

# Emotion and Blame in Collective Action: Russian Voice in Kyrgyzstan and Latvia

MICHELE E. COMMERCIO

Russians experienced a dramatic change in status as a result of the Soviet Union's demise. Once the majority nationality of a vast federation, in 1991 they were suddenly transformed into minority nationalities of small, newly independent states. The following quotation alludes to the plight of Russians who reside outside the Russian Federation, but within the former Soviet Union:

The most obvious macrooutcome of the collapse of the Soviet Union is the end of the 'Soviet Man.'... Everywhere, nationalism and nationalist conflicts have grown more intense, as Abkhazis, Chechens, Tatars, and other minorities within newly independent states struggle for their own independence. *The Russians living outside the territory of the Russian Republic are now ethnic minorities in foreign countries, with all the tension that entails.*<sup>1</sup>

Voice, or political mobilization, is one response Russians have to such tension.<sup>2</sup> Though there are several explanations for different types of voice, the Kyrgyz and Latvian cases suggest that this variation is, in part, related to whether a minority has a concrete source of blame for its grievances. This article argues that the absence of a concrete source of blame accounts for amicable Russian voice in Kyrgyzstan, while the presence of a concrete source

<sup>1</sup> Jack A. Goldstone and Doug McAdam, "Contention in Demographic and Life-Course Content" in Ronald R. Aminzade, Jack A. Goldstone, Doug McAdam, Elizabeth J. Perry, William H. Sewell, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 205.

<sup>2</sup> I borrow the term "voice" from Hirschman. See Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

---

MICHELE E. COMMERCIO is an assistant professor at the University of Vermont. She specializes in comparative politics, and focuses on issues related to regime transition and ethnic politics in post-Soviet states. Her work appears in *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *Nationalities Papers*, and *Problems of Post-Communism*.

of blame accounts for contentious Russian voice in Latvia. Approximately 25 million Russians resided in non-Russian successor states when the Soviet Union collapsed. In some states, like Tajikistan and Lithuania, Russians constituted less than 10 percent of the total population, but in most states, including Kyrgyzstan and Latvia, the Russian population was sizable. In 1989, Russians constituted 22 percent of the Kyrgyz Republic's population and 34 percent of the Latvian Republic's population.<sup>3</sup>

Thirteen years after Latvia reinstated its independence, For Human Rights (Parliament's minority opposition faction representing the interests of non-citizens) issued a warning: "We are at a watershed: ethnic conflict might erupt, or genuine integration might emerge. For Human Rights did everything possible in order to prevent conflict."<sup>4</sup> The statement referred to potential ramifications of a policy scheduled to be in effect several months later requiring state schools for national minorities to teach 60 percent of classroom hours in Latvian—the state language.<sup>5</sup> Because it curtails the percent of classroom hours taught in Russian within these schools, the policy is an integral element of the government's strategy to Latvianize the country's education system.<sup>6</sup> While the authorities view the legislation in terms of reform, Russians consider it an attempt to force assimilation. The controversial policy sparked a rare surge of disputatious Russian mobilization that began in May 2003 and ended in September 2004. Russians in every non-Russian Soviet successor state have grievances that stem from formal policies and/or informal practices designed to promote the core nation, but they respond to perceptions of wrongdoing with different types of voice. This article explains why, given similar grievances, Russians in Kyrgyzstan exercise amicable voice while Russians in Latvia exercise contentious voice.

The analysis is based on qualitative, case-oriented comparative research conducted in Kyrgyzstan and Latvia.<sup>7</sup> The cases were selected on the basis of a similar, though not identical, historical context. Although Kyrgyzstan lacked a history of independence prior to the Soviet Union's demise and Latvia was an internationally recognized sovereign state during the inter-war period, the cases are analogous in many ways. First, there was evidence of nationalist sentiment among Latvians *and* Kyrgyz by the end of the Soviet era: the former

<sup>3</sup> Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras, eds., *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). See Appendix B for census data.

<sup>4</sup> Igor' Vatolin, "Zakon ob obrazovanii: nakanune revoliutsii shkol'nikov," *Chas*, 4 February 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Latvian was designated the Latvian SSR's state language in 1989. *Zakon Latviiskoi Sovetskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki o iazykakh*, 5 May 1989.

<sup>6</sup> The policy is an amendment to the 1998 law on education. *Zakon ob obrazovanii*, 17 November 1998; *c izmeneniunami vncennymi po sostoianiiu*, 5 February 2004, Article 9.

<sup>7</sup> For more on case-oriented research, see Charles C. Ragin, "Turning the Tables: How Case-Oriented Research Challenges Variable-Oriented Research," *Comparative Social Research* 16 (1997): 27–42.

manifested itself in challenges to decisions made in Moscow, the latter in the Kyrgyzzification of local institutions. For example, in the mid-1980s, Latvians organized a successful campaign to prevent Moscow from building a hydro-electric dam on the Daugava River, while Kyrgyz elites continued to implement affirmative action policies that generated an over-representation of Kyrgyz in select positions in the economy.<sup>8</sup> Second, because the Kyrgyz and Latvian republics were union republics, post-Soviet elites inherited all the trappings of statehood necessary for the implementation of nationalization projects designed to promote members of the Latvian and Kyrgyz nations. Third, the republics were demographically alike at the time of the Union's disintegration: the titular nation comprised 52 percent of each republic's population, while Russians comprised between 20 and 35 percent of each republic's population.<sup>9</sup>

The foundation of this article is a series of open-ended interviews with three groups of Russians in Bishkek and Riga: potential migrants, or Russians who at the time of the interview were planning to move to Russia; likely permanent residents, or Russians who at the time of the interview were planning to remain in their current country of residence; and representatives of local Russians. The "snow-ball" method of selection generated each sample of potential migrants and likely permanent residents. Because the interviews were open-ended, respondents identified numerous answers. Unless otherwise noted, figures are presented in terms of the percent of responses (versus respondents) citing a specific answer. Interviews with potential migrants and likely permanent residents were conducted between September 1999 and December 2000, while interviews with representatives of local Russians were conducted during the same period or between June and August 2005. The research was conducted in capital cities because these urban centers house headquarters of non-governmental organizations and political parties representing Russians, and are home to heavily concentrated Russian populations.<sup>10</sup> While in some instances it makes sense to disaggregate Russian minority populations into subcategories like place of birth or length of residence in successor state, here the central unit of analysis—Russians—is treated as uniform within

<sup>8</sup> For more on the dam campaign, see Juris Dreifelds, *Latvia in Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 55. For more on local *korenizatsiya*, see Jeff Chinn and Robert Kaiser, *Russians as the New Minority* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 220–221, and William Fierman, "The Soviet 'Transformation' of Central Asia" in William Fierman, ed., *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 11–35.

<sup>9</sup> Bremmer and Taras, *Nations and Politics*, Appendix B.

<sup>10</sup> Bishkek is Kyrgyzstan's most Russianized city: Russians constitute 33 percent of its population. *Naselenie Kyrgyzstana, Itogi Pervoi natsional'noi perepisi naseleniia Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki 1999 goda v tablitsakh, Kniga II, chast' pervaiia* (Bishkek: National Statistical Committee, 2000), 78. Though more dispersed than Kyrgyzstan's Russian population, Latvia's Russian population is concentrated in three cities: Russians constitute 55 percent of Daugavpils' population, 51 percent of Rezekne's population, and 44 percent of Riga's population. *Results of the 2000 Population and Housing Census in Latvia* (Riga: Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2002), 124.

each case because such subcategories do not affect one's ability to identify a source of blame for grievances.<sup>11</sup>

The first section of the article highlights critical insights from the social movement literature and explains how the argument presented here advances that body of scholarship. The literature's analysis of effective injustice collective action frames sheds light on the main question explored here, and its discussion of the role of emotion in contentious politics helps explain why the wave of contentious Russian mobilization in Latvia mentioned above began and ended. The second section explores alternative explanations for variation in type of Russian voice concerning out-migration, external actors, and differences in intensity of grievances. The third and fourth sections of the article analyze Russian voice in Kyrgyzstan and Russian voice in Latvia, respectively. The conclusion suggests that analyses of variation in type of voice must move beyond Ted Gurr's theory of causes of rebellion and incorporate Debra Javeline's argument about the relationship between blame attribution and costs of collective action.

#### INSIGHTS FROM THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT LITERATURE

The argument presented here advances the social mobilization literature in various ways. First, it shifts the focus from the emergence of collective action to variation in type of collective action.<sup>12</sup> Scholars who identify political opportunities and constraints as factors that shape social movements tend to analyze the appearance of collective action. For example, Charles Tilly suggests that "an increasingly powerful and demanding state [that] called forth a new form of politics" explains the manifestation of mass popular politics—demonstrations, strikes, and rallies—in nineteenth-century Britain.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Mark Beissinger argues that the Soviet state shaped collective action repertoires by delineating possible avenues for contestation: "State authority at some level is almost always involved in encouraging or perpetrating violence."<sup>14</sup> Scholars who work

<sup>11</sup> Barrington, Herron, and Silver disaggregate the Russian minority in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine along these lines to identify perceptions of homeland because there is a reasonable expectation that place of birth and/or length of residence in a successor state might influence perceptions of homeland. Lowell W. Barrington, Erik S. Herron, and Brian D. Silver, "The Motherland is Calling: Views of Homeland Among Russians in the Near Abroad," *World Politics* 55 (January 2003): 290–313.

<sup>12</sup> McAdam et al. emphasize the need to analyze variation in movement size, form, organization, and success rate. See Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, "Introduction: Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Framing Processes—Toward a Synthetic, Comparative Perspective on Social Movements" in Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–20.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Tilly, "Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758-1843" in Mark Traugott, ed., *Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 35.

<sup>14</sup> Mark A. Beissinger, "Nationalist Violence and the State: Political Authority and Contentious Repertoires in the Former USSR," *Comparative Politics* 30 (July 1998): 401.

in the political process tradition emphasize diverse grassroots settings where movements take root. For example, Aldon Morris argues that existing social structures such as colleges, personal networks, and activist groups “provided the framework through which the [black Southern student] sit-ins emerged and spread.”<sup>15</sup>

The literature’s emphasis on framing, or the process whereby movement leaders present ideas and sentiments in a manner conducive to group mobilization, furthers our understanding of variation in type of collective action. Scholars who stress the importance of constructed ideas and sentiments tend to explore the origins and purposes of identity within social movements, or the role of ideas and sentiments in prompting collective action. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald define framing as “conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves *that legitimate and motivate collective action.*”<sup>16</sup> In their expansion of this conceptualization, David Snow, Robert Benford, and William Gamson highlight the significance of injustice collective action frames. Within the context of an identifiable source of blame for grievances, an understanding of these frames sheds light on the issues analyzed below.

The argument presented here also advances the social movement literature by stressing the importance of specific versus abstract sources of blame in analyses of variation in type of voice. The literature suggests that highly charged injustice collective action frames play a prominent role in motivating contentious politics. A collective action frame is “an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one’s present or past environment.”<sup>17</sup> An injustice collective action frame defines a particular condition or situation as “unjust, intolerable, and deserving of corrective action....”<sup>18</sup> But as Snow and Benford point out, “The framing of a condition, happening, or sequence of events as unjust, inexcusable, or immoral is not sufficient to predict the direction and nature of collective action. Some sense of blame or causality must be specified as well as a corresponding sense of responsibility for corrective action.”<sup>19</sup> The injustice component of a collective action frame expresses moral indignation or righteous anger laden with emotion, and demands that human actors take responsibility for inflicting harm, distress, and suffering.<sup>20</sup> Effective injustice collective action frames are aimed at a

<sup>15</sup> Aldon Morris, “Black Southern Student Sit-in Movement: An Analysis of Internal Organization,” *American Sociological Review* 46 (December 1981): 764.

<sup>16</sup> McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, “Master Frames and Cycles of Protest” in Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller, eds., *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 137.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> William A. Gamson, *Talking Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 7.

specific rather than abstract target because the latter makes moral indignation and righteous anger seem silly, and thus not worth protesting. As Gamson argues, “Vague, abstract sources of unfairness diffuse indignation and make it seem foolish....When we see impersonal, abstract forces as responsible for our suffering, we are taught to accept what cannot be changed and make the best of it.”<sup>21</sup> An injustice collective action frame that fails to identify a specific target will not generate the level of emotion—be it anger, fear, desperation, or a combination of such sentiments—required for mass mobilization.

So the social movement literature helps us answer at least three questions pertaining to the Russian minority problem. First, why is Russian voice amicable in Kyrgyzstan but contentious in Latvia? Second, what caused the wave of Russian voice that swept Latvia in the early part of this decade? Third, why did this episode of voice end? Sidney Tarrow’s definition of contentious politics provides a launching pad for an exploration of the first question. In general, these politics occur “when ordinary people, often in league with more influential citizens, join forces in confrontation with elites, authorities, and opponents.”<sup>22</sup> According to this definition, Russian voice in Kyrgyzstan is not contentious. Non-governmental organizations representing Russians work within the established political system, avoid politicization, and frame issues in a non-confrontational manner; they do not seek to mobilize ordinary people to challenge the authorities. This does not mean, however, that Russians are satisfied with Kyrgyz nationalization, or elite strategies to promote members of the core nation.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, research suggests that Russians are offended by and dissatisfied with informal personnel practices that favor the Kyrgyz. Yet offended and dissatisfied Russians express grievances amicably.

The absence of a concrete source of blame accounts for the amicable quality of Russian voice in Kyrgyzstan. Russian grievances in Kyrgyzstan stem from informal personnel practices that promote the Kyrgyz. While an individual can undoubtedly blame a particular manager at a particular firm for condoning such practices, at the aggregate level Russians cannot identify a specific individual or agency responsible for instituting such practices. The government is not a legitimate source of blame because it implements accommodating policies. It is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for representatives of Russians to create an effective injustice collective action frame without a specific target. Lacking tools to generate the level of emotion required for mass mobilization, they choose to work with the government to create a society based on equal rights rather than to politicize their constituency.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>22</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>23</sup> I borrow the term “nationalization” from Brubaker. See Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

In contrast, Russian voice in Latvia is contentious: ordinary people join influential individuals to confront the authorities. Political parties and non-governmental organizations representing Russians frame issues in a confrontational manner and aim to politicize Russians. The existence of an obvious, undisputed, concrete source of blame—the government—explains the contentious nature of Russian voice in Latvia. According to Gamson, “If one attributes undeserved suffering to malicious or selfish acts by clearly identifiable persons or groups, the emotional component of an injustice frame will almost certainly be there.”<sup>24</sup> Gamson’s position is clear: an effective injustice frame requires a concrete target, even if that target is misplaced. Russians in Latvia hold the government responsible for the systematic implementation of antagonistic policies related to citizenship, language, and education. Although informal personnel practices contribute to grievances as well, representatives of Russians focus on the unjust nature of concrete policies rather than the unjust nature of intangible practices. At the aggregate level, Russians *can* identify a specific agency responsible for the implementation of hostile policies. In part, representatives of local Russians aim to politicize their constituency because they suspect they can stir up the level of emotion required for mass mobilization.

This brings us to the second question. The wave of Russian voice that swept Latvia in the early 2000s can be explained by “the power of emotions to trump or, at the very least, shape rational calculus.”<sup>25</sup> Ronald R. Aminzade and Doug McAdam argue that the typical formulation of the free-rider problem does not permit the power of emotion to influence individual evaluations of potential risks, costs, rewards, and gains. In their view, emotion often prevails over a rational cost/benefit calculation.<sup>26</sup> The Latvian case suggests that certain factors, like a threat to national identity and a positive collective action experience, can cause emotion to trump rational cost/benefit calculations.

Impending implementation of the education policy mentioned above triggered the surge of minority voice in the early part of this decade. As the date of execution approached, Russians became emotional—and vocal—about the future of their identity in Latvia. Anger, a necessary but insufficient emotion required for organized collective action, was widespread. Milton J. Esman agrees with Aminzade and McAdam’s assessment that anger must be accompanied by hope for the possibility of change in order for mass mobilization to occur: “Grievances alone are insufficient to mobilize protest at a level that threatens existing arrangements. To be effective, grievances must be associated with rising expectations, with credible hopes for personal and group improvement.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Gamson, *Talking Politics*, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Ron Aminzade and Doug McAdam, “Emotions and Contentious Politics” in Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, eds., *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 17.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Milton J. Esman, “Perspectives on Ethnic Conflict in Industrialized Societies” in Milton J. Esman, ed., *Ethnic Conflict in the Western World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 378.

Both a threat to the quotidian and a transforming event stimulated hope for change among Russians in Latvia. The commitment to reduce the percent of classroom hours taught in Russian within state schools for national minorities threatened expectations regarding routine activity. The authorities' determination to further narrow the public sphere in which Russian is used evoked pervasive fear among Russians that they would lose their already dwindling right to study in their native language, and ultimately have to assimilate. Aminzade and McAdam's assertion that "it seems clear that the dominant emotion animating the threat/action link is fear" is borne out by evidence presented below.<sup>28</sup> The first massive Russian protest, held in May 2003, was a positive transforming event. We might consider the large crowd of demonstrators a site "where claims about nationhood are put forth and where nations become imaginable and seemingly tangible."<sup>29</sup> These claims about the central importance of language to identity are part of a broader ongoing contestation of the meaning of Russian identity in Latvia.<sup>30</sup> Coverage of the protest in local newspapers and frequently visited Internet sites including BBC News, as well as the authorities' decision to refrain from suppressing demonstrators, generated hope for change among Russians. Credible hopes for improvement then sparked a wave of protest that did not subside until shortly after the policy's implementation.

Although the government neither stifled the demonstrators nor elected to satisfy their demands, the episode of voice did end. Various emotions, including satisfaction in the achievement of objectives, contribute to the cessation of contentious politics, but often "feelings of despair may lead people to abandon their early idealism, become cynical or apathetic about prospects for an alternative future, and focus their energies on individual pursuits and the demands of daily life."<sup>31</sup> In this case, satisfaction was absent from the protestors' emotional repertoire: collective action did not stop the authorities from taking a major step designed to further Latvianize the education system. This generated feelings of despair among Russians who, with the policy's implementation, returned to the rigors of daily life. While anger and hope for change motivated collective action, despair contributed to the cessation of contentious voice.

#### ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS FOR VARIATION IN TYPE OF VOICE

If Russian out-migration, or exit, is a form of contentious politics, then perhaps Russian voice in Kyrgyzstan is actually *not* amicable because Russians

<sup>28</sup> Aminzade and McAdam, "Emotions and Contentious Politics," 36.

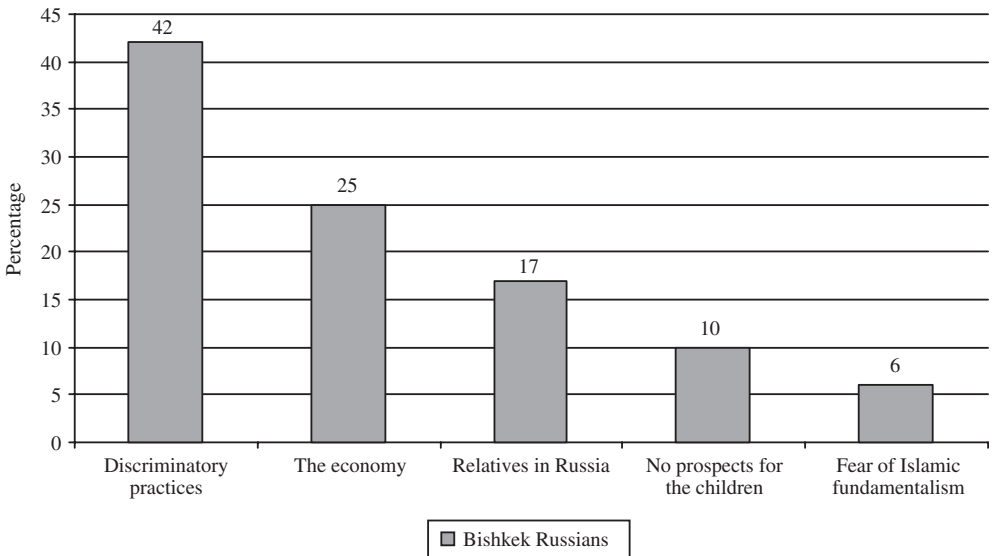
<sup>29</sup> Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 22.

<sup>30</sup> Abdelal et al. define identity as a social category that varies in terms of content (the meaning of a group identity) and contestation (the extent to which a group agrees on the specified content of the shared identity). See Rawi Abdelal, Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston, and Rose McDermott, "Identity as a Variable," *Perspective on Politics* 4 (December 2006): 695–711.

<sup>31</sup> Aminzade and McAdam, "Emotions and Contentious Politics," 44–45.



FIGURE 1  
*Motivations for Russian Exit from Kyrgyzstan*



Note: Percent naming this factor (more than one factor may be named). Number of potential migrant respondents = 115.

engage in contentious politics with their feet.<sup>32</sup> Albert Hirschman argues that dissatisfied customers will “exit” an uncompetitive firm so that the firm in question will incur financial losses; they then expect the firm to rethink its operations and eventually take remedial action.<sup>33</sup> In a political context, this suggests that a discontented minority will articulate dissatisfaction via out-migration, which can be interpreted as an expression of opposition to the state. Though we have seen significant waves of Russian exit from post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, out-migration does not appear to be a form of contentious politics. Research suggests that Russians migrate on a voluntary basis to improve their lives, rather than to challenge the authorities. Figure 1, which is based on interviews conducted by the author with potential migrants, indicates that Russian exit from Kyrgyzstan is based on push factors like discriminatory personnel practices, poor economic circumstances, a dismal view of the future,

<sup>32</sup> I borrow the term “exit” from Hirschman’s *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*. For more on Russian exit from Kyrgyzstan and Latvia see Michele E. Commercio, “Exiles in the Near Abroad: The Russian Minorities in Latvia and Kyrgyzstan,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 51 (November/December, 2004): 23–32.

<sup>33</sup> Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, 22–29.

and fear of Islamic fundamentalism, as well as pull factors like familial networks in Russia.

There are at least three alternative explanations for variation in type of Russian voice. The first is that minority voice in Kyrgyzstan is more amicable than it is in Latvia because Russians who were dissatisfied with the status quo have left Kyrgyzstan.<sup>34</sup> The level of Russian exit from Kyrgyzstan is higher than the level of Russian exit from Latvia: between 1989 and 1999, Kyrgyzstan's Russian population shrank by 34 percent, while Latvia's Russian population shrank by 22 percent.<sup>35</sup> Based on fairly constant life expectancy rates, these decreases are attributable primarily to migration.<sup>36</sup> Yet research shows that while Russians who left Kyrgyzstan were certainly disgruntled, Russians who stay in Kyrgyzstan are also disgruntled.

Data from fifty interviews with Russian likely permanent residents of Kyrgyzstan indicate that Russians consider themselves victims of nationalization practices that ban them from management positions in general, and certain professions in particular. When asked how the Soviet Union's demise affected Russians, the majority of responses (80.5 percent) emphasized negative consequences of informal personnel practices favoring the Kyrgyz (see Figure 2). Respondents claim that Russians are judged in the labor market first on the basis of ethnicity, and then on the extent to which they can communicate in Kyrgyz, which is a Turkic rather than Slavic language. One respondent described the adverse impact of informal personnel practices on Russian mobility as follows:

Life's gotten a lot worse for Russians—now, for the most part, everything is for the native population. At work they hire the native population. So yes, of course it's harder for Russians to find good work.... Of course there's oppression; Russians never occupy high positions. Kyrgyz occupy them.

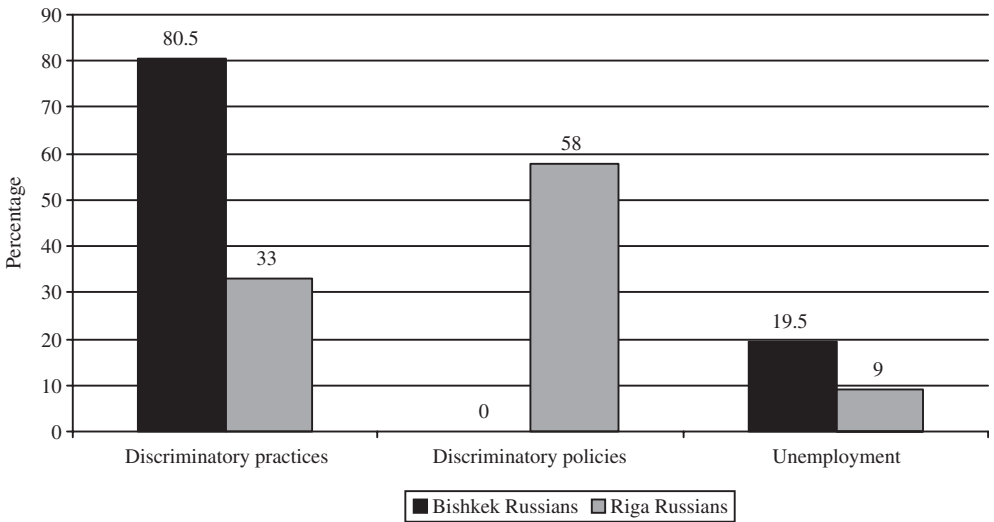
In a separate question, the majority (66 percent) of respondents answered affirmatively when asked if their rights were oppressed. Of these respondents, 67 percent identified the right to choose a profession as the most infringed upon, 19 percent asserted that the inability to speak Kyrgyz is frequently used as an excuse to replace Russian personnel with Kyrgyz personnel, and 14 per-

<sup>34</sup> Some scholars suggest that Russians choose to migrate rather than adapt to post-Soviet challenges like learning a titular language. See Igor Zevelev, *Russia and Its New Diasporas* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2001), 107. David Laitin makes a similar argument about Russians in Kazakhstan, who he claims may prefer to migrate rather than assimilate into a culture they consider inferior. See David Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 175.

<sup>35</sup> *Osnovnye itogi Pervoi natsional'noi perepisi naseleniia Kyrgyskoi Respubliki* (Bishkek: National Statistical Committee, 2000), 26; *Results of the 2000 Population and Housing Census*, 121.

<sup>36</sup> The 1970–1975 life expectancy at birth rate differs from the 1995–2000 life expectancy at birth rate by four and a half years in Kyrgyzstan and by less than two years in Latvia. See *Human Development Report 2000* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2000), 187.

FIGURE 2  
*Post-Soviet Changes*



Note: Percent naming this factor (more than one factor may be named). Number of likely permanent resident respondents = 90 (50 Bishkek Russians, 40 Riga Russians).

cent claimed that higher-education enrollment decisions are based on ethnicity rather than merit. This research suggests that Russians who remain in Kyrgyzstan are far from satisfied.

The second alternative explanation is that minority voice is contentious in Latvia because Russians hope European Union (EU) membership might compel Parliament to take accusations of human rights abuses seriously, and amicable in Kyrgyzstan because EU membership is not even a remote possibility.<sup>37</sup> But there is no evidence that assumed EU support motivated contentious Russian voice in Latvia, and there is evidence that the authorities did not respond positively to pressure from international institutions to implement accommodating policies. For example, while the Organization for Security

<sup>37</sup> Klara Hallik and Pal Kolsto offer a version of this argument. Hallik asserts that many Russians who considered Estonia's citizenship policy (which resembles Latvia's citizenship policy) hostile to the spirit of the EU hoped accession would bring a liberalized version of the legislation. See Klara Hallik, "Nationalising Policies and Integration Challenges" in Marju Lauristin and Mati Heidmets, eds., *The Challenge of the Russian Minority: Emerging Multicultural Democracy in Estonia* (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2002), 65–88. Kolsto claims that Latvia's desire to join international organizations like the EU and NATO represents "an important safety valve for frustrations in the Russophone community." See Pal Kolsto, *Political Construction Sites: Nation-Building in Russia and the Post-Soviet States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 120.

and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) did convince Latvia to amend its citizenship law, elites fought further concessions “despite immense pressure from the OSCE mission and the EU in the run-up to the mission closure in December 2001.”<sup>38</sup> Similarly, pressure from the United States, which fought for Baltic membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, generated “an equivocal pursuit by the EU of moderation in Estonia and Latvia, which soured its grand declaratory goals of minority protection set out in the early 1990s.”<sup>39</sup> Russians in Latvia were aware that international pressure did not prevent the implementation of antagonistic policies; they were not under the illusion that mobilization around human rights issues might be effective because Parliament did not want to jeopardize EU accession. And it is unlikely that they thought Russia would come to their aid should they take to the streets because although Russia has voiced concern over their treatment, it has done very little to improve their welfare.

The third alternative explanation is that minority voice is contentious in Latvia because Russians have acute grievances, and amicable in Kyrgyzstan because Russians have only moderate grievances. The data presented here speak to the nature of Russian dissatisfaction in both countries rather than potential differences in intensity of grievances, so the extent to which such variance may matter is beyond the scope of this article. But when thinking about this issue, it is worth noting that the social movement literature began to question the assumed link between grievances and voice in the late 1970s.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, while it is reasonable to assume that a group facing antagonistic policies will have more-intense grievances than a group facing accommodating policies, this supposition neglects the critical role that informal practices play in voice politics. Figure 2, which is based on interviews conducted by the author with likely permanent residents of Bishkek and Riga, reflects responses to the question: How has the Soviet Union’s collapse affected Russians?

The data show that Russians in both states have grievances but the nature of their grievances differs: discriminatory personnel practices contribute to grievances among Bishkek Russians, while discriminatory policies contribute to grievances among Riga Russians. Whether formal or informal, discrimina-

<sup>38</sup> James Hughes, “‘Exit’ in Deeply Divided Societies: Regimes of Discrimination in Estonia and Latvia and the Potential for Russophone Migration,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 43 (2005): 754.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 751.

<sup>40</sup> Scholars who emphasize this link include Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970); Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Killian, *Collective Behavior* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972); and Neil J. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior* (New York: Free Press, 1963). McCarthy and Zald question their claim that “an increase in the extent or intensity of grievances or deprivation and the development of ideology occur prior to the emergence of social movement phenomena.” John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory,” *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (May 1977): 1214.

tion has the same adverse effect on Russian mobility. All else being equal, it is safe to conclude that obstacles to mobility generate intense grievances in *both* countries.

### RUSSIAN VOICE IN POST-SOVIET KYRGYZSTAN

Organizations that represent Russians in Kyrgyzstan, such as the Slavic Foundation, Union of Russian Compatriots, Public Association of Russians, and Russian Cultural Center, have their work cut out for them: Russians loath informal personnel practices that promote Kyrgyz mobility. In addition to the questions discussed above, likely permanent residents were asked what must change in order for the welfare of Russians to improve, and almost half—43 percent—of the Bishkek Russian responses identified discriminatory personnel practices. There is a widespread perception among Russians that Kyrgyz personnel occupying influential positions condone hiring and firing practices that restrict their career choices. This consensus weakens attempts made by the government to forge ethnic harmony through accommodating policies. As one respondent put it: “Few Russians work in private firms—for the most part, Kyrgyz occupy management positions and they hire people of their nationality.”

Given widespread dissatisfaction, it is surprising that organizations representing Russians work within the established political system, frame controversial issues in a non-confrontational manner, and seek equal rights for *all* groups. The amicable quality of their rhetoric and tactics is due to the fact that Russians lack a concrete source of blame for their grievances. Representatives of Russians cannot credibly blame the government because it makes concessions to Russians. Not only did the government establish the Assembly of the Peoples of Kyrgyzstan, but it also facilitated the creation of a Slavic University and elevated the status of Russian from language of interethnic communication to official language.<sup>41</sup>

The Slavic Foundation’s goal is to preserve Slavic culture in Kyrgyzstan without infringing upon other cultures. According to one of its representatives: “We established the Foundation to preserve Russian language and culture in Kyrgyzstan, but we also work on protecting human rights, developing communication with our historical homeland, and addressing migration issues.... *But we do all of this at the constitutional level.*”<sup>42</sup> Rather than encouraging Russians to fight for their rights, the organization works with the government through the Assembly of the Peoples of Kyrgyzstan to foster a multiethnic society based on equal rights. This institutional forum allows representatives of the country’s minorities, who are excluded from the official political arena

<sup>41</sup> *Zakon Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki ob ofitsial’nom iazyke Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki* (25 May 2000).

<sup>42</sup> Author’s interview, 25 July 2005.

by informal personnel practices, to converse with government officials on behalf of their respective constituencies. In order to alleviate concern regarding the future of Russian education in Kyrgyzstan, the Foundation also initiated the building of a Slavic University that would conduct business in Russian but also provide ample Kyrgyz language classes.

The Union of Russian Compatriots, which seeks to protect Russian traditions and rights, is similar to the Slavic Foundation in terms of tactics and objectives.<sup>43</sup> Rather than politicizing Russians, the Union works with the Kyrgyz government, foreign governments, and potential investors to enhance the socioeconomic welfare of Russians by improving the local economy.<sup>44</sup> According to one former representative: “The only way to keep Russians here is to improve economic conditions...the economic task is more important than the political task because without an economic foundation it’s very difficult for people to resolve basic problems.”<sup>45</sup> Because the Kyrgyz government does not subsidize education, the Union maintains agreements with institutes of higher education in Russia which stipulate that Kyrgyz citizens who enroll in these institutes receive a stipend and do not pay tuition, room, or board.

The Public Association of Russians and the Russian Cultural Center also exercise amicable voice in their efforts to protect the interests of Russians. The former provides an informational forum, encourages Russia to assist Kyrgyzstan’s industrial development, and sends students to Russia on scholarships provided by the Russian government.<sup>46</sup> The latter aims to decrease the level of Russian exit through the preservation of Russian culture, language, and education in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the fact that Russians have grievances related to informal personnel practices that compromise their ability to earn a living, they do not exercise contentious voice. Instead, they rely on amicable voice because at the aggregate level they cannot identify a particular individual or agency responsible for the toleration of informal practices that privilege the Kyrgyz. In short, the lack of a specific target of blame complicates the creation of an effective injustice collective action frame. In contrast to their counterparts in Latvia, representatives of local Russians in Kyrgyzstan do not encourage mass mobilization.

## RUSSIAN VOICE IN POST-SOVIET LATVIA

Representatives of Russians in Latvia have exercised contentious voice ever since the Baltic state regained its independence in 1991. Non-governmental

<sup>43</sup> Author’s interview with leading representative, 25 July 2005.

<sup>44</sup> *Ustav Respublikanskoi Assotsiatsii Etnicheskikh Rossiian Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki “Soglasie,”* Bishkek, 1994, section 2.2.

<sup>45</sup> Author’s interview, 2 December 1999.

<sup>46</sup> Author’s interview with leading representative, 21 July 2005.

<sup>47</sup> Author’s interview with leading representative, 8 July 2005.

organizations and political parties representing Russian interests frame issues in a confrontational manner and seek to politicize their constituents. Leaders of these groups focus on grievances related to antagonistic policies implemented on a systematic basis by the government. An identifiable source of blame facilitates the creation of an effective injustice collective action frame that utilizes powerful emotion-generating words like *Negro*, *apartheid*, and *assimilation*.

Russians consider Latvia's citizenship, language, and education policies unjust. While most Soviet successor states, including Kyrgyzstan, adopted a zero-option citizenship policy in the immediate aftermath of the Union's disintegration, Latvia implemented a policy based on the contours of the interwar republic's citizenry. With the exception of individuals (and their descendants) who were citizens of Latvia on 17 June 1940, as well as a restricted group that can acquire citizenship through registration, everyone must naturalize if they wish to join the citizenry.<sup>48</sup> However, individuals who arrived after the Soviet occupation to work for the Party or security apparatus are not allowed to naturalize. The population is thus divided into citizens (who are predominantly Latvian), and non-citizens (who are predominantly Russian). Approximately 72 percent of citizens are Latvian, while 20 percent are Russian; less than 1 percent of non-citizens are Latvian, while 71 percent are Russian.<sup>49</sup> Many Russians avoid naturalization because they find it both difficult to demonstrate proficiency in Latvian, and offensive to acknowledge the Soviet occupation in an obligatory history exam and to take an oath of loyalty to the state. In general, Russians view Latvia's citizenship policy as unjust because it deprives non-citizens of electoral rights and access to many professions.<sup>50</sup>

Russians oppose Latvia's language policy because it aims to eliminate de jure and de facto use of Russian. Most employers require applicants to present an official certificate, which is issued by a government commission that evaluates proficiency in the state language, designating their level of proficiency in Latvian. This "grade" dictates admittance to a variety of professions. Elites have also widened the sphere of communication in which Latvian is required, classified Russian as a foreign language, and implemented the education policy discussed above. The 1999 law on the state language asserts that Latvian is *the* language of public and private organizations: transactions conducted in Russian within such organizations are illegal; employees of such organizations

<sup>48</sup> This group includes individuals who contribute in a unique way to society, as well as individuals and their descendants who have legally resided in Latvia since 17 June 1940, can claim citizenship of the first Latvian Republic, and have mastered Latvian. *Postanovlenie Verkhovnogo Soveta Latvianskoi Respubliki, o vosstanovlenii prav grazhdan Latvianskoi Respubliki i osnovnykh usloviakh naturalizatsii*, 15 September 1991.

<sup>49</sup> These data are effective as of January 2008. See the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, accessed on 28 June 2009 at <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/policy/4641/4642/4649/>.

<sup>50</sup> The Latvian Human Rights Committee posts a list of 57 restrictions placed on non-citizens on the Minority Electronic Resources (MINELRES) site: [http://www.minelres.lv/count/non\\_cit-rights\\_2.htm](http://www.minelres.lv/count/non_cit-rights_2.htm), accessed on 28 June 2009.

must use Latvian when their activities affect the public; documents submitted to public organizations must be in Latvian unless they contain urgent calls for assistance, and those submitted in a foreign language must be accompanied by a notarized translation in Latvian; and all languages except Latvian and Livonian are considered foreign.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, Russians view Latvia's education policy as unjust because it effectively bans Russian-speaking students from state institutions. The 1998 law on education stipulates that Latvian is the language of instruction in public institutions, professional exams are administered in Latvian, work must be written and defended in Latvian in order for students to receive an academic degree, and vocational training financed by state and municipal budgets is conducted in Latvian.<sup>52</sup> Students can study in other languages in private institutions, but these tend to be more expensive than public institutions.<sup>53</sup> And the opportunity to study in non-Latvian languages in state schools with national minority programs is now restricted.

Groups that represent Russians in Latvia focus on policies Russians consider unjust. Data from interviews with likely permanent residents suggest that Russians resent privileges given to Latvians in the workforce. Figure 2 shows that when asked how the Soviet Union's collapse has affected Russians, 58 percent of the responses emphasized discriminatory legislation favoring Latvians. Moreover, when asked in a separate question which rights, if any, were infringed upon, 34 percent of respondents stressed the right to choose a profession.<sup>54</sup> According to one respondent who decided to naturalize so she could keep her job with the postal service:

Our rights are oppressed. Preferences, especially in state institutions, are given to the native nationality—they hire Latvians and fire Russians. Language is one instrument of oppression....Even if they hire you, there are problems if you don't have a language certificate—the police come, they issue a fine, and you are left naked.

Russians expressed dissatisfaction with preferences given to the 'native nationality' in answers to another question. When asked what needs to change in order for the welfare of Russians to improve, 54 percent of the responses identified policies related to citizenship, language, and education.

Widespread dissatisfaction with concrete policies allows representatives of Russians to adopt contentious rhetoric and tactics, and this facilitates the

<sup>51</sup> *Zakon o gosudarstvennom iazyke*, 21 December 1999.

<sup>52</sup> *Zakon ob obrazovanii*, 17 November 1998, Article 9.

<sup>53</sup> Private institutions have the authority to determine payment for education. *Zakon ob Obshchem Obrazovanii*, 10 June 1998, Article 38.

<sup>54</sup> Though this was the most frequently cited infringement, Riga Russians stressed this less than Bishkek Russians because although they are unwelcome in the public sector, they do work in the private sector. See Michele E. Commercio, "Systems of Partial Control: Ethnic Dynamics in Post-Soviet Estonia and Latvia," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 43 (January 2008): 81–100.



creation of effective injustice action frames. Non-governmental organizations and political parties that represent Russians can legitimately blame the government because it implements antagonistic policies and makes few concessions to Russians. For example, although Russian Community and Russian Society seek to unite Russians on the basis of a shared culture, they do challenge decisions made by the authorities.<sup>55</sup> The former considers the state's rejection of the Russian language unacceptable. According to one Russian Community representative: "If they introduce a second state language, Russians would be able to speak, write, and study in their native language—and still study Latvian. But the rejection of Russian, which almost half the population speaks, is offensive and unacceptable."<sup>56</sup> This organization, which attempts to politicize Russians through civil disobedience campaigns, acknowledges the potential for radicalization:

Russians are becoming increasingly radical...they wait for the right moment to at least not support the state, if not turn against the state. We think that 10% will assimilate under pressure, 10% will migrate, and 80% will come to a radical position. Russians are strangers in Latvia because the state alienates them; it reminds them that they are strangers, invaders who must listen and obey. In appearance this is resignation, meekness—but only in appearance. At heart, we will not support such a state. There is a Russian proverb: nothing nice or kind comes from force.<sup>57</sup>

Russian Society, which exercises contentious voice via demonstrations and letters of protest, opposes the state's societal integration program because it considers the program's foundation—mastery of Latvian—a measure designed to force Russians to assimilate.<sup>58</sup> According to one of its representatives:

We disliked the initial program, so we criticized it severely. It was assimilation, and humiliating because it insisted that we prove our loyalty. Why must we prove our loyalty? Latvians don't prove their loyalty, why must Russians?...We don't consider the state's program integration, [we consider it] assimilation.<sup>59</sup>

Issue-based organizations also adopt contentious rhetoric and tactics. For example, a leading representative of the Association for the Support of Russian Language Schools describes the state's integration program as ethnocentric and assimilative:

Minorities must integrate, but the state's program reflects a very ethnocentric political course and is, in essence, a program of assimilation. We submitted

<sup>55</sup> *Ustav Russkoi Obshchiny Latvii (Riga, 1992); Ustav Russkogo Obshchestva v Latvii (Riga, 1996).*

<sup>56</sup> Author's interview, 10 October 2000.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Though this program addresses the need to protect minority rights, it identifies proficiency in Latvian as the means to achieve integration. See *Integratsiia obshchestva v Latvii: kontseptsia gosudarstvennoi programmy* (Riga: Upravlenie Naturalizatsii Latviiskoi Respubliki, 1999), 31.

<sup>59</sup> Author's interview, 4 October 2000.

changes to the program, but they didn't incorporate anything we proposed...we cannot support the notion of mandatory education in Latvian.<sup>60</sup>

Similarly, the Center for the Preservation of the Russian Language deems the state's integration program discriminatory, assimilative, and conducive to apartheid. According to one of its former representatives:

They offered representatives of Russians the opportunity to submit changes to the integration program, so we did. Our suggestions didn't oppress the rights of Latvians, but they did defend our rights in accordance with international standards. These modifications did not appear in the program. Instead, they adopted the most radical, anti-Russian program. We are categorically against it because it encourages assimilation, segregation, and apartheid.<sup>61</sup>

The Center also opposes the 1999 language policy: "We consider the law on language unacceptable because it is discriminatory toward Russian-speakers.... It is necessary to preserve Latvian because it is deteriorating, but not to the detriment of another language!"<sup>62</sup>

The Association of Latvian–Russian Cooperation, which represents permanent residents of Latvia with Russian citizenship, aims to normalize relations between Latvia and Russia, assist Russian citizens in Latvia, and appeal to Russia on behalf of its compatriots abroad.<sup>63</sup> According to one its leading representatives, the Association opposes "draconian measures" that force Russians to study Latvian:

We oppose the language law because it does not resolve linguistic issues in a civilized way. There is no need to restrict us, to forbid us to study in our native language. Our children must study Russian culture and be educated in their native language. Our language cannot be ignored.<sup>64</sup>

The Association's spokesman stated the following four years prior to—and perhaps in anticipation of—the 2003/2004 demonstrations: "A fight for our rights lies ahead. The harsher the policies, the harsher a fight for our language, culture, and rights."<sup>65</sup>

Political parties representing Russians in some capacity include the Russian Party, Socialist Party, Party of National Harmony, and Equal Rights Party.<sup>66</sup> The Russian Party aims to integrate Russians into Latvian society

<sup>60</sup> Author's interview, 18 October 2000.

<sup>61</sup> Author's interview, 25 October 2000.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Approximately 19,236 permanent residents of Latvia have Russian citizenship. *Results of the 2000 Population and Housing Census*, 138.

<sup>64</sup> Author's interview, 5 October 2000.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Latvia is a multiparty democracy with a list-proportional representation system. Parties representing Russians that manage to surpass the 5 percent threshold do so because of votes they receive in heavily Russian districts like Riga. Pal Kolsto, ed., *Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration in Post-Soviet Societies* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999).

without a loss of national identity, prevent the dismissal of Russian language school personnel on the basis of nationality, guarantee the teaching of basic subjects in Russian language schools in Russian, and persuade the authorities to designate Russian an official language.<sup>67</sup> The Party considers the 1999 language law discriminatory: “If the right of such a large percent of the population to speak its native language is oppressed, this is illegitimate. The official language must be Russian. How is it possible that here, in Riga, where more than half the population is Slavic, they can say that there is only one language? This is blatant discrimination.”<sup>68</sup> In its attempt to eliminate such prejudice, the Party seeks to prevent the liquidation of Russian language schools, which it deems conducive to assimilation:

We are 100 percent against the language policy, how it stipulates the end of education in Russian. We are categorically against this. Let children study in Russian schools, in the Russian language....We oppose the transfer of education into Latvian. It is wrong, and it is a huge mistake.”<sup>69</sup>

The Socialist Party, Equal Rights Party, and Party of National Harmony represent non-citizens who, as stated previously, are overwhelmingly Russian. These parties adopt a similarly contentious approach. The Socialist Party seeks to improve the socioeconomic welfare of Latvia’s entire population, but focuses on the ongoing “struggle” to defend the rights of non-citizens. According to one of its representatives:

The citizenship problem has not been resolved, and the situation is absurd. My wife is Russian, and although we were married in 1941 and she has lived and worked here ever since, she is not a citizen. Our children have citizenship through me, but my wife is a non-citizen. This is groundless and undeserved. So the struggle continues.<sup>70</sup>

One aspect of that battle is a determination to convince the authorities to designate Russian an official language. The Socialist Party rejects the 1999 language law because it restricts the use of Russian. The Party’s chairman, who adheres to the Party’s slogan (Our fate—in our hands! There are no victories without struggles!),<sup>71</sup> asserts the following: “Without a sensation, without such a serious attitude toward the issues from the population, nothing will change.”<sup>72</sup>

The Equal Rights Party actually emphasizes the possibility of such a sensation, or “a transition to conflict in a violent phase,” in its platform: “The protest of the Russian community basically boils down to parliamentary activities and peaceful acts—meetings, pickets, signature collecting. *However, the mar-*

<sup>67</sup> *Programma “Russkoi Partii” Latvii na vybory v Rizhskuiu Gorodskuiu Dumu*, 9 March 1997.

<sup>68</sup> Author’s interview, leading representative, 20 October 2000.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Author’s interview, 6 October 2000.

<sup>71</sup> *Politicheskoe Programmnoe zaiavlenie Sotsialisticheskoi Partii Latvii*, 30 October 1999, 16.

<sup>72</sup> Author’s interview, 6 October 2000.

ginalization of the Russian community and the growth of linguistic pressure from the state do not eliminate a transition to conflict in a violent phase.”<sup>73</sup> This Party protests the 1991 ruling that created non-citizens annually, and submits petitions opposing citizenship policy to Parliament on a regular basis. According to the Party, Latvia’s language policy violates the rights of Russians: “Our Party came out against the new law because it declares all languages except Latvian foreign....The law violates the rights of and discriminates against the Russian minority....We are against the fact that all other languages have been ostracized to the kitchen.”<sup>74</sup> Russian voice in Latvia acquired greater potential to garner international attention when the Party’s Chairman, Tat’iana Zhdanok, was elected to the European Parliament in 2004. Zhdanok is an outspoken critic of the state’s integration program, which she describes as “a thesis of assimilation; there is no equality or mutual respect. According to the program, integration is based on the Latvian language and one view of history. For all practical purposes, it orders non-Latvians to integrate.”<sup>75</sup> The following statement sums up the Party’s position:

Russians in Latvia are second-class; Negroes. There is discrimination based on ancestry. If you don’t have ancestors who were born here in 1940, then you are a Negro. This is pure discrimination on the basis of ethnic affiliation.<sup>76</sup>

The Party of National Harmony also defends the rights of non-citizens in a contentious manner. Although it aims to secure “the freedom, prosperity, and security of the people and of every individual on the basis of the revival of the people’s economy in a free and independent state,”<sup>77</sup> it does challenge policies that encourage assimilation. According to a leading representative:

The Party opposes education policy, and rejects the liquidation of high-school education in languages of minorities! We fight for the preservation of education in Russian...but policies facilitate assimilation—and this is wrong.<sup>78</sup>

This Party characterizes the state’s integration program in terms of assimilation as well. As the same representative put it, “There are sections, particularly the part on education, that are undoubtedly assimilative....Although we support integration, we cannot support the program. Forced assimilation is forbidden.”<sup>79</sup> The following statement sums up the Party’s view:

I am convinced that policies and practices pursue the goal of favoritism. Through policies and practices, they extend privileges to Latvians in a whole series of

<sup>73</sup> *Partiia Ravnopravie: kratko o programme, strukture, istorii* (Riga: Editorial Commission of the Party, 2000), 25.

<sup>74</sup> Author’s interview with leading representative, 3 October 2000.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Programma Partii Narodnogo Soglasia* (Riga, 1997), 5.

<sup>78</sup> Author’s interview, 1 November 2000.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

spheres....Unfortunately, we cannot say that rights and opportunities do not depend on ethnic origin and/or native language.<sup>80</sup>

The wave of demonstrations that swept Latvia in the early 2000s indicates that many Russians share this view. As early as 1998, a member of Parliament warned of the state's intention to restrict the use of Russian: "Higher education in the Russian language has already been curtailed; now secondary schools are turning in this direction."<sup>81</sup> Six years later, when the authorities implemented the education policy discussed above, Latvia witnessed unprecedented anger that, when combined with hope for change, morphed into large-scale collective action.

Both fear that Russian education and thus Russian identity were at risk, as well as a transforming event, motivated hope for change. Some Russians expressed anxiety regarding the controversial education policy in terms of ethnic extinction: "We cannot support the 60-40 percentage! If there's no Russian culture or Russian language, we as Russians will perish here."<sup>82</sup> The transforming event occurred on 23 May 2003, when 10,000 people participated in a protest organized by the Association for the Support of Russian Language Schools that was based on the slogan "For Free Choice of Language of Education!"<sup>83</sup> The authorities did not block the protest, and newspapers and reputable online sites covered the event. The protest's success mobilized hope for change and triggered a series of large-scale demonstrations. Russian activists, schoolchildren, parents, and teachers participated in these manifestations of collective action. On 11 February 2004, 30,000 people protested outside the presidential palace in Riga;<sup>84</sup> on 1 April 2004, 15,000 schoolchildren, parents, and teachers went on a two-day strike throughout the country—10,000 schoolchildren participated in Riga alone.<sup>85</sup>

With a concrete source of blame in hand, representatives of Russians created a highly charged injustice collective action frame that generated a surge of emotion. This emotion propelled thousands of people into the streets on a regular basis. Headquarters for the Defense of Russian Schools, an organization created in spring 2003, planned the demonstrations. The following Headquarters statement captures the essence of the injustice action frame:

Our children have proven with their actions that they are not and never will be slaves. They are truly free people who want to live, and will live, in a free country

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Iakov G. Pliner, *Sozvezdie problem obrazovaniia* (Riga: Latviiskogo instituta pravovykh issledovani, 1998), 18.

<sup>82</sup> "Takaia reforma nam ne nuzhna!" *Chas*, 29 January 2004.

<sup>83</sup> Vadim Radionov, "Repsh: 'Vsekh za reshetku!'" *Chas*, 12 May 2004. This article chronicles the history of post-Soviet Russian voice in Latvia.

<sup>84</sup> Elina Chuianova, "O Latviia, pechalen tvoi udel!" *Chas*, 12 February 2004.

<sup>85</sup> "V piketakh – i star i mlad," *Chas*, 16 April 2004.

which they themselves will create....We congratulate parents and teachers who have decided to stand next to our children and students.<sup>86</sup>

Individuals who have defended Russian interests since the reinstatement of Latvia's independence participated in the creation of a highly charged injustice action frame. As one activist put it, "Even in the period of the Nazi occupation of Latvia it was possible to receive a full-fledged high school education in Latvian or Russian. The current norms fail to guarantee this."<sup>87</sup>

On 1 May 2004, 50,000 schoolchildren, parents, teachers, and activists demonstrated on one side of the Daugava River against education policy, while a crowd of people celebrated Latvia's accession to the EU on the other side of the river.<sup>88</sup> A prominent Headquarters activist proclaimed: "They're raising the flag of the European Union and drinking beer over there...and that's precisely why we're over here! So the world's television cameras can see that Russians will not surrender."<sup>89</sup> Three months later, Headquarters organized a "field trip" to Strasbourg, where schoolchildren demonstrated in front of the European Parliament.<sup>90</sup> Students held banners sporting bold slogans like "Stop Apartheid in Latvia!" "Hands Off Russian Schools!" and "Equal Taxes, Equal Rights!" Then, just prior to the policy's scheduled implementation, Headquarters activists went on a hunger strike to honor the right of Russian students to study in their native language.<sup>91</sup> But all of these protests failed to generate change. The policy went into effect on 1 September 2004.

The last large-scale demonstration occurred on 1 September, when 30,000 people gathered in front of Riga's Freedom Monument. One activist gave a speech in which he emphasized the futility of appealing to the authorities:

For the last thirteen years the government has proven that it does not care about us. They don't give a damn about us. Moreover, they want things to be more difficult for our children than their children. During the time of our hunger strike, not even one small unimportant bureaucrat paid us a visit....I call on every one of you—don't count on the government, but believe in yourself and cross the line of humiliation and fear.<sup>92</sup>

The policy's implementation created a sense of despair that brought this episode of contentious politics to an end. Having lost their sense of idealism, Russians went home.

The contentious nature of Russian voice in Latvia, which manifests itself in pugnacious rhetoric and public protest, can be attributed in large part to

<sup>86</sup> "My ne raby!" *Chas*, 26 January 2004.

<sup>87</sup> Igor' Vatolin, "Nas obmanuli. vpered - 'pustye shkoly,'" *Chas*, 23 January 2004.

<sup>88</sup> "Pervyi den' evropy," *Chas*, 3 May 2004.

<sup>89</sup> Elina Chuianova, "Daugava razdelila obshchestvo," *Chas*, 3 May 2004.

<sup>90</sup> Kira Savchenko, "Strasbur uznal nashikh," *Chas*, 22 July 2004.

<sup>91</sup> Viacheslav Ivanov, "Pochemu my reshili golodat" *Chas*, 23 August 2004; Viacheslav Ivanov, "Golodaite - vlastiam vse ravno," *Chas*, 14 September 2004.

<sup>92</sup> Elina Chuianova, "Vmeste my budem sil'nee," *Chas*, 2 September 2004.

the presence of a concrete source of blame for grievances. Representatives of Russians call attention to tangible policies implemented by the government; these policies and their unambiguous architect provide a foundation for the creation of an effective injustice collective action frame that draws on powerful emotion-generating words like *Negro*, *apartheid*, and *assimilation*. The Latvian case suggests the need to bring emotion into the study of voice, as anger and hope for change contributed to the emergence of Russian protests, while despair contributed to their cessation.

### BUILDING ON EXISTING THEORIES OF POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

The Kyrgyz and Latvian cases suggest that if we want to understand variation in type of voice, we should move beyond Gurr's theory of causes of rebellion and incorporate Javeline's argument about blame attribution and costs of collective action. Gurr's theory asserts a causal sequence to political violence that starts with the development of discontent, progresses to the politicization of discontent, and ends with violence directed against political objects and/or actors.<sup>93</sup> Discontent stems from relative deprivation, "a perceived discrepancy between men's value expectations [conditions people believe they are entitled to] and their value capabilities [conditions people believe they are capable of attaining and maintaining]."<sup>94</sup> Relative deprivation generates grievances; when politicized these grievances spur action. Russians in Kyrgyzstan and Latvia have grievances that stem from a shared perception that they are getting less than what they got from the Soviet system, and less than what the Kyrgyz and Latvians get from the post-Soviet system. In Kyrgyzstan, discontent is not politicized and voice is expressed amicably; in Latvia, discontent is politicized and voice is expressed contentiously.

While Gurr's theory cannot account for variation in type of voice because it focuses on *why* political violence occurs, Javeline's claim about blame as a motivator of public protest sheds light on such variation. According to Javeline, specific blame attribution, or the ability to identify a particular cause or culprit, is a more powerful motivator for protest than diffuse blame attribution because it decreases costs of collective action: "Specific attributions allow individuals to focus and therefore limit the scope of their proposed collective action. Aggrieved individuals who blame the country's executive organize to protest against that executive and no other. Since the boundaries of their action are relatively finite, their costs of mobilization are also relatively limited."<sup>95</sup>

Specific blame attribution is possible in Latvia. The government implements antagonistic policies that generate grievances; there is no confusion

<sup>93</sup> Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 12–13.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>95</sup> Debra Javeline, "The Role of Blame in Collective Action: Evidence from Russia," *American Political Science Review* 97 (February 2003): 109.

regarding the origin of these policies. Because the boundaries of blame and thus protest action are finite, the costs of mobilization are lower than they otherwise would be. But there is a puzzle here: although specific blame attribution is straightforward in Latvia, we do not observe constant Russian mobilization. This is where emotion enters the analysis. The government's decision to further restrict the public sphere in which Russian can be used evoked pervasive fear among Russians that they would ultimately have to assimilate. Representatives of Russians strategically incorporated that alarm into effective injustice action frames. Fear of assimilation and hope for change stimulated the 2003/2004 wave of contentious voice in Latvia. By the same token, despair motivated the end of this period of confrontational politics.

In contrast to specific blame attribution, diffuse blame attribution increases costs of collective action:

Conversely, aggrieved individuals who are not specific in attributing blame for their grievance must incur a cost of decision making that other individuals can avoid. Since no clear target of protest emerges from these individuals' attribution of blame, their options are (1) to invest in identifying and protesting against some single target, (2) to protest against some randomly selected single target, (3) to protest against multiple targets, or (4) to protest without naming any target. In each case, mobilization is more costly.<sup>96</sup>

Specific blame attribution is impossible in Kyrgyzstan because the main source of grievances is informal personnel practices that hinder Russian mobility. These practices are not systemic. There is no central actor or institution that condones these practices; instead, numerous individuals at numerous institutions encourage this extralegal form of nationalization. As Javeline explains, collective action frames "need to convey information about the origins of the grievance."<sup>97</sup> Representatives of Russians in Kyrgyzstan lack this information and consequently cannot create effective injustice collective action frames.

This article demonstrates the importance of emotion and blame attribution in the study of variation in type of collective action. As its objective is to explain why Russians engage in amicable voice in Kyrgyzstan and contentious voice in Latvia, it does not address the Kyrgyz or Latvian authorities' perspectives. Future research on views of the Kyrgyz and Latvian authorities concerning the prospect of Russian voice will enhance our knowledge of collective action in post-communist states, and contribute to the social movement literature.\*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 109–110.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

\* I thank two anonymous readers for insightful comments on initial versions of this article, and the following institutions for generous research support: the International Research and Exchanges Board, the National Science Foundation, and the United States Institute of Peace.