution proclaims Kazakhstan a democratic state, and regular elections are held to fill the seats of the national assembly. To a large extent, however, democratic procedures serve as a facade behind which other and stronger social dynamics of promotion and representation operate.<sup>40</sup> The underrepresentation of minorities in Latvia and Estonia, we believe, stem from causes that differ from those in Kazakhstan. In these countries, the formal rules of democracy are indeed honored, but the democratic system taking shape is of a peculiar kind: along with the undeniable emergence of general democratic procedures, its image is that of a state of and for the majority ethnic group.

In political science literature the term "ethnic democracy" has been coined to describe political systems that combine elements of democracy and ethnic favoritism.<sup>41</sup> The rules and procedures of democratic processes in these countries have been skewed in favor of one ethnic-group, the titular nation, but even so, the precepts and practices of democracy are in fact being honored. Sammy Smooha defines ethnic democracy as a political system that combines "the extension of political and civil rights to individuals and certain collective rights to minorities with institutionalized dominance over the state by one of the ethnic groups."<sup>42</sup> In recent years, several researchers have begun to

39. See, for example, a letter of fourteen intellectuals to President Ulmanis, *Diena*, 7 February 1996, which triggered a broad public debate.

40. See, for example, Ian Bremmer and Cory Welt, "The trouble with democracy in Kazakhstan," *Central Asian Survey* 15:2(1996): 179-99.

41. See, for example, Yoav Peled, "Ethnic democracy and the legal construction of citizenship: Arab Citizens of the Jewish state," *American Political Science Review* 86:2 (June 1992): 432-43.

42. Sammy Smooha, "Minority Status in an Ethnic Democracy: the Status of the Arab Minority in Israel," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13:3 (July 1990): 389-413, esp. 389.

apply this term to Latvia and Estonia.<sup>43</sup> We believe that this extended application of the term is fully justified and supported by our research.

43. G. Smith, A. Aasland, and R. Mole, "Statehood, Ethnic Relations and Citizenship," in Graham Smith, ed., *The Baltic States. The National Self-Determination of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 181-205, on 201; and Vello Pettai, "Emerging Ethnic Democracy in Estonia and Latvia," a reworked version of a paper presented at the 15th Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies Conference. 8-11 June 1994; Graham Smith, "The Ethnic Democracy Thesis and the Citizenship Question in Estonia and Latvia," *Nationalities Paper*, 24:2 (1996): 199-216.