

## **The Influence of Party Competition on Minority Politics: A Comparison of Latvia and Estonia**

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The aim of the research presented in this article is to highlight differences in inter-ethnic political relations on minority issues in Latvia and Estonia, and how the varied structures of their political party competitions have affected the ethno-political landscapes of the two countries. Though Estonia and Latvia had similar starting points with their respective minority questions, the political elites in both republics have demonstrated different responses to this issue, and inter-ethnic political relations in Latvia and Estonia have demonstrated divergent paths. While the citizenship and language laws of Latvia adopted or amended by majority parties are still restrictive, those of Estonia are relatively less so. The Russophone minorities in Latvia have intensified their support for ethnic parties, while in Estonia no ethnic party currently has any seats in the national parliament. Moreover, Russophone residents in Latvia organize political rallies or movements more often than in Estonia.

The party systems of Latvia and Estonia are significantly important as an explanatory factor for this variance. Under the fragmented party system in Latvia, ethnic majorities' political elites exploit ethnic issues to mobilize support from Latvian voters and to win popularity over political rivals. This has generated spiralling dynamics of restrictive policies and political protests by Russian-speakers. In contrast, Estonian political elites function under a relatively consolidated party system and, instead, seek to incorporate Russophone voters to win elections. This has resulted in relatively few protests by minorities and ethnic entrepreneurs failing to mobilize within the political sphere.

**Keywords:** ethno-politics; the Baltic States; elections; party system; Latvia; Estonia.

Following the restoration of their independence, Latvia and Estonia appeared to share largely similar ethno-political circumstances and were notoriously dubbed nations of 'ethnic democracy' (Smith, 1996; Linz and Stepan, 1996; Smooha, 2002). Especially during the first years of independence, Estonian and Latvian hard-line nationalists had the upper hand in policy-making. Based on the ideology of 'restorationism', national elites considered the presence of its Russophone minorities<sup>1</sup> to be consequence of an

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occupation regime and therefore illegitimate. This view of the history of Russophone migration into the Estonian and Latvian former Soviet Union republics was used to justify repressive citizenship and language policies. However, there is no doubt that external pressure, from the Council of Europe, the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), has encouraged the Estonian and Latvian governments and the countries' political elites to liberalize some of their restrictive policies and laws since the 1990s.

Despite similar starting points, interestingly, the political elites in both republics have demonstrated different responses to this external pressure. In Latvia, ethnic majority elites intended to keep to a minimum the amending of the country's citizenship and language laws. On the other hand, Estonian majority elites accepted broader amendments of similar laws. As a result, the situation concerning minority policy and political activities in Latvia and Estonia began to diverge. For example, voting rights in local elections have never been granted to non-citizens in Latvia, whereas Estonia has granted voting rights to non-citizen residents (cf. Cianetti in this special issue). In addition to strict language requirements in the public sector, minority members who are not fluent in Latvian cannot be employed in nearly 1,300 private sector posts (Woolfson, 2009: 961), whereas Estonian minority policy regulates minority labour activities in the public sector only. Some indexes represent these relative divergences on minority policies between Latvia and Estonia. Table 1 presents several indicators from Minorities at Risk (MAR) in 2003 and Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX-III) in 2010, capturing the respective policies of both nations toward ethnic minority groups. According to these data, while Latvia's minority policy is restrictive towards ethnic minorities, Estonian minority policy is, by contrast, relatively less restrictive, especially in the field of educational/language policy and the right for political participation, though both countries share strict citizenship policies.

We also find striking differences with regard to minorities' political involvement. Figure 1 presents the number of large mass demonstrations that have taken place and the share of seats in parliament held by political parties claiming to represent ethnic Russophone minorities (ethnic minority parties) in Latvia and Estonia. This illustrates the similarities between the two countries immediately after each gained independence and likewise speaks of the vast difference between them currently in terms of ethnically-defined political relations.

**Table 1. Government policies' openness toward minorities in Latvia and Estonia**

Name of Index	Year	Fields of Minority Policy	Discriptive evaluation by datasets (and its numerical score)	
			Latvia	Estonia
MAR	2003	Restrictions on language instruction*1	Activity sharply restricted (3)	Activity somewhat restricted (2)
		Political discrimination*2	Neglect (1)	No discrimination (0)
		Economic discrimination*3	Social exclusion (3)	Neglect (1)
MIPEX-III*4	2010	Education	Slightly unfavourable (17)	Halfway favourable (50)
		Political participation	Critically unfavourable (18)	Slightly unfavourable (28)
		Access to nationality	Unfavourable (15)†	Unfavourable (16)
		Overall score	Slightly unfavourable (31)†	Halfway favourable (46)

\*1 The variable name on dataset is CULPO3. Score ranges from 0 ("no restrictions") to 3 ("activity sharply restricted").

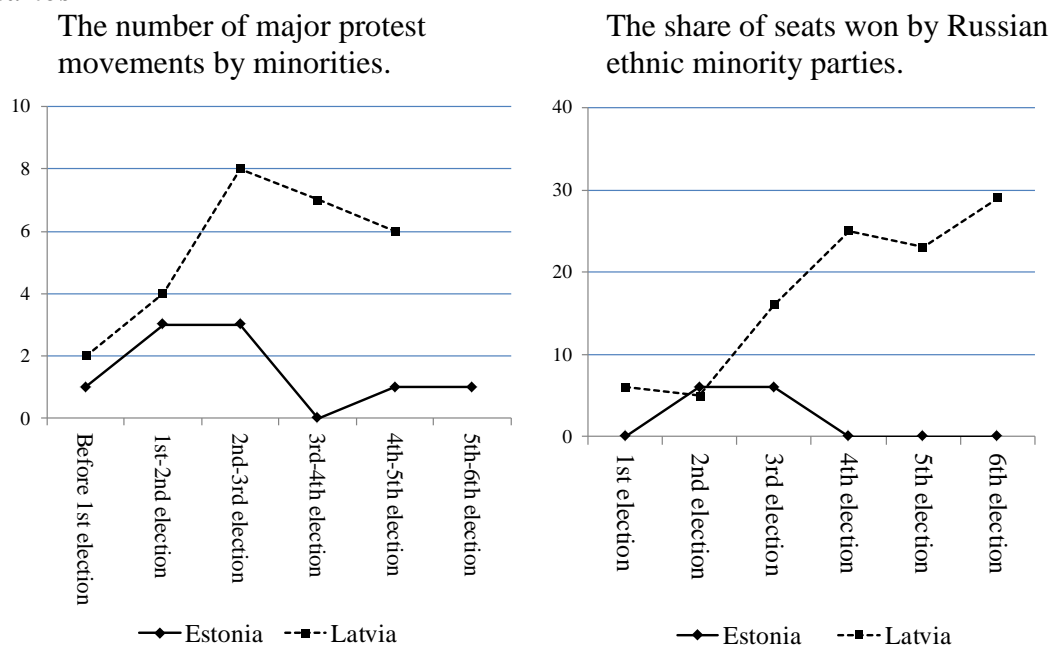
\*2 The variable name on dataset is POLDIS. Score ranges from 0 ("no discrimination") to 4 ("exclusion/repressive").

\*3 The variable name on dataset is ECDIS. Score ranges from 0 ("no discrimination") to 4 ("restrictive").

\*4 The MIPEX index scores governmental openness toward minority groups across several policy fields, from 0 (ultimately exclusive for non-citizens) to 100 (open and equal treatment for non-citizens). For example, the overall score in 2010 for Sweden, Germany, and Turkey is respectively 83, 57, and 24.

† The Lowest score in EU countries.

**Figure 1. Minorities' political actions in Latvia and Estonia: diverging political scenarios**



Source: Minorities at Risk 2010a, 2010b, Hokkaido University Slavic Research Centre.

Moreover, one study pointed out that while ethnic politics are no longer an important political agenda in Estonia today, it has remained the most important one in Latvia, even recently (Rohschneider and Whitefield, 2009). Research by Lauristin and

Vihalemm (2009) also shows that ethnic issues no longer feature as important topics in electoral campaigns and political debates in Estonia. In contrast, as noted by Zepa *et al.* (2005: 11), '[i]n Latvia's case, representatives of the political elite still continue to operate ethnicity to mobilize support for their own groups in elections. Thus, it becomes a main catalyst in promoting ethnic tensions.'<sup>2</sup> In short, both countries, despite their similar backgrounds, display contrasting elite interaction between the ethnic majority and minorities in terms of minority politics. Arguably, the rise of political activities by Russophone minorities and elites in Latvia is linked to the even more restrictive policies adopted by Latvian majority elites, which continue to estrange minorities in the country, while the gradual shift away from heated ethnic politics in Estonia is likewise connected to the Estonian political elites' actions affecting their minorities. This article argues that this can be explained by the different structures of political competition that have emerged in the two countries, which have shaped the potential for political (majority) elites to exploit ethnic antagonism.

The article proceeds as follows: section one begins by examining the similar starting points of both cases by revisiting their historical background, and provides a brief discussion of existing explanations of ethno-politics in the two countries.<sup>3</sup> Section two deploys the ethnic outbidding theory to provide the theoretical framework of our argument. Section three analyses party competition and its impact on policy-making in the area of minority policies, pointing to the different dynamics in the two cases. This section focuses on the time period from the end of the 1990s to the middle of the 2000s, when developments in the two republics began to diverge. In this period, Latvia and Estonia developed different structures of party competition, and differences in their party systems affected the behaviour of their political elites and ethnic entrepreneurs, when each group had to make decisions on minority issues. Section four scrutinizes minority responses to the different forms of exclusion from political process. The concluding section provides a summary of the core argument, again making a case for the importance of party systems to understand the dynamics of majority-minority political relations. This article demonstrates how the different structures of party competition in Estonia and Latvia affect the behaviours and decisions of ethnic elites, and how these interactions affect the majority and minority populations of each country. The article does not (and cannot) specify the origin of the Latvian and Estonian party systems' character *per se* because there are too many

factors that define it: party registration law, personal antagonism among elites, the pattern of party systems prior to World War II (and attempts at their restoration), the relationships between parties and private enterprises, and so on. Moreover, this article does not claim that ethnic politics are the *only* explanatory factor defining the pattern of interaction between the majority elites and minority political entrepreneurs in the two Baltic republics. However, what matters is uncovering variables that have not been considered heretofore and to propose alternative hypotheses.

### **1. Minority politics and historical, structural, and international explanations**

The pattern of ethno-politics in democratic (multi-ethnic) countries is a ‘complex dialectic of state nation-building (state demands on minorities) and minority rights (minority demands on the state)’ (Kymlicka, 2001: 49). In the conventional political process, this interaction is expressed in the interaction between the political actions by majority elites through the legislation and policy-making on minority issues, and the political movements by minorities through, or mobilized by, minority elites’ (or ethnic entrepreneurs’) actions. Hence, this article conceptualizes inter-ethnic relations on minority politics as interactional dynamics between the majority elites and minority elites, and focuses on their behaviours to analyse these phenomena. In practice, as illustrated in the introductory section, Latvia and Estonia have demonstrated divergent paths on this aspect, although they started from a very similar point in relation to their respective ethno-political situations.

It is still unclear which factors contribute to explaining the difference in interaction patterns of political elites in terms of minority politics. Although some scholars have noted the divergence of inter-ethnic elite relations between the two countries, they have attributed it to the personality of politicians (Kelley, 2004: 204 n21) or the sensitivity of the ethnic majority (Vogt, 2003: 89-90). These are vague and non-gaugeable factors. Others have argued that Latvia’s and Estonia’s historical backgrounds provide a better understanding of the common tendencies and situations regarding ethnic politics in the two countries immediately following independence (Mole, 2012; Ishiyama and Breuning, 1998). Latvia and Estonia share a similar historical background before and after the restoration of national independence, and similar historical developments are responsible for the presence of sizable minority populations. There are no significant differences between minority protection policies in inter-war and Soviet-era Latvia and Estonia either (Hiden, 2004; Smith and Hiden,

2012; Jarve, 2013). However, history alone is not sufficient to explain the present-day contrast between the two. Social substructures also do not provide adequate explanations for the differences in the behaviours of ethnic elites in Latvia and Estonia today. Some might argue that ethnic grievance leads to conflict between inter-ethnic political elites, but the two Baltic republics have not shown significant differences in this area. Currents in public opinion seem to account to some extent for common tendencies in the ethno-politics of these two Baltic republics, rather than the different pattern of majority and minority elite behaviour. According to the *New Baltic Barometer*, from 1993 to 2004, approximately 50-60% of ethnic Estonians have at some point felt that the Russian-speaking minority posed the greatest threat to their society, a sentiment not as strongly shared (approximately 40%) by their Latvian counterparts (Rose and Maley, 1994; Rose, 1995; 1997; 2000; 2005). Approximately 80% of Russophone minorities in Estonia and 70% of Russophones in Latvia thought that all residents should enjoy the right to be educated in their parents' language (Rose, 2000). Overall, historical and sub-structural factors have helped explain similarities between the two countries' ethno-politics, rather than their different dynamics.

Analysing the importance of a realistic incentive structure for domestic elites is essential in relation to the argument emphasizing the effect of international interventions and mediations designed to change the regional political situation. There is no doubt, as many researchers have pointed out, that EU conditionality encouraged Estonia and Latvia to liberalize their minority policies (Gelazis, 2003; Kelley, 2004; Galbreath, 2005; Vachudova, 2005). However, majority elites had considerable leeway in the process of turning external recommendations into national-level policies. In practice, in the accession process, each post-communist state 'responded differently to challenges of transposing *acquis communautaires* into domestic legislation' (Agarin and Regelmann, 2012: 444). There have been large and discernible differences between Latvia and Estonia in this regard, as I will demonstrate later. External recommendations from international actors thus cannot explain the variations between the two countries, although they partially explain the variance in each country over time. Rather, the behaviour of political elites with regard to minority politics under external pressure should be analysed against the background of their domestic political context. The following sections deal in particular with electoral incentives and structures of party competition, which have

received relatively little attention in scholarly literature as they apply to inter-ethnic relations in Estonia and Latvia.

## **2. Theory of party competition, elites' behaviours and inter-ethnic relations**

Political scientists have emphasized the importance of the role of political elite competition in creating ethno-political divides, as political elites often mobilize ethno-nationalist discourses to appeal to citizens in order to win elections and to grasp or maintain political power (Bates, 1974; Collier and Hoeffler, 1998; 2004; Hechter, 1986; Fearon and Laitin, 2000; Lemarchand, 2004; Collier *et al.*, 2005; Cederman and Girarding, 2007). In order to acquire political support and win elections, moderate and radical ethnic parties can exploit an ethno-political divide, overstating and outbidding each other by making ethnic issues salient in electoral campaigns (Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972; Horowitz, 1985). Even a single radical ethnic party can cause a spiral of ethnic outbidding, endangering the stability of a democratic system (*ibid*). These mechanisms of outbidding and elite mobilization have been found in many newly-democratized countries (Metcalf, 1996; Kitschelt *et al.*, 1999; Gurr, 2000: 163; Barany, 2005). Kitschelt (2001) even points out that political mobilization based on ethnic cues, especially during the 1990s, has been more important and salient in the post-communist new-democracies than in established democracies. Moreover, while ethnic outbidding also exists among ethnic minority parties, we are concerned here with political actors that have shaped institution-building, policy-making and the emerging political system directly. In the context of Estonia's and Latvia's post-communist democratization these have been parties representing the ethnic majority predominantly. We will allude to the effect this has on minority mobilization below.

Yet outbidding does not always occur where societies are ethnically-divided (Brubaker, 2004), and it has been discussed when and where it might occur (Chandra, 2005; Mitchell *et al.*, 2009). The variability in outbidding and overstatement may depend on the party system in question. This article extends the concept of 'ethnic-outbidding', not only understood here as a competition mechanism between a moderate party and a radical party (usually referred to as 'nationalist'), but also as competition among moderate parties where radically nationalist parties do not play a role. This is because moderate parties theoretically play a key role in democratic majoritarian rule, as they are usually caught in the middle between parties that take a more liberal stance on minorities and nationalist parties. This often puts them in a

position of casting the decisive vote. In practice, post-communist countries demonstrate a high divergence in their development of party systems, and many exogenous factors determine the effective number of political parties, electoral volatilities and stability of party competition (Kitchelt *et al.*, 1999; Lewis, 2001; Sikk, 2005; Tavits, 2008; Herron, 2009; Rose and Munro, 2009).

The key points that account for the degree of intensity in outbidding are this type of difference in the number of moderate political parties and the degree of intensity in which these parties compete for votes in a certain political sphere. Generally, minority-friendly policies tend to arouse ethnic majority voters' antipathy as they dilute the relative power and hegemony of ethnic majority groups in political and social life. Therefore, '[i]n many cases domestic politicians gain political capital from staunch positions against accommodating ethnic minority' (Kelley, 2004: 36). However, the strength of this effect on electoral results is supposed to differ depending on the structure of party competition. That is to say, a moderate party would hesitate to agree to policies that aim to accommodate minorities, anticipating a critical backlash when and where many other rival moderate parties would compete for electoral support from ethnic majorities. Under such conditions, these rival parties can rob the 'minority-friendly' moderate party of its political support by demonstrating an advocating attitude towards ethnic majorities and making ethnic issues salient in an electoral campaign. On the other hand, moderates may capture the opportunity to acquire political support from ethnic minority voters, where these are eligible to vote, by promoting less restrictive minority policies when and where there are few rival moderate parties, and when ethnic issues are less salient in electoral competitions.

The degree of 'ethnicized' competition among ethnic majority parties, in turn, provides the context for minority political action. It is important to note that not every ethnic minority group necessarily stages political protests and asserts its separateness in multi-ethnic countries. Many studies have demonstrated that political actions by ethnic minority groups and elites are strategic and rational, rather than intransigent and parochial (Gurr, 2000; Chandra, 2004; Birnir, 2007). 'Ethnic groups forego political action because they harbour no grievance, because they are reasonably satisfied with the status quo' (Esman, 1994: 17). In this regard, party competition affects the political activities of ethnic minorities both indirectly and directly. First, as we argued above, party competition forms its minority policies and the substances of



these minority policies affect minorities' political actions. However, if this type of regulations adopted by majority elites are restrictive, such 'ascriptive barriers to upward mobility—that is discrimination ... gives political entrepreneurs an eager constituency' (Fearon, 2006: 859). This is an indirect but primal effect of party competition on minority political actions. Second, if party competition is excessive and ethnic-outbidding mechanisms raise the nationalistic discourse, it puts added pressure on ethnic minorities and provides the rationale for ethnic entrepreneurs to mobilize their ethnic groups. Party dynamics (among majority parties) also collaterally but directly affect minority political behaviour.

The structure of party competition thus determines the incentive structure of each (majority) political party that plays a key role in the formation of minority policies in national legislatures. In turn, through minority policies as well as ethno-political rhetoric, party systems affect the political actions of ethnic majorities and minorities, and their political elites, through a complex set of causal mechanisms. In other words, party systems play a key role in forming political relations between ethnic majorities and minorities.

### **3. The party competition and minority policies in Latvia and Estonia**

#### **3.1 *Party systems in Latvia and Estonia***

Present-day Latvia and Estonia have developed markedly different party systems. Latvia still retains a certain fragmentation, characterized by severe competition among political parties which are economically centre-rightist and moderate in terms of minority issues, while Estonia has, since the late 1990s, acquired a stable and consolidated party system. In both countries restrictions on citizenship meant that the largest portion of the minority population was excluded from party formation and participation at the national level in the early 1990s (cf. Regelman's introduction to this special issue). This limited the impact of minority parties on the party system, with minority parties playing a visible and more important role in Latvia than in Estonia. In this section, we will first provide a general overview of Latvia's and Estonia's party landscapes, before we discuss the effect of party competition on policy-making on minority issues in each case.

As already stated, Latvia has a highly fragmented party system. There have been many political parties in the Latvian Parliament, or *Saeima*, competing for 100 seats in total. The Latvian political sphere has not witnessed stable, lasting political

parties. In general, the members of the electorate who bear the strongest nationalist sentiment tend to vote in favour of the For Fatherland and Freedom/Latvia National Independent Movement (*Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/Latvijas Nacionālās Neatkarības Kustība*, TB/LNNK hereafter). The For Human Rights in United Latvia (*Par Cilvēka Tiesībām Vienotā Latvijā*, PCTVL hereafter) and Harmony Centre (*Saskaņas Centrs*) are the two main political parties that represent Russian-speaking minorities' interests. These ethnic minority parties and their predecessors have won seats in parliament in the first elections in 1993 (see Figure 1 above). Between these two anti-minority and pro-minority camps, many political parties hold intermediate positions on ethnic issues. In the past 20 years, segments of the electorate with market-oriented attitudes and moderate values have been able to choose from among many parties. The pre-war Democratic Centre Party was revived after Latvia regained independence and changed its name to the Democratic Party Saimnieks (*Demokrātiskā Partija Saimnieks*) in 1994. Latvia's Way (*Latvijas Ceļš*) was founded in 1993 and it embraced many members of the Popular Front. They merged with Latvia's First Party (*Latvijas Pirmā Partija*); Latvia's First Party's *de facto* predecessor was the New Party (*Jaunā Partija*, JP). The JP in turn served to catapult the political career of ex-businessman and political oligarch Ainārs Šlesers. When the JP fell out of favour following several government corruption scandals, Šlesers founded Latvia's First Party. Šlesers' rival oligarchs, Andris Šķēle and Aivars Lembergs, had founded and taken over the People's Party (*Tautas Partija*) and the Union of Greens and Farmers (*Zaļo un Zemnieku Savienība*), respectively. New Era (*Jaunais Laiks*), founded in 2002, is the alternative party with economically centre-rightist orientation in Latvia. The important point is that there are many centre-rightist and ethnically moderate political parties in the Latvian party system. In practice, these parties had 'much in common in broad policy terms. This potential partnership, however, foundered on a clash of leadership' (Davies and Ozolins, 2001: 137–8), as these leaders did not rely on different social classes or ideological groups, but inevitably scrambled for votes from the same segments of the electorate. This meant that each centre-right political party had many 'rivals' within its particular range of the political spectrum.

In contrast, the Estonian party system has progressively consolidated (Vogt 2003; Sikk, 2005; Rose and Munro, 2009; Lagerspetz and Vogt, 2013). During the time period on which this article focuses, there has been less fluctuation and fragmentation among political parties consistently gaining representation in the

Estonian Parliament, the *Riigikogu*, where 101 total seats are available. One can describe each political party's orientation as follows. Pro Patria Union (*Isamaaliit*, also known as Fatherland Union) is an unquestionably nationalist party. The Reform Party (*Reformierakond*) is an economically liberal party. The Reform Party has a centre-rightist conservative leaning, though its attitude toward ethnic issues has not been as nationalistic in practice (Pettai and Kreuzer, 1999) when compared to the Pro Patria Union. The Centre Party (*Eesti Keskerakond*) and the Social Democratic Party (*Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond*) have been centre-leftist parties. The elderly, urban, low-educated and low-paid segments of the electorate tend to support the Centre Party. Many Russian-speaking voters tend to vote for the Centre Party. This is true at the national level, but it is important to note that the party is also the strongest at the local level where Russian-speakers form the local majority, such as in certain districts of the capital Tallinn and in the north-eastern region of Ida-Viru county. Conversely, youths, countryside residents, and the well-educated among the electorate tend to support the Social Democratic Party (Lagerspetz and Vogt, 2004). In recent years the Social Democrats have received some support from Russian-speakers, but, though consistently represented in parliament and included in several coalition governments, the party does not enjoy high levels of support. The People's Union of Estonia (*Eestimaa Rahvaliid*)<sup>4</sup> is a rural-based agrarian party, which is also the case for its *de facto* predecessor, the Coalition Party (*Koonderakond*). Both parties share many similarities, as their support bases are located in rural areas and their managers and administrators during the Soviet era (*ex-nomenklatura* Arnold Rüütel of the People's Union of Estonia and Tiit Vähi of the Coalition Party) were leading figures in these parties (Pettai and Kreuzer, 1999: 154; Raun, 1997: 361). Each political party draws support from specific social or ideological groups and it should be noted that, unlike in Latvia, party support bases do not overlap. For example, there have been no significant conservative political parties with economically liberal platforms other than the Reform Party. A possible exception concerns the temporary appearance of Res Publica; the effect of this party on Estonian ethno-politics will be discussed later.

These different political competition structures crystallized in the late 1990s, prior to policy changes and disputes concerning the liberalization of minority policies and their citizenship law in the context of EU conditionality in both countries. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the differences in party systems generated different policies toward ethnic minorities. As we argue here, these different political constellations affected

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the decisions of key moderate parties on the minority politics dimension—key players in democratic rule—within the two countries regarding minority policies and associated amendments. The next sub-section explains the process by which political competition has affected ethnic majority elites' decisions with regard to amending citizenship and language legislation in the late 1990s.

### ***3.2 Policy changes and political parties in Latvia***

Ethnic politics in Latvia have evolved primarily around two policy issues: the question of post-Soviet citizenship and minority rights, specifically with regard to the role in public life, education and the economy of the Russian language. After the restoration of independence, the Latvian government adopted highly exclusive citizenship policies which deprived Russians of suffrage as nationalistic Latvian political elites considered them 'illegal immigrants' based on the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Therefore, whether or not to grant citizenship to all residents has been a major issue in Latvia, as this decision effectively determines the political influence of non-Baltics at the polls. Although a pro-minority party submitted an amendment plan, and the OSCE and the EU applied pressure on the Latvian parliament to liberalize the Latvian citizenship law, the Latvian parliament refrained from amending its citizenship law twice, in 1997 and February 1998 (Baltic News Service, 1997a; 1998b). The reason for this is that no centre-rightist Latvian moderate party fell in line with the proposals to liberalize the citizenship law and grant citizenship to Russophone immigrants and their descendant minorities. This fact demonstrates that Latvian moderate parties played a decisive role in preventing the amendment of the citizenship law in Latvia. Jānis Jurkāns, leader of the People's Harmony Party, commented on this reluctance among Latvian parties by noting that his party had blocked amendments to the citizenship law because it was 'taking care of its own interest as it might lose voters in case the circle of citizens is expanded' (*ibid*). That is, political elites were subjectively aware that their decision on this minority policy had an impact on their winning or losing votes. The situation changed in 1998 after multiple bombings of the Russian Embassy and public statues, coupled with the government's support of the nationalist event Legion Day (*Leģionāru piemiņas diena*) on March 16, and strained Russian-Latvian diplomatic relations. The centre-rightist Democratic Party Saimnieks, who were mainly supported by the business sector, began to support the amendment of the citizenship law, and to seek to improve

relations with Russia to protect their political supporters' interests. Prior to this shift, the Democratic Party Saimnieks had held the largest support of voters (TBT Staff, 1997), but when the Democratic Party Saimnieks withdrew from the coalition (the Guntars Krasts cabinet) and worked closely on its pro-Russian line, the party's public support waned (Davies and Ozolins, 2001). This is because, in the electoral campaign for the 1998 general elections, some parties criticized the Democratic Party Saimnieks' behaviour and expressed more nationalistic views in the course of the campaign (Council of Europe, 1998). The newly-founded People's Party voiced strong criticism of the Democratic Party Saimnieks (LETA, 1998a). Latvia's Way also did not support the Democratic Party Saimnieks, while TB/LNNK insisted for the naturalization process to proceed with great caution towards ensuring 'the protection of the Latvian nation' (LETA, 1998b). By this time, the Democratic Party Saimnieks were already seen as betrayers of the Latvian nation in the eyes of citizens, due to the other centre-rightist moderate parties' campaigns and mobilizations. The 1998 general elections saw the total defeat of the Democratic Party Saimnieks. The Democratic Party Saimnieks, which had been the strongest party in the 1995 general elections, lost all of its seats in parliament after the ethnic backlash mobilized by the other centre-rightist parties. In contrast, the new centre-rightist People's Party emerged as the clear winner of the election. These events demonstrate the difficulties and the political risk associated with accommodating ethnic policies in a highly fragmented political party system.

The dispute concerning the official language is another major issue. Following the 1998 general elections, the *Saeima* passed a new education law in October. The new education regulations required that all general schools switch to Latvian-only instruction as early as 2004. Only private schools were allowed to educate students in Russian (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1998). With the approaching deadline to switch to Latvian-only instruction, a great deal of criticism was being directed at the change in policy in 2003-2004. In spite of strong protests, the Einars Repše cabinet did not postpone the 2004 deadline. However, it compromised by introducing the "60-40 principle", which requires public secondary schools to deliver at least 60% of instruction in Latvian, while the rest of the teaching could remain in a minority language (mainly Russian). After this compromise in 2004, Repše was forced to resign from his post as prime minister and his party, New Era, was excluded from the incoming coalition government of the People's Party, Latvia's First Party and the

Union of Greens and Farmers. It should be pointed out that the three incoming government parties were known as “oligarch” parties; New Era in particular had stated its goal of challenging the “oligarchs”. This seems to indicate that ethnic outbidding was deployed by these parties not necessarily for ideological reasons, but rather strategically in order to oust a political competitor. An ethnicized dispute over education policy under the next prime minister, Indulis Emsis from the Union of Greens and Farmers, gives further support to this thesis. Emsis sought political cooperation with the Harmony Centre, a Russian-speakers’ party, because the government was a minority government (42/100). The People’s Party instantly excluded the Union of Greens and Farmers, allegedly in order to exclude pro-Moscow parties (Ikstens, 2005), but with the result of effectively eliminating another rival party. The opposition party, New Era, also criticized the Union of Greens and Farmers. As a result, Emsis was forced to resign and the Union of Greens and Farmers failed to win seats in the following European parliamentary elections in 2004. Contrarily, the People’s Party succeeded in taking the reins of the government and New Era succeeded in returning to government power. This turn of events indicated that cooperating with the ethnic minority group allowed political rivals room to criticize and to play on ethnic discourses to mobilize support. Even in the 2006 general elections, these centre-rightist moderate Latvian parties, including the People’s Party, New Era, Latvia’s First Party/Latvia’s Way and the nationalist TB/LNNK, continued to be politically successful.

### ***3.3 Policy changes and political parties in Estonia***

The political doctrine of the Estonian independence movement advocated legal restoration of the nation’s status prior to the ‘Soviet occupation’. This idea took shape in the form of a new Citizenship Law implemented in September 1992. Under this law, only someone who possessed Estonian nationality prior to June 16, 1940, and whose parents possessed Estonian nationality, could acquire Estonian citizenship. This doctrine was similar to that of Latvia at the time. Since then, however, this law has changed through both international and domestic political debates.

Considering several sources of external pressure, domestic political actors in Estonia started to argue for the amendment of the citizenship law and played a decisive role in determining whether such a move would progress smoothly. Although there was harsh resistance from the Pro Patria Union concerning the liberalization of

the law, the *Riigikogu* passed the amendment of the citizenship law<sup>5</sup> in December 1998, thereby granting citizenship automatically to stateless children (Baltic News Service, 1998b). A major advocate for amending the citizenship law was the Centre Party and its leader, Edgar Savisaar. The Centre Party officially expressed its desire to liberalize the Citizenship Act in August 1997. At that time, some of the other parties faulted the Centre Party's stance, claiming that the party was also trying to gain votes from Russian-speaking minorities (Baltic News Service, 1997b). Estonian politicians acknowledged that the amendment of this law was caught up in the struggle for votes. Centre-rightist parties, namely the Coalition Party and the Reform Party, played a key role at this time because the Centre Party and the other Russian ethnic party could not gain a simple majority in the *Riigikogu* with their seats alone. At this point, the critical juncture for amending the law was the agreement of the members of the Coalition Party and the Reform Party. As they held a centre position on the ethnic issues spectrum, their position on the amendment would be the deciding factor in the change of citizenship policies. The Reform Party eased party restrictions and allowed deputies to individually decide whether to support or oppose the motion. The Coalition Party formally changed its policy stance in a party congress held in October 1998, stating that it would support the amendment plan (Santana, 1998). For the Coalition Party and the Reform Party, there was no great risk that they would be criticized on ethnic issues, as policy arguments and criticism over ethnic issues were not featured as major areas of concern.<sup>6</sup>

One language issue that did cause controversy was the regulation of fluency in the Estonian language in the private sector. In February 1999, the amendment of the Estonian language law was passed at the initiative of the nationalist group Pro Patria Union. The amended language law required that the Estonian language be used even in the internal operations of private enterprises. This amended law directly antagonized minorities and helped Russian ethnic parties win seats in elections held the following March. International organizations responded with their own concerns. The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, van der Stoep, visited Estonia in June of that year and the EU demanded that Estonia postpone the enactment of language regulation in the private sector.

External pressures encouraged Estonian political and administrative elites to readjust restrictions in the language laws. At the time, the Russian ethnic party, United People's Party of Estonia (*Eestimaa Ühendatud Rahvapartei*) and the Centre

Party held 34 seats in parliament, and the nationalist Pro Patria Union held 18 seats. Accordingly, the decisions of the Social Democratic Party and the Reform Party, who had a total of 36 seats between them, were key to whether this new amendment would pass (the People's Union of Estonia did not have many seats at the time). Both parties did not seem to have any objections to the amendment.<sup>7</sup> Rather, many supporters of the Reform Party embraced the economically liberal-oriented political view and would welcome the integration of Estonia's market into the EU if and when Estonia joined. In the end, not only the MPs of the United People's Party of Estonia and the Centre Party, but also the MPs of the Social Democratic Party and the Reform Party, agreed on the bill containing the new amendment of the language law in June 2000. The final amendment abolished the language restriction in the private sector with no exceptions for the public interest.

After this process, parliamentary political parties in the conservative camp (especially the Reform Party) did not face any kind of ethnic backlash. As the majority of MPs supported the amendment, it would not have been beneficial for any moderate Estonian political party to criticize the other parties' agreement to amend the language law in 2000. Even if the People's Union of Estonia had criticized the Reform Party's agreement, the agrarian People's Union of Estonia could not have attracted the economically liberal supporters of the Reform Party. In addition, if the Reform Party had accused the People's Union of Estonia or the Coalition Party of betraying the Estonian nation, they would not have been able to attract the redistribution-oriented voters who tended to support the Centre Party, nor the farmers who supported the People's Union of Estonia. Instead, it was more advantageous to agree to the amendment and appeal to the Russophone voters to maximize their voting shares in future elections. It is especially apparent that the Reform Party sought Russophone ballots, as the Reform Party later merged with the Russian Baltic Party in Estonia (*Vene Balti Erakond Eestis*) (The Baltic Times, 2002; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2002; Pettai and Toomla, 2003).

This section has shown that the structural differences in political competition resulted in differences between minority policies and the behaviours of the majority elites of Latvia and Estonia. The intensity of competition among majorities' moderate parties is greater in Latvia, where the parties are more fragmented, than in Estonia. Whereas Latvian moderate parties have been under pressure to show their loyalty towards the Latvian electorate to maintain political support and win elections,



Estonian moderate parties have incentives to promote liberal amendments in order to gain further political support from minority segments of the electorate (when the gain is greater than the loss). This difference naturally generates diverse political reactions from ethnic minority residents. This topic will be discussed in the next section.

#### **4. Minorities' political reactions to their exclusion from institutional politics**

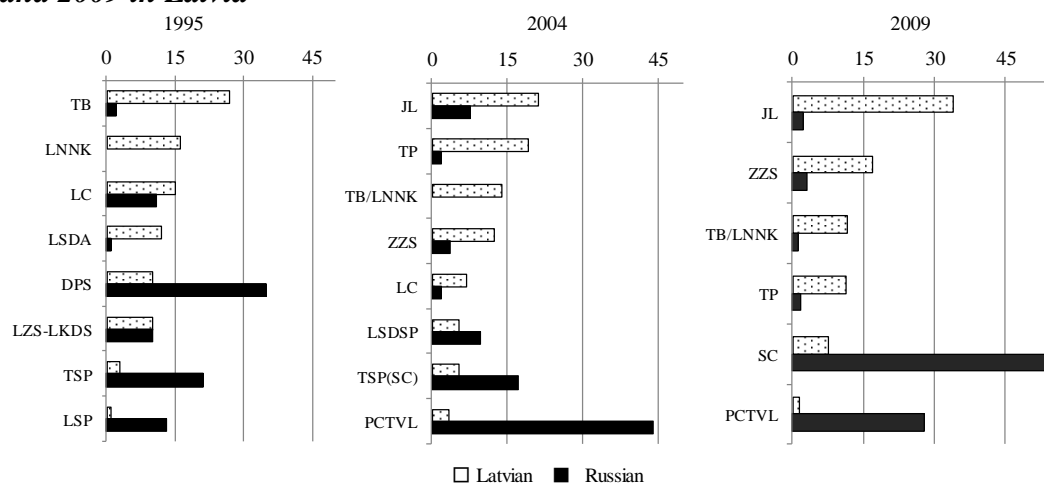
As argued in the theoretical section, the structure of party competition directly and indirectly affects minority political reactions through the implementation of minority policies. The restrictive ethnic policies adopted by majority elites in Latvia have fuelled and intensified political protest among Russophone residents, while Estonia's less restrictive policies—with the exception of the Andrus Ansip cabinet taking a hard-line stance on the controversial historical issue around the time of the 2007 general elections—have allowed for some, however minimal, cooperation among majority parties with different stances on minority policies, as well as between moderate majority parties and minority parties. The following comparative analysis of minorities' political responses to the political dynamics described in the previous section mainly focuses on the change in party support distribution among ethnic groups from the 1990s to the 2000s, and on several typical protest movements sometimes connected to minority ethnic entrepreneurs' actions.

##### **4.1 Minorities' political protest in Latvia**

Ethnic voting by Russophone minorities has intensified in Latvia. From the Russophone minority voters' perspective, no political parties except the Russian ethnic parties have traditionally been receptive to their interests. Figure 2 shows the significant differences between ethnic Latvians and Russian-speakers in terms of their attitudes towards support for political parties. It shows that the average Russian-speaking minority voter has continued to maintain support for Russian ethnic parties even in recent years. In fact, this tendency seems to have recently grown stronger. Comparing the support distribution of 2004 to that of 1995, we can clearly see that Latvians and Russian-speakers supported completely different parties. These segmentalized party preferences can be seen to have increased further in the 2009 data. Latvian voters preferred the People's Party, the Union of Greens and Farmers, Latvia's Way, New Era and the TB/LNNK. Russian-speaking voters preferred Harmony Centre or the PCTVL. There were no parties that were supported by both

ethnic groups.<sup>8</sup> Such an ethnically-divided situation contrasts sharply to that of Estonia.

**Figure 2. Party support rate percentage among each ethnic group in 1995, 2004 and 2009 in Latvia**



Note1: In calculating percentages, the author excluded those respondents who answered 'Don't Know' and those who could not vote (N = 216 [1995], 956 [2004], 378 [2009]).

Note2: The distinction of ethnic groups in 1995 and 2004 are defined by the New Baltic Barometer's readymade distinction based on respondents' primary language. The distinction in 2009 is also defined by the respondents' answers on the ESS4 (conducted in 2009 at Latvia) question, 'Language most often spoken at home'.

Parties: DPS: Democratic Party 'Saimnieks', JL: New Era, LC: Latvia's Way, LKDS: Latvia's Christian Democrats Union, LNNK: Latvian National Independence Movement, LSDA: Latvia's Union of Social Democrats, LSDSP: Latvia's Social Democratic Worker's Party, LSP: Latvia's Socialist Party, LZS: Latvia's Farmers Union, PCTVL: For Human Rights and United Latvia, SC: Harmony Centre, TB: For Fatherland and Freedom, TP: People's Party, TSP: People's Harmony Party, ZZS: Union of Greens and Farmers.

Source: Rose, 1997, 2005; European Social Survey Round 4 Data (2008).

In Latvia, ethnic confrontation within the conventional political process is reinforced by, rather than mitigated by, the behaviour of political elites. As this study has shown in the preceding sections, many political parties, including the centrist People's Party, the Union of Greens and Farmers, Latvia's Way and New Era, among others, have hesitated to support minority-friendly bills and proposals. This is not necessarily because they were all nationalist; more important were their—probably justified—fears of losing support from Latvian voters. However, such a situation has accelerated Russophone voters' disappointment with these moderate Latvian parties. This phenomenon has strengthened Russophones' political support for Russian parties like the PCTVL and Harmony Centre, thereby resulting in today's ethnically-divided distribution of party support.

Outside the electoral process, protest movements by Russian-speakers in Latvia remain active. ‘In response to antagonistic policies’, as Commercio (2010: 139) writes, ‘Russian Society also adopts a confrontational posture, which manifests itself in demonstrations and letters of protest’. He points out that while only one third of Russians (in Riga) think that there are *informal* personnel practices favouring Latvians, the majority (58%) of them feel that there are *formal* discriminatory policies (Commercio, 2010: 93). For example, around 1998, when the nationalist Krasts’ cabinet conducted several Latvians-first style policies, Russian political dissatisfaction increased and provoked several major demonstrations. One major rally occurred in March of that year. Most of the participants were elderly pensioners and other socially-marginalized people. About 10,000 people participated in the demonstration, which sought to draw the government’s attention to the problems of the Russophone minorities. Krasts’ cabinet decided to mobilize the police to suppress the uprising using rubber batons (Johnson, 1998; Jeffries, 2004: 192). In May and June 1998, Russian youth and teachers organized rallies and demonstrations to protest against restrictive Latvian language and education laws (Baltic News Service, 1998c, 1998d). Several Russian organizations and political parties played upon this sentiment. Finally, on October 3, the day of the general election, a fight between Russian demonstrators and Latvians broke out in central Riga (Minorities at Risk, 2010a).

We can see another example from the period 2003–2004. When the education reform was implemented, opposition from minority groups peaked (Galbreath and Muiznieks, 2009). Rallies and demonstrations protesting against education reform occurred mainly from 2003 until 2004. The first large protest on May 23, 2003 was initiated by Latvia’s Russian-Language School Support Association (LASOR), which announced that it would stage an empty school protest if the government did not postpone or reverse the school reform restricting the use of Russian in secondary schools (Baltic News Service, 2003). It can be argued that such demonstrations tend to happen not only because the participants are ethnic minorities, but also because they are dissatisfied with the policies implemented by Latvian party politics and the lack of responsiveness to their needs and demands as residents of the country. The demonstrators adopted a resolution in March 2004, which stated that the people ‘fear the loss of ethnic identity and [the] deteriorating quality of education after the forced change of the tuition language’, and some Russian ethnic parties supported and

utilized this view (Baltic News Service, 2004). The political disputes regarding language between ethnic Latvians politicians and Russian political figures, including Harmony Centre members, are still salient, as shown in a national referendum in 2011–2012 and in the related disputes on the status of the official language.

Russian ethnic parties nevertheless succeeded in garnering political support from the Russian-speaking minorities by participating in these movements. The Russian parties (Harmony Centre and the PCTVL) won 20.5% of the ballots in the 2006 general election, which was a higher share than in 2002 (19.0%). The party's political support has since grown even stronger (27.5% in 2010 and 29.1% in the 2011 general election). Confronted with a restrictive Latvian minority policy, many disillusioned Russophone voters strengthened their electoral support for minority parties and took part in various protest movements. The powerful minority parties endorsed the protest movements, making them larger scale, and mobilized Russophone ethno-nationalism, reinforcing the political power of minority parties.

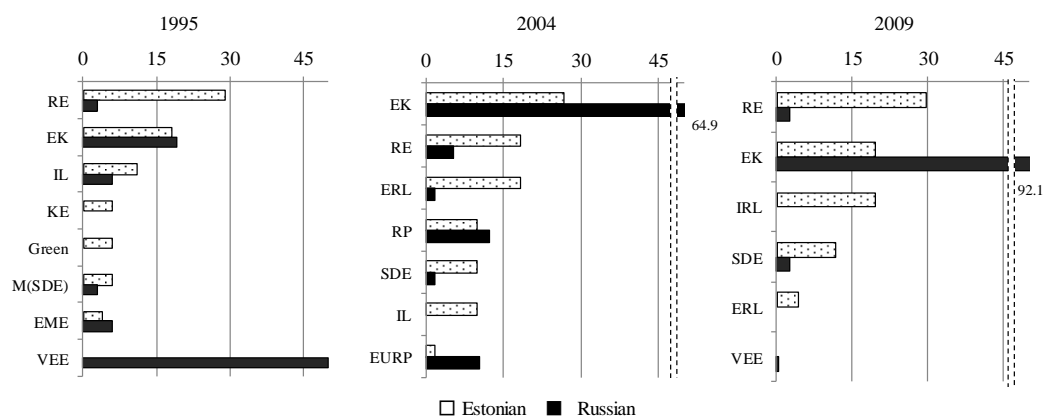
#### ***4.2 Minorities' political actions in Estonia***

The left column of Figure 3 shows the party support distributions for ethnic Estonians and the Russian-speaking minority in the mid-1990s. During this period, Russophone voters and Estonian voters supported different political actors, as in Latvia. Russophone voters favoured their own ethnic Russian party for expressing their dissatisfactions, protecting their own ethnic interests, and voicing their protests. In the 1995 general elections, the number of eligible voters increased, reflecting the growing number of non-Estonians who were acquiring citizenship. The minority Russophones' share of eligible voters rose to over 10% (Aklaev, 1999: 171) in that election, which contributed to the electoral success of Russian parties, including the United People's Party of Estonia and Our Home is Estonia (*Meie Kodu on Eestimaa*).

However, as noted above, the Russian-speaking minorities' discordant political actions began to abate in the late 1990s. The Russophone electorate stopped voting for Russian ethnic parties. Russian parties lost seats in parliament because many Russophone voters began to support the centre-leftist Centre Party after 2000. The Centre Party and its chairman, Savisaar, appealed to Russophone voters with their policies, through credit-claiming for protecting ethnic minorities' interests (Jeffries, 2004: 160–1; Nakai, 2009; Toomla, 2011: 198–203). Since the 2003 general

elections, no minority parties have been able to win seats in parliament. Figure 3 shows the change in Russophone voters' preferences.

**Figure 3. Party support rate percentage among each ethnic group in 1995, 2004, and 2009 in Estonia**



Note1: In calculating percentages, the author excluded those respondents who answered Don't Know and those who could not vote (N = 143 [1995], 698 [2004], 698[2009]).

Note2: The distinction between ethnic groups in 1995 and 2004 is defined by the New Baltic Barometer's readymade distinction and based on respondents' primary language. The distinction in 2009 is also defined by the respondents' answer to the ESS4 (conducted in 2009 in Estonia) question "Language most often spoken at home".

Parties: EK: Centre Party, ERL: People's Party of Estonia, EURP: United People's Party of Estonia, IL: Fatherland Union (also known as Pro Patria), KE: Coalition Party, M: Moderates, RE: Reform Party, RP: Res Publica, SDE: Social Democratic Party, VEE: Russian Party in Estonia.

Source: Rose, 1997, 2005; European Social Survey Round 4 Data (2008).

It is evident that the Centre Party has been consistently popular among Russophone voters. On the contrary, few Russophones support their ethnic party, the Russian Party in Estonia (*Vene Eesti Erakond*, VEE), according to 2009 data. Russian-speaking minority voters have generally reacted to changes in ethnic policy in Estonia by switching party affiliations (including by switching to the Centre Party). Some Russophone denizens even support for the People's Union of Estonia, the Social Democratic Party and the Reform Party. By striving to to make legislation (the citizenship law, education law and language law) more favourable to Russian-speaking minorities, several Estonian political parties have increased their popularity among Russophone voters. Many political parties in Estonia have tried to incorporate the Russian elites and other voters in their power base. Recently, the Social Democratic Party merged with the Russian Party in Estonia (Smutov, 2012) and this assimilation has contributed to increased support for the Social Democratic Party by

Russian-speaking minority. Today, most Russian voters can express their political will by supporting the political parties that Estonians also support.

Accordingly, organized political activities have consistently declined over the years. Although Russian-speakers did stage several protest riots, strikes and demonstrations in the early 1990s (see Figure 1 in the introduction of this article), subsequently there have been only small, sporadic rallies by Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia. There seem to be three main reasons for this. First, although Russian-speaking minorities still suffer from socio-economic disintegration compared to Estonians (Lauristin, 2008), their political disadvantage is smaller than in Latvia. Estonian minority policy has partially become progressively less restrictive. Second, Estonian moderate parties have been in a position to incorporate Russian minority parties/organizations. Third, the disappearance of radical and powerful ethnic minority parties has meant the demise of ethnic entrepreneurs who could mobilize minority protest movements.

However, this is not to say that minority unrest does not exist in Estonia. This became clear with the events of April 2007, known as the ‘Bronze Night’ or ‘April Unrest’. This exceptional movement had important implications for how Estonia’s minority policies have been discussed since. On the night of April 26–27, many Russian young people rallied, protesting the relocation of the historically controversial bronze soldier statue in Tallinn.<sup>9</sup> As the government forced its way through the crowd to complete the relocation, the Russian-speaking protesters turned to violence. The decision on the relocation had been made immediately after the general election in 2007, without any dialogue with minority groups. In other words, at that time, Reform Party’s Ansip cabinet was exceptionally nationalistic and Russian-speaking minorities protested against their nationalistic attitudes.

The present study can explain this exceptional minority-antagonizing behaviour of the majority elite. The important point is that the Reform Party, which had once attracted Russophone voters, changed its stance and mobilized in support of Estonian nationalism. In fact, there had been an exceptional change in the party system before the April unrest. Following the 2003 general election, the newly-formed political party Res Publica gained many seats and much broader support in Estonian party politics. Res Publica’s main political supporters were young, educated, rich and economically liberal-minded people. This meant that the Reform Party had a new viable political rival. This situation seemed to make the Reform Party become

more nationalistic. If the Reform Party had not promoted a nationalist discourse, most Estonian supporters who had voted for the Reform Party (but disapproved of its relatively accommodating position towards minorities) would have begun voting for IRL. This would have meant political death for the Reform Party. Although Res Publica merged with Pro Patria Union and formed the new IRL affiliation several months prior to the 2007 general elections, this did not mean the disappearance of a political rival. Thus, before the general elections in March 2007, Andrus Ansip and his Reform Party were determined to use the historically controversial issue of the bronze soldier statue in support of the Reform Party's electoral campaign (Smith, 2008; Ehala, 2009). It was a 'tactical choice in order to compete with the Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica for nationalist votes' (Lagerspetz and Vogt, 2013: 57).

Substantially high levels of minority protest through ethnic minority representation and mobilization, with the cooperation of minority elites, developed in response to antagonistic policies adopted by majority elites, who fought for their political survival in the context of the highly-fragmented Latvian party system. On the other hand, the Estonian consolidated party system mitigated Estonian nationalistic policies and discourses, resulting in a decrease of minority political protest.

## **Conclusion**

Today, Latvia and Estonia have completely different landscapes when it comes to inter-ethnic political relations, specifically with regard to inter-ethnic interaction between majority and minority elites. Latvian majority elites have adopted highly exclusive minority policies compared to other European countries, and Russian-speaking minorities have protested against this both inside (through minority elites) and outside of parliament (through mobilization by these elites). The Estonian government, which is usually composed of ethnic-majority, Estonian-backed parties, has shown some preparedness to amend aspects of citizenship and language legislation, and at present the Russophone minorities rarely engage in acts of political protest inside or outside of parliament. We can see the decline of ethnically-driven political rivalry among elites on minority issues in Estonia; instead, Latvia has experienced ethno-political confrontation, even though Estonia and Latvia had a similar starting point with regard to their respective minority questions. Such diverse situations concerning ethnic political relations in Latvia and Estonia cannot be explained by historical determinism, socio-economic substructures, or international

external pressure only (even though these may affect both states' common general tendencies). One of the main differences between Latvia and Estonia, which could explain variance between them, concerns the structure of competition in party politics.

Latvia has a highly fragmented and polarized party system and an especially high number of non-radical nationalistic Latvian parties. These moderate Latvian parties form coalitions and governments, and they pass and block laws to make (and to keep) ethnic policies nationalistic. In response, Russophone minorities have protested both inside and outside of parliament. Of course, there have been several pro-minority parties in Latvia's party system, but they cannot change the law and policies without the cooperation of the centrist parties, which do not offer their cooperation. It must be noted that the Latvian moderate parties' decisions have not been based on sincere ethno-nationalist sentiment, but on political survival. Estonia's consolidated party system has allowed majority elites to modify several policies to embrace more minority-friendly positions, and the minority groups have thus muted their political protest. Since Estonia regained its independence, some political parties (including Russian minority parties) have had minority-friendly policies (Sikk and Bochsler, 2008), but these parties have not received sufficient seats to change national laws by themselves. The decisions of some Estonian moderate parties have contributed to legal reform in Estonian ethno-politics. The crucial point is that these centrists' decisions were not based on their cosmopolitanism, or on a sense of altruism toward ethnic minorities. Rather, these decisions were simply linked to their own egoistic aims and political survival, i.e. the maximization of votes.

Latvian nationalistic minority policies adopted by majority elites have often triggered protest by ethnic minority Russophones. Russian-speaking minorities' disagreement and general dissatisfaction with Latvian minority policies have often been politicized and escalated with the mobilization of minority elites. They have voted for Russian ethnic parties and organized and participated in picketing and protest demonstrations. In contrast, the regulations and amendments adopted by majority Estonian political elites are more inclusive than those in Latvia. These amended rules have led to the softening of minorities' protests and intransigency, and have not provided rationales for ethnic entrepreneurs to mobilize. Minority voters have stopped voting for their own ethnic parties, and have discontinued participation in mass protest movements outside parliament.



This article has reviewed the ways and causal mechanisms through which party systems have defined majority elites' decisions on minority policies—in other words—majority elites' strategies for political survival. Such competitions and policies have, in turn, defined minorities' political reactions with minority elites in Latvia and Estonia. Considering the structures of political competition in Latvia and Estonia is indispensable for a better understanding of their inter-ethnic political relations.

### Notes

1. The primary minority group that this article mentions is Russophone or Russian-speaking minorities, who are not only ethnic Russians but also Ukrainians, Belarussians and so on. However, depending on given sources, this article sometimes uses the term 'Russian' to indicate these minority groups.
2. Author's own translation.
3. Indeed, while scholars have paid attention to the differences between these two Baltic countries and neighbouring Lithuania, the latter of which took a completely different stance toward the treatment of its ethnic minorities, post-independence Latvia and Estonia have widely been grouped together (Lane, 2001; Mole, 2012).
4. The People's Union of Estonia lost their seats in Riigikogu after the 2007 general elections and realigned in 2012 as the Conservative People's Party (*Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond*, EKRE) after merging with the nationalistic group.
5. RT I, 1998:111, 1827. <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/76625>. Retrieved: March 1, 2013.
6. The Coalition Party lost its seats in the 1999 elections, but its loss was not due to criticism over its ethnic policies, but rather to internal conflict. The party's *de facto* successor, the People's Union, succeeded in keeping its seats in parliament.
7. Although we consulted the reports from the Baltic News Service and all the articles in *The Baltic Times* around this time period, we could not find a single sentence that touched on the Reform Party's criticism of the proposed amendments of the language law.
8. An exception is LSDSP, but its overall popularity is low.
9. For the older generations and the Russian minority, this statue was the symbol of victory over Nazi Germany and fascism, but for most Estonians it symbolized the start of the (re)occupation of Baltic territory by Soviet Communists.

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