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Baltic Protest in the Gorbachev Era: Movement Content and Dynamics[1]

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Introduction

In August 1984, a Soviet court sentenced 16-year-old Latvian schoolboy Janis Lauska to five years in a labor camp for his purported membership in an underground nationalist youth group.[2] In August 1989, as many as 2 million residents of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia took part in the Baltic Way, forming a human chain that stretched unbroken across hundreds of kilometers and passed through the three republics' capital cities as a demonstration of support for Baltic independence.

In the five years that Lauska was sentenced to serve in hard labor, demands for Baltic independence had transformed from a criminal act into the publicly demonstrated aspiration of hundreds of thousands of the region's residents. After the failure of a reactionary coup in Moscow in August 1991, that aspiration was realized. Five decades after the Red Army ended their 25-year run of independence, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia were recognized again as sovereign states.

This article examines the nature and dynamics of the mass movements that swept the Baltic republics in the Gorbachev era and, ultimately, helped to bring about the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Drawing on theoretical foundations established by Tarrow, Tilly, McAdam, and others, I examine the timing and sequence of the Baltic movements through a framework that understands waves of protest as collective political behavior. This 'political process' approach, as McAdam (1982: 36) labels it, emphasizes actors' changing perceptions of opportunities for protest in response to changes in state politics and institutions, as well as shifts in actor interests, organization, and resources.

Two questions in particular are addressed in this article: What motivated the Baltic protest waves, and what forces shaped the timing of the protest events that comprised them? To answer these questions, I apply exploratory event-history techniques to a data set that describes 440 collective events occurring in the region from 1986 to 1991.

Based on that analysis, I conclude that the Baltic waves are best understood as ethno-nationalist mobilization—that is, mobilization by communities linking the ideas of state and homeland to ethnic identity and thus pursuing control over public authority within a particular territory on behalf of members of their ethnic group. On the protest events' timing and sequence, I conclude that changes in the structure of political opportunities played a powerful role in shaping the dynamics of the Baltic waves. Taken together, these findings further confirm the view that ethno-nationalist protest waves follow trajectories similar to other kinds of contentious collective action more commonly understood as 'rational' or strategic.[3]

This analysis is eminently subjective; exploratory event-history techniques can identify patterns in data, but they do not offer a rigorous test of arguments about the origins of those patterns. Neither do I pretend that this analysis represents a full accounting of the social and political events of this period, a task that other scholars have undertaken with

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[2] *Human Rights Brief: USSR* 13/14 (31 July 1986): p. 4.

[3] See McAdam et al. (2001) and Beissinger (2002) for other efforts to link the analysis of nationalism to larger theories of protest mobilization and contentious politics.

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great success.[4] Instead, events are discussed selectively, as they appear to relate to patterns that emerge from the event data.

The Dataset: Observing Baltic Protest, 1986–1991

The research presented here is based on a dataset describing 440 ethnic or nationalist collective events that occurred in the Baltic republics between January 1, 1986 and August 19, 1991. Following Tilly (1978) and Olzak (1992), I defined a collective event as a non-routine, public action involving a group of individuals making a claim which, if realized would affect the interests of a specific community beyond those participating in the event.[5]

Information permitting, the collective events in this data set were characterized along five dimensions: (1) spatial—the event's location; (2) temporal—the timing and duration of the event; (3) human—the number and identity of participants; (4) tactical—the actions of the participants and the nature of the response, if any, from security forces; and (5) political—the content of the participants' claims.

This research was motivated by an interest in ethnic and nationalist mobilization, so a crucial question in the construction of this data set was how to distinguish between ethnic and nationalist claims. Based on theoretical considerations discussed in the next section of this article, I arrived at the following guidelines: *nationalist* claims are aimed at defining or redefining the territorial boundaries of the polity, while *ethnic* claims are aimed at defining or redefining the social boundaries of the polity. Although both types of claims center on reshaping boundaries, the two are distinguished by the nature of the markers on which the 'ideal' boundaries are based. Nationalist claims emphasize geographic space, while ethnic claims emphasize social and political processES in relation to criteria such as language, religion or phenotype.[6] Thus, for example, shouts of 'Freedom for Latvia!' were coded as a nationalist claim, while cries of 'Russians, go home!' and 'Latvia for Latvians!' were coded as ethnic claims.

These narrative reports from which these data were coded came from seven print sources. Three of them were the republics' major 'official' Russian-language daily newspapers: *Sovietskaia Litva*, *Sovietskaia Latvia* and *Sovietskaia Estonia*. Two were foreign sources: the U.S. Information Agency's *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report: Soviet Union* (and later *Central Eurasia*), and *The Times* of London. And two were 'unofficial' publications from the region: *Human Rights Brief: USSR*, a bi-weekly *samizdat*[7] newsletter, and *Baltiiskoe Vremya*, a Russian-language daily published by the Latvian Popular Front.

As the abundance of sources suggests, this data set was assembled using a limited version of a so-called 'blanketing' strategy—drawing on multiple sources and multiple types of information, wherever they are available. Beissinger (2002) advocates a blanketing strategy for the study of transitional societies in particular, arguing that this approach helps to overcome sampling problems caused by the relationship between patterns of mobilization and changes in the news media. The seven sources used here represent a

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[4] See especially Lieven (1994) for an excellent political and social history of this period in the region. On Latvia, see Muiznieks (1993) and Dreifelds (1996). On Lithuania, see Senn (1990) for a first-hand account of events there. On Estonia, Taagepera (1993) provides an outstanding history of this period.

[5] 'Non-routine' is intended to exclude regular or formalized actions, such as political party meetings, conferences or traditional holiday commemorations. 'Public' is intended to exclude meetings held behind closed doors, or by invitation only.

[6] The specific markers emphasized in protesters' claims will depend on the structure of ethnic boundaries in a given temporal and geographic context. In Northern Ireland, for example, religion is the central marker, whereas differences (real and imagined) in skin color are the key marker in the United States.

[7] *Samizdat* means self-published; it is the Russian term applied to Soviet-era dissident publications, which typically were typed and then hand-cranked through a small mimeograph machine.

compromise between what Beissinger (1995: 7) refers to as the need 'to simulate thoroughness' and the resource constraints facing a lone researcher attempting content analysis.[8]

Of course, even a blanketing strategy will not capture all collective events. Clues in the publications examined for this study suggest that routinized protests (for example, daily picketing of the Supreme Soviet[9] during legislative sessions) and small events often were not reported. A case in point: During legislative sessions, *Sovietskaia Estonia* would often include a photograph of a small group of picketers outside the entrance to Toompea Hall, the building in which the Supreme Soviet met. These photographs often appeared next to a report on the day's events at the legislative session, but the newspaper would not include any story or even a caption about the picket itself. Any attempt to use these photographs alone as indicators of an event's occurrence for purposes of analysis would require the researcher to make multiple assumptions about the event with potentially problematic consequences for the resultant sample.

Other clues suggest that small events often were not reported either.[10] For example, in Vilnius on the night of August 9, 1988, a student wearing an armband bearing the name of Lithuania's independence-minded popular front, Sajudis, was called a 'fascist' and was stabbed by a group of three Russian-speaking youths. This event, which meets a minimal definition of collective action and is clearly a significant occurrence in the context of ethnic and nationalist mobilization, was not directly reported in any of the sources used in this study.[11]

In light of these issues, the data set used here only includes events involving 50 or more participants. In part, the use of 50 as a threshold reflects convention; other event-analysis researchers have often used this number for the same reasons. In the Baltic context, this number also helps to address the problem of ritualized events. Based on the aforementioned clues, it appears that these events usually involved fewer than 50 participants. In cases where more participants were involved, such events were more likely to garner coverage.

Some events undoubtedly are lost in this approach, but the underlying theory—and thus the validity of the analysis—is essentially the same. The higher threshold simply means that the study captures only those efforts at collective action that are strong enough to put more than 50 people in the street. This approach is analogous to using more coarsely grained film to capture a subject's image; though the finer details may be lost, the larger patterns should remain. Of course, it is vital that the researcher keep this omission in mind when interpreting the results of his or her analysis; at this level of resolution, one cannot conclude that the absence of data indicates a total lack of mobilization.

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[8] Most event-analysis projects employ a team of researchers to compile narrative reports of events and to code the characteristics of those events. These data were gathered and coded by a single individual. Though this arrangement was not by choice, the advantage to doing it by oneself is a thorough familiarity with each source, and with other events of the period. This familiarity helped me to develop some broader impressions about events in the three republics studied, and the Soviet Union in general.

[9] The Supreme Soviet is the republic's legislature. These bodies were elected, but the candidates were all picked by the Communist Party and often ran unopposed. During the Soviet era, real power lay in the hands of the Communist Party's leadership council, the Politburo. These structures existed in each of the USSR's 15 republics, and again at the federal level.

[10] Drawing on a broader set of sources for events across the Soviet Union, Beissinger (1995: 13) arrives at the same conclusion and decides to define small events as those involving fewer than 100 participants.

[11] I learned of this event from a story in *Sovietskaia Litva* ('Nastoyaschie i Mnimye Vinovniki', 13 August 1988, p. 3) about a meeting between Communist Party and government officials and members of the initiative group forming Sajudis.

Of the 440 events included in this data set, 231 (52 percent) occurred in Lithuania, 117 (27 percent) occurred in Latvia and 92 (21 percent) occurred in Estonia. The higher counts occurred in the larger republics. Lithuania was the biggest of the three, with a population of 2.5 million. Latvia was home to roughly 2 million people, while Estonia was the smallest, with only 1.5 million residents at the time. In all three cases, most of the protests recorded in this data set occurred in the republic's capital city: Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn, respectively.

The first event in this data set took place in Riga, Latvia, on December 26, 1986.[12] In the early morning hours after a rock concert, some 300 working-class Latvian youths gathered in Riga's Cathedral Square and marched down Lenin Avenue toward the Freedom Monument shouting, 'Soviet Russia out! Free Latvia!' Security forces confronted the marchers, and several police vehicles were overturned.

The final event in this sample occurred in Vilnius, Lithuania, on August 19, 1991. On that day, protesters gathered outside the city's KGB headquarters to demand the KGB's withdrawal from Lithuania. A scuffle broke out between the protesters and Soviet soldiers guarding the building when the soldiers used batons against a group of young men who attempted to affix an anti-KGB placard near one of the building's entrances. Ten days later, following the failure of a reactionary coup in Moscow, the banner headline in the republic's largest newspaper declared: 'Today Is the First Day of Genuine Freedom.' The remainder of this article analyzes the goals and dynamics of the wave of collective action that led to that historic declaration.

The Character of the Baltic Protest Waves

How should we characterize the waves of protest that swept the Baltic republics in the Gorbachev era? Put simply, what were the protests about? This section examines data on the frequency and timing of collective events categorized by participant claims, in conjunction with other contextual evidence, to assess the issues and identities around which mobilization occurred.

Observers of, and participants in contentious collective action in the Baltic states during the Gorbachev era have characterized the events of that period in very different ways. In many cases, these disagreements seem to reflect differences of politics rather than analysis. In the Baltic cases, actions that Russian-speakers saw as indicative of ethnic prejudice and discrimination were often cast by ethnic Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians as expressions of the right to national self-determination. Consequently, the character of these events represents a central concern for any analysis of the Baltic protest waves.

The fundamental aim of all three movements was abundantly clear: to restore the independence the Baltic republics lost when they were annexed by the Soviet Union during World War II.[13] This goal is perhaps best characterized as a *nationalist* agenda. As Chinn and Kaiser (1996: 23) argue, following Gellner (1983):

[12] This was not the first ethnic or nationalist protest event in Baltic history, of course. During the 1970s in particular, the Baltic republics experienced a handful of demonstrations against Soviet occupation and Russian immigration. For this research, I chose to focus on the period 1986-1991 in order to isolate the dynamics of protest during the Gorbachev era. See Beissinger (2002) for one attempt to track systematically collective events in the Baltic republics prior to the Gorbachev era.

[13] The Baltic republics became independent states for the first time after World War I. In a secret treaty signed on the eve of the Second World War that carved Eastern Europe into Soviet and German territories—the so-called Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact—Germany ceded control of the Baltic states to the USSR. During the war, the German and Soviet armies each occupied the republics at various times, and both armies received some collaboration from local officials and guerrillas. After the war, some guerrillas continued to fight against Soviet occupation until the early 1950s.

> The central issue of nationalism...is political control over geographic space. [In nationalism], the national membership's sense of spatial identity...is transformed into a sense of exclusiveness toward the homeland as the place where only members of the nation truly belong and as the only place in which the national destiny can be fulfilled.

In other words, nationalism involves the pursuit of power over public authority in a specific territory on behalf of members of the national community. Consequently, nationalist political claims center on efforts to redefine the territorial boundaries of the polity or to enhance the national group's control over an existing polity. Membership in the national community can be defined according to various criteria, such as ideology, language, and ethnicity, or even some combination thereof.[14] National communities may also be closed or open; that is, they may or may not provide opportunities for new members to join by choice. In all instances, however, nationalism revolves around the notion of a homeland, where political authority over a certain geographic space is linked to loyalty to a particular community.[15]

What is less clear from the fundamental goals of the Baltic movements is the extent to which they were also rooted in ethnicity. In contrast to nationality, which emphasizes territory, *ethnicity* is rooted in the concept of kinship, which may or may not involve the idea of a homeland. As with nationalism, ethnicity can also become more or less salient, and thus encourage mobilization along ethnic lines. Broadly speaking, ethnic mobilization may be understood as an effort to enhance the control that members of an ethnic group—bound by ties of purported kinship—have over their own lives. That control may or may not flow from power over public authority in a particular territory. Instead, ethnic mobilization often focuses on control over valued political and economic resources, such as housing and jobs. Anti-immigrant mobilization in the United States in the late 19th century and anti-Chinese riots in Indonesia in 1997 both represent instances of this phenomenon. Ethnic mobilization may also emphasize control over symbols linked to group identity, such as what group members are called and how they are portrayed to the broader public. Minority groups in the United States have frequently mobilized around these sorts of issues in recent decades.

Implicit in the concept of ethnicity is the idea of a social boundary separating members from non-members. As Barth (1969) and others have emphasized, in practice, these social boundaries take the form of rules governing interaction between members and non-members. These social boundaries may or may not reference political authority and geographic space; in fact, in less hierarchical arrangements, those boundaries may explicitly involve the idea of finding ways to share a physical space and the resources it contains. Viewed from this perspective, ethnic boundaries may be thought of as existing in social space and emerging from human interactions.

Of course, ethnic and national identities often coincide. When communities bonded by a spatial as well as an ethnic identity mobilize, they are likely to pursue exclusive control over public authority within a particular territory on behalf of members of their ethnic group. This amalgamated agenda is perhaps best labeled *ethno-nationalism*, representing the intersection of ethnic and nationalist mobilization rather than a sub-type of either. Because it draws on overlapping sources of identity and emphasizes control over fundamental resources, ethno-nationalism tends to cast more groups as rivals and demand costly concessions from them. Consequently, ethno-nationalism is particularly likely to engender significant political conflict. Ethno-nationalism may generate conflict over

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[14] The doctrine of Cambodia's Khmer Rouge may be viewed as an extreme expression of ideological nationalism. The emphasis in France on mastery of the French language as an informal criterion for membership in the national community represents a form of nationalism based on language.
[15] See Taras (2002) on nationalism and the concept of home.

territorial control, over individual rights, over group rights, or all of the above, as authority groups and militaries in control of a given territory are likely to resist efforts to wrest that control from them, and residents of that territory who identify with existing states or other ethnic groups might resist efforts to subordinate or exclude them from the territory in question.

To what extent was Baltic mobilization based on ethnic as well as nationalist identities? We can try first to answer this question by examining protesters' claims. As Figure 1 illustrates, participants voiced explicitly ethnic claims—that is, claims aimed at defining or redefining the social boundaries of the polity—at relatively few collective events in the Baltic republics during the Gorbachev era. In all three republics, the vast majority of collective events emphasized demands related to political control over territory.

The intersection of ethnic and nationalist objectives is evident in the agendas of the Popular Fronts and Sajudis, the region's major social movement organizations and the chief sponsors of native-group collective action. These organizations pursued agendas that explicitly linked the goals of political independence and popular sovereignty to ethnic identity. The Latvian Popular Front (PFL), for example, declared in its October 1988 Program that:

> The [PFL] proceeds upon the basis that the Latvian people has in this republic the status of an indigenous nation, for Latvia is the historical territory of the Latvian people, the only place on earth where the Latvian nation, Latvian language, and Latvian culture can be maintained and developed. Therefore, the [PFL] deems it necessary, as a guarantee of the Latvian people's national self-determination, to include in the legislation on the soviets [or councils] and the elections to the soviets a principle according to which the soviets of this republic at any level must provide for a permanent and irreversible majority of mandated positions which under any demographic situation will be retained for the representatives of the Latvian nationality.[16]

This statement draws an explicit connection between cultural and spatial identity and political power. The declaration that ethnic Latvians *must* form a majority of the representatives on local as well as national governing councils 'under any demographic situation' seems particularly bold in light of the fact that Latvians did not form a majority of the population in most of the republic's major cities.[17]

The Estonian Popular Front, in its founding program, also drew a strong link between the native ethnic group and the exercise political power in the republic. Its statement on the means to an ethno-nationalist end is somewhat less radical than that of its Latvian counterpart, however. Specifically, the Estonian Popular Front's platform states that:

> To the native ethnic group in a union republic, the national problem is one of historical destiny. To a member of another ethnic group who lives in a union republic, the national problems are a matter of his personal destiny. The Estonian SSR is a national republic. Acting above all as a defender of the interests of the

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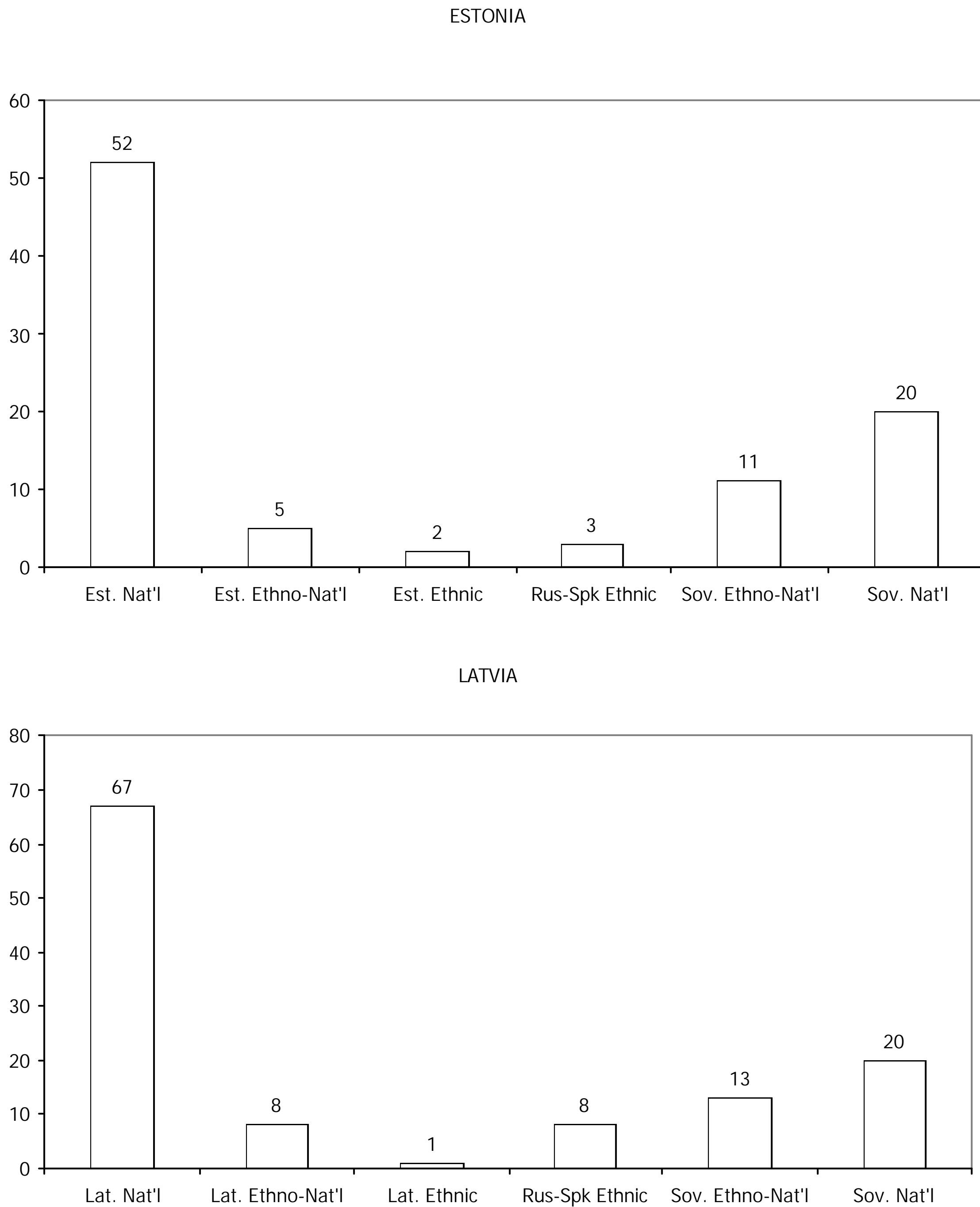
[16] 'National Front Publishes Program', *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report: USSR*, 6 December 1988, p. 88.

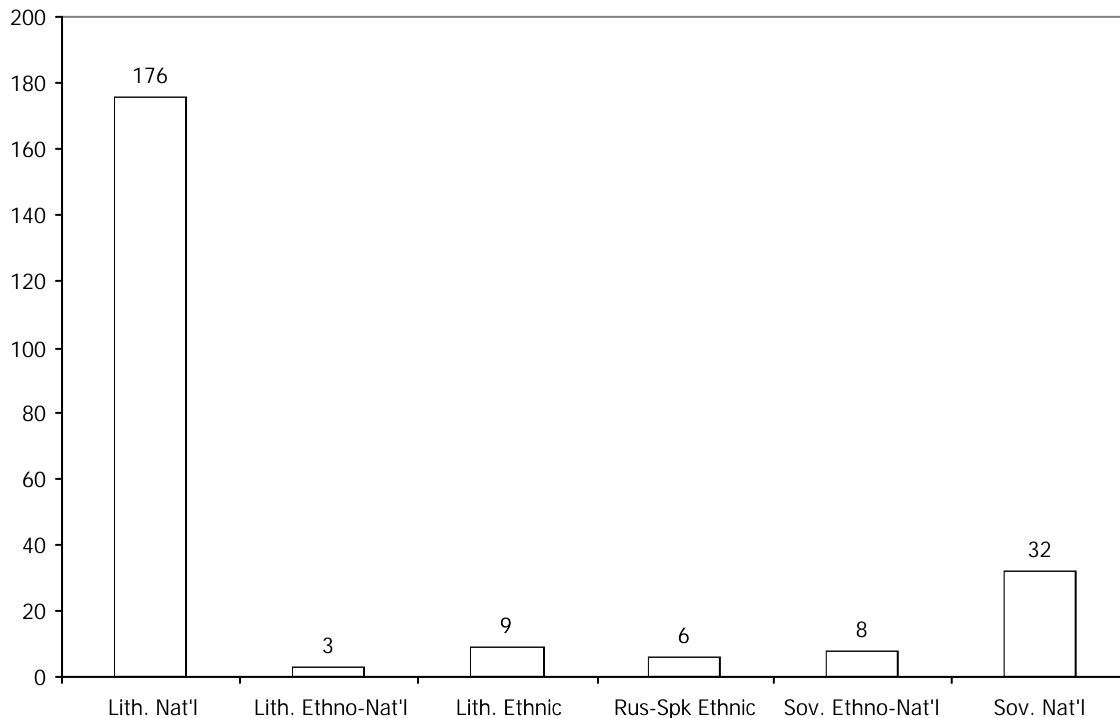
[17] The ethno-demography of Latvia changed dramatically under Soviet rule, largely because of the immigration of ethnic Russians encouraged by the Soviet government. By 1989, ethnic Russians comprised at least one-third of the population in each of the republic's seven major cities and in three of the 26 mixed urban/rural districts. Moreover, ethnic Russians outnumbered ethnic Latvians in four of those cities, including the capital, Riga. Estonia underwent a numerically similar shift, but most ethnic Russian immigrants settled in that republic's northeastern coastal strip. Lithuania experienced the least immigration of the three.

Estonian nation, it will be able to ensure the defense of the interests of all other ethnic groups which live here.[18]

Figure 1: Count of Protest Events by Claim, 1986–1991



[18] 'Estonian 'Popular Front' Drafts Expanded Program', *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report: USSR*, 27 September 1988, p. 52.



Here the ethnic, territorial, and political are linked in the vision of the republic as the defender of the interests of the titular ethnic group. Despite the democratic intentions of this statement, it is not at all clear how state actions in defense of one ethnic group's interests simultaneously ensure the defense of the interests of all other ethnic groups residing on that territory.

These sentiments are echoed in the draft program of Lithuania's Sajudis/Movement for Perestroika, also published in 1988. Like the others, this program expresses a commitment to pluralist democracy and to the equal rights of all ethnic groups residing in the republic. Also like the others, it simultaneously links the 'popular' part of popular sovereignty to the native ethnic group. Sajudis' draft platform states that:

> The Movement believes that national equality may be achieved only on the condition that representatives of all nations recognize the right of the Lithuanian people to self-determination, the sovereignty of the Lithuanian SSR and its territorial integrity, that Lithuanian history, culture, and language are known, and that they are respected. The right of the Lithuanian people, as with any other community, to concern themselves with their self-preservation, with their own economy, with nature, and with preservation and development of language and culture on territory inherited from their forefathers must be recognized.[19]

Although less assertive about the relationship between public authority and the native ethnic group, this statement nonetheless emphasizes an ethno-nationalist vision of social and political change in Lithuania. The republic's territory is seen as the domain of

[19] 'Lithuanian Restructuring Movement Draft Program', *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report: USSR*, 4 November 1988, p. 47.

Lithuanians, and political reform is linked to the self-determination of the Lithuanian people, understood primarily in ethnic terms.

Thus all three of the region's major social movement organizations establish ethno-nationalist agendas in their initial platforms, linking the enhancement of republican autonomy to the interests of the native ethnic group. These organizations grew explosively in the first months of their existence and promptly became the primary sponsors of collective protests in the region. While many of these protests and demonstrations centered on nationalist claims, the movements' platforms clearly indicate that republican sovereignty was seen not only as an end in and of itself, but also as a means to ensure the survival and advance the interests of the region's native ethnic groups. Support for republican sovereignty and independence often went hand-in-hand with the expectation that such changes would restore the titular ethnic group to power and revive its language and culture.

It is also relevant that the nationalist movements acted against a background of swelling cultural activity among all ethnic groups in the region. During this period, annual folk song festivals attracted hundreds of thousands of participants in each republic, leading some observers to dub the Baltic transformation the 'Singing Revolution.' While many of the events that marked the growing emphasis on cultural ties do not meet this study's definition of collective action, they do suggest the development of ethnic solidarity and importance of ethnic identity in the mobilization that was occurring.

The ethnic and nationalist strains of Baltic mobilization sometimes came into conflict. In the first years of the popular fronts' existence and particularly in Latvia and Estonia, advocates of ethnic exclusion and proponents of civic nationalism competed for dominance within those organizations. At times, this competition led to the pursuit of apparently conflicting policies. For example, at the same time that the Latvian Popular Front was advocating rules to ensure an ethnic Latvian majority in all state bodies, it was also supporting the development of non-Latvian cultural associations to promote the language and culture of other ethnic groups within the republic (Muiznieks 1989: 20).

The weight of ethnicity was also apparent in the emergence of the Estonian and Latvian Citizens' Committees, whose agendas centered more explicitly on ethnic objectives.[20] The Citizens' Committees were founded in 1989, first in Estonia and later in Latvia. They were rooted in the idea that the Baltic republics had never lost their independence, at least not in a legal sense. In light of that interpretation of history and international law—one officially shared by numerous foreign governments, including the United States—these groups sought to register residents of interwar Latvia and Estonia and their descendants as the only rightful citizens who could elect national congresses to consider the republics' future. Nearly all of those 'rightful' citizens were, of course, ethnic Latvians and Estonians.

The efforts of the Citizens Committees were extremely successful; by the time elections to the Citizens' Congresses were held in early 1990, the Estonian and Latvian Committees had reportedly registered over 600,000 and 900,000 individuals, respectively (Kionka 1990b: 31; Muiznieks 1990: 29). Because of their massive popular base and moral authority, these congresses were able to exert a powerful influence over the republican legislatures on changes in citizenship policy.

The nature of the Citizens' Committees and their role as a source of pressure over the popular fronts helps explain the relative absence of native ethnic events in a wave of ethno-nationalist mobilization. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of the committees'

[20] For a more thorough discussion of these organizations, their origins, and their evolution, see Kionka (1990a) and Muiznieks (1990).

registrants were ethnic Estonians and Latvians. As Muiznieks (1990: 28) observes, the appeal of the committee concept to Latvian activists rested, in large part, on the fear that if non-native immigrants were eligible to vote, they might oppose independence in an open referendum. It is important to note that no analogous organization emerged in Lithuania, the republic that experienced the least intensive immigration under Soviet rule. Given the aims and consequences of their actions, these committees can be understood as a form of ethnic mobilization aimed at excluding non-native rivals from the political process as the new 'rules of the game' were being drawn up. Rather than taking to the streets, the Citizens' Committees sough to accomplish ethnic exclusion by co-opting state institutions. Even as Latvians and Estonians marched for independence, they were working to accomplish ethnic exclusion through another form of activism.

The timing of political reforms in response to ethnic claims also helps explain the limited number of native-group ethnic collective events. When confronted with early mass demonstrations, republican elites initially responded to what they perhaps perceived as the symbolic rather than substantive elements of the demonstrators' demands, namely, issues of language, education, migration, and state emblems. By mid-1989, all three republics had adopted new language laws establishing the native group's language as the official state language and requiring its use in various arenas. The Lithuanian Supreme Soviet had adopted a law on education intended to enhance the use of Lithuanian and undo efforts toward Russification. The Latvian legislature had enacted restrictions on migration aimed at stopping the flow of non-native workers into the republic. These victories indicated that the movements' chief opponent resided not in their republican capitals, but in Moscow.

From a strategic perspective, then, it seems sensible that these movements decided to concentrate their efforts on breaking free from the Soviet state, as the predominance of nationalist claims suggests. After an early burst of protest activity won results on key ethnic claims, the Baltic movements appear to have used collective protest primarily to apply pressure on the nationalist issues where change was less forthcoming, namely, republican sovereignty and independence.

The Dynamics of Baltic Mobilization

That final piece of evidence begins to address the second question posed at the start of this article: What forces shaped the timing of protest in the Baltic republics? The remainder of this article explores the applicability to ethnic and nationalist collective action of Tarrow's (1988: 422) claim that, 'The dynamics of collective action—even in its most 'expressive' and anti-political forms—are best understood in relation to the political process.' Research by McAdam (1982) on mobilization among African-Americans suggests that erosion of the political establishment, brought by the gradual accumulation of broad social processes, contributed to the rise of a black insurgency in the United States. The research presented here focuses more narrowly on the impact on ethnic and nationalist collective action of certain formal and informal changes in state institutions and practices.

Tarrow (1994: 85) argues that social movements arise primarily in response to changes in the structure of political opportunities, which he defines as 'consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure.' This section explores four hypotheses about the relationship between movement dynamics and change in the political opportunity structure.

First is the possibility that *change in the openness of the polity* encourages collective action. More specifically, as Eisinger (1973) argues, increasing access to political power encourages collective action in systems characterized by a mix of open and closed institutions or channels. When the state becomes more responsive to popular preference

but fails to provide regular channels for its expression, social groups are more likely to undertake collective action in an effort to influence state power.

Second, now following Tarrow (1994), is the possibility that *instability in elite alignments* encourages collective action by generating uncertainty, encouraging challengers to attempt to exercise marginal power, and inducing elites to seek new sources of support. This instability might take the form of splits among elites, including but not limited to divisions between so-called 'hard-liners' and 'soft-liners.' It might also come about through the emergence of influential allies within the government (Tarrow 1994: 86-88).

Third, as posited by Tilly (1978) and Tarrow (1994), among others, *change in the levels of state repression and facilitation* can encourage collective action. The level of state repression is understood here as expectations about how security forces will respond to protest; those expectations, of course, are often based on recent experience. State facilitation is understood as the resources and procedures available to organizers of collective events.

Finally, as Tarrow (1994: 24-25) and Beissinger (2002: 16–18) argue, once collective action emerges, actors begin to create their own opportunities and expand opportunities for others by demonstrating authorities' weaknesses and challengers' strengths, increasing uncertainty, and providing elites with potential social allies. In Beissinger's (2002: 17) words, 'A reproducing chain of events can grow to the point that the initial structural influences that played a prominent role in unleashing the series seems buried in the distant past and relatively impotent within the ongoing production of events.' Thus early opportunities for collective action are transformed into *cycles of protest* that reflect not only exogenous features of the political environment but also endogenous dynamics of learning, resource mobilization, and organizational competition.

Figure 2 presents monthly counts of collective events by ethnic natives and Russian-speakers in each republic. These figures portray changes in the rate of ethnic and nationalist protest in the Baltic republics from 1986 to 1991. It is important to recall that these figures show only the number of collective events with 50 or more participants, indicating nothing about the size or duration of those events. Even so, these figures do indicate change in the rate of collective action over time. By taking advantage of information about the event's participants, they also illustrate some of the dynamics of mobilization and counter-mobilization between native ethnic groups and Russian-speakers.

Perhaps the most striking feature of these figures is the similarity across the three cases in the timing of the beginnings, major peak, and decline of collective action, particularly among the region's three native ethnic groups. This similarity suggests that the Baltic movements do indeed represent 'waves' of protest, and that these waves were shaped by common factors.

In all three cases, mobilization began hesitantly in 1987, with the first round of so-called 'calendar' demonstrations commemorating significant days in the interwar history of the Baltic states. Also in all three cases, these early events typically were organized by dissident groups founded prior to Gorbachev's rise to power. The main contrast across the three—the number of participants—does not appear in the monthly count charts but does appear in the larger data set. While these early demonstrations typically attracted no more than a few hundred participants in Lithuania and Estonia, the Latvian events drew crowds numbering in the thousands.

Despite the relatively small number of participants, these events clearly helped to spark a transformation of political perceptions in the region. What Taagepera (1993: 125–126) says of Estonia was undoubtedly true in all three Baltic republics:

> From February to August 1987, the atmosphere...changed more than it had during the previous thirty years. Repression of freedom to organize and express opinions faded. Public opinion and public action were born. History had indeed started to move.

The beginnings of ethnic and nationalist collective action in the Baltic republics conform to Tarrow's (1994) roadmap of the first phase of a protest cycle. In each republic, 'early risers' began sporadically in 1987 to test the sincerity and depth of Gorbachev's calls for economic and social reforms. These early demonstrations in 1987 were occurring in the wake of the disaster at the Chernobyl Atomic Energy Station in April 1986, which encouraged officially sanctioned creative unions across the USSR to become more vociferous about their environmental and cultural concerns (Nahaylo and Swoboda 1990).[21]

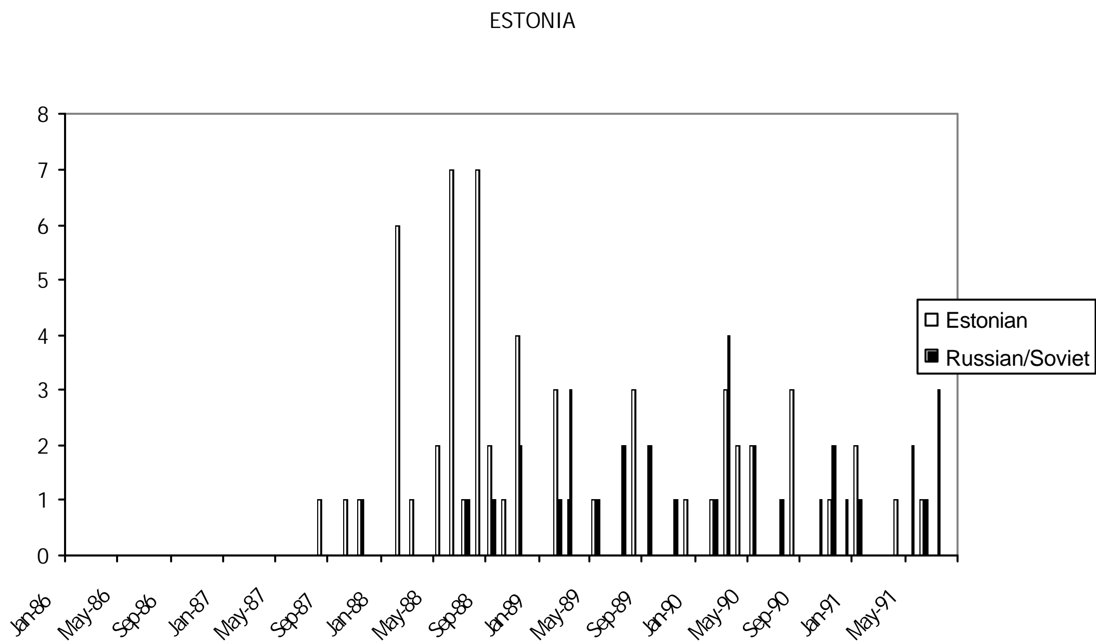
From a strategic perspective, these calls signaled instability in elite alignments following Gorbachev's accession to power and his announcement of an agenda for social and economic reform (later known as *perestroika*). The assertive tone adopted by the prominent writers and artists who comprised the creative unions highlighted the presence of potential allies within the Communist Party. Meanwhile, the success of Baltic environmental campaigns supported by these unions suggested an increase in the state's responsiveness to popular concerns. An implicit (and sometimes explicit) link in these campaigns between environmentalism, on the one hand, and ethnicity and nationalism, on the other, encouraged ethnic and nationalist activists to take the next step and openly voice their demands. [22]

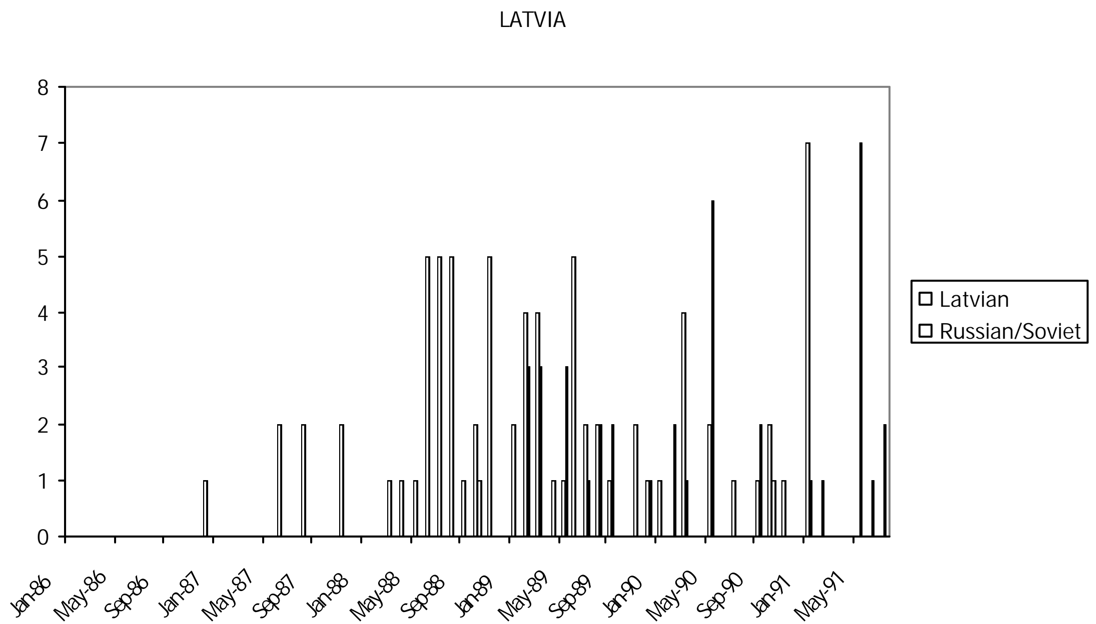
Yet despite the responsiveness to grass-roots environmentalist activism in this period, the Soviet system still lacked formal channels for communicating interests from the bottom up. This state of affairs conforms to Eisinger's (1973) notion of a change in the openness of the polity resulting in 'mixed' institutions. In this context, would-be activists undoubtedly recognized that further efforts to influence official decision-making would require public protest.

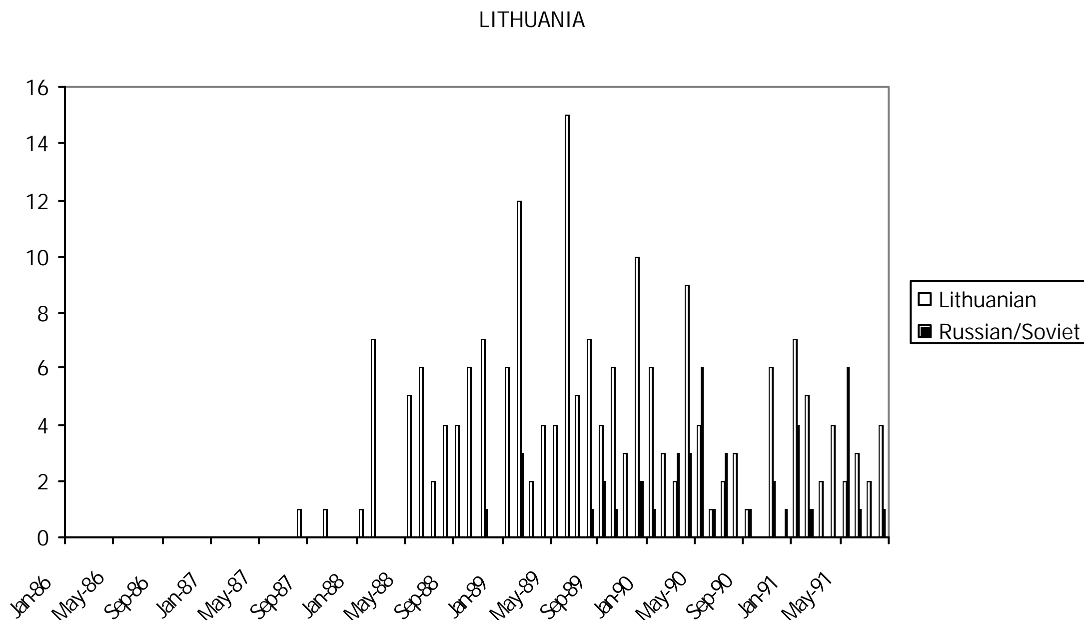
Taken together, these changes—elite instability, the rising visibility of potential allies in the Party, and increased responsiveness to popular pressure within a formally closed system—represent a significant transformation of the structure of political opportunities in the early years of Gorbachev's tenure. The early Baltic protests exploded into mass mobilization when they highlighted and exacerbated splits within and across republican leaderships, thereby emboldening Baltic residents and encouraging some native elites to adopt the role of 'tribune of the people' (Tarrow 1994: 88). As Beissinger (2002: 72–79) demonstrates, similar processes were occurring at the same not only in all three Baltic republics but also in other parts of the Soviet Union, creating interactive effects that contributed to the acceleration of these movements.

[21] In all three republics, the major environmental campaigns of this period involved opposition to new industrial development, which often included plans to import more Russian-speaking laborers. In Lithuania, plans to build a fourth reactor at the Ignalina nuclear power plant were also a key issue.
[22] For more on the links between environmentalism and nationalism in the USSR under Gorbachev, see Dawson (1996).

Figure 2: Monthly Count of Protest Events by Primary Participating Group, 1986–1991







The divisions among elites were vividly apparent in security forces' ambivalent response to these early risers. While police prevented or broke up many early protest events, they allowed others, sometimes even on the same day and around the same issue as those in which they intervened. This mixed response revealed divisions within republican Party leaderships over the appropriate role of and reaction to nationalist activists in a time of economic crisis and political reform in the USSR.

Elite instability was further highlighted by the shuffling of top Party officials in each of the Baltic republics. In December 1987, Ringaudas Songaila became Lithuania's new First Secretary following the death of his predecessor. Songaila was replaced less than a year later by Algirdas Brazauskas, who supported a conservatively interpreted Sajudis agenda. Meanwhile, Estonia's leadership took a turn towards reform when Vaino Väljas, the former Soviet ambassador to Nicaragua, was chosen to replace the highly unpopular Karl Vaino as the Estonian Communist Party's First Secretary in June 1988. Upon arriving to take his post, Väljas promptly dumped the requirement that Estonian Party meetings be conducted in Russian (Taagepera 1993: 136-138). Latvia finally followed suit in October 1988, when Jãnis Vagris rose to that republic's top post in place of the hard-line Russian Boris Pugo, who had been moved to the USSR's Interior Ministry.

The rise of reform-minded Communists to power in the Baltic republics was, in part, a tactical response to early activism. Various factions within the Baltic and Soviet Communist Parties supported these leadership changes as a means to control or to capitalize on rising ethnic and nationalist solidarity. The Gorbachev team seemed to have learned a lesson in Kazakhstan in December 1986, when the replacement of that republic's First Secretary with an ethnic Russian from outside the republic resulted in mass demonstrations and rioting. Centrist Communists had apparently come to believe that ethnic and nationalist sentiments could not be ignored (as they were in Kazakhstan), so perhaps they could be harnessed in the service of *perestroika*. At the same time, the more liberal native cadres saw an opportunity finally to pursue the kinds of changes they had been attempting to implement since at least the late 1950s.[23]

[23] The years 1957-1959 saw the rise of a political movement within the Latvian Communist Party characterized by Nils Muizneks (1994) as 'National Communism.' Led by Eduards Berklavs, Latvia's

In what must be regarded as one of Gorbachev's most profound miscalculations, these leadership changes only encouraged elites and non-elites alike to push even harder. The monthly protest counts show that the rate of collective action increased significantly in 1988 as the Baltic populations became emboldened by the presence of potential allies in the top ranks of their governments. What these figures do not show is that the magnitude of these events (measured in terms of the number of participants) was increasing as well, often dramatically.

The surge in collective protest is also reflected the increasingly progressive actions of the republics' creative unions, which in early 1988 offered sharp criticism of the USSR's brand of federalism and its nationalities policies. These actions culminated in the foundings of the mass organizations that would come to dominate the Baltic protest waves—the Popular Fronts of Estonia and Latvia and Sajudis/Movement for Perestroika in Lithuania.

In 1988, local Communist elites began responding to the growing calls for change embodied in the collective protests. By the end of that year, each of the Baltic republics had a new First Secretary of the Communist Party, the top political job in the Soviet system. The governments of the Baltic states also began to enact real policy changes. In all three, government bodies took the symbolic steps of recognizing nationalist symbols (the flags and anthems of the independent Baltic states) and declaring the native group's language the official tongue of each republic. In November 1988, Estonia's legislative body, the Supreme Soviet, took the more dramatic step of adopting a declaration 'On Sovereignty', which asserted the republic's right to greater self-governance and economic autonomy. The Latvian and Lithuanian Supreme Soviets did not follow suit on this score until the summer of 1989 (in June and May, respectively).

The peaks in the rate of ethnic and nationalist collective action in 1989 imply that the republican leadership's responsiveness to protesters' demands further emboldened Baltic residents. Supplemental data indicate that participation in collective events also increased substantially in 1989 compared with 1988, especially in Latvia and Lithuania.[24] At this time, the axis of political conflict was shifting from 'state vs. society' to 'republics vs. center' as republican elites scrambled to keep up with the increasingly radical demands of the nationalist organizations and their supporters. As Tarrow's (1994: 88) framework suggests, this public split between republican and Soviet elites (and between hard- and soft-liners at both levels) signaled deeper change in the structure of political opportunities that further emboldened activists.

Moscow's accession to one of the nationalists' key demands further catalyzed Baltic protest. In the summer of 1989, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR admitted to the existence of secret protocols in the Hitler-Stalin pact ceding the Baltic states to Soviet control, and to their illegitimacy. As Lieven (1994: 222) notes, the Supreme Soviet 'had in effect admitted the illegitimacy of Soviet rule; any subsequent Soviet political activity in the region could now be only a rearguard action or an attempt at the re-imposition of military rule, without any democratic legal justification.'[25]

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political leadership undertook efforts to slow the influx of immigrants, to promote ethnic Latvian cadres, to expand the use of the Latvian language in the republic, and to increase Latvia's economic autonomy. This movement came to an abrupt end in the summer of 1959 when some 2,000 local officials were purged as part of a broader 'anti-nationalism' campaign conducted across the Soviet Union.

[24] Measured by event counts, Beissinger's data show a surge in 1989 in mobilization in Lithuania but not Latvia and Estonia. Measured by participants, Beissinger's data show substantial spikes in all three republics in 1989.

[25] It should be noted that, even acknowledging the existence and illegitimacy of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, not all observers immediately admitted the annexation of the Baltic republics was illegal. Many interested parties, including Gorbachev, continued for some time to espouse the traditional party line that the Baltic republics had nevertheless acceded voluntarily to Soviet power in a 'popular revolution' and

Not coincidentally, the Baltic cycles of protest peaked shortly thereafter in the incredible Baltic Way demonstration of 23 August, 1989, the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. On that day, as many as 2 million Baltic residents joined hands in a human chain stretching from Tallinn to Vilnius as an expression of Baltic solidarity in opposition to Soviet occupation and annexation. Approximately one third of the entire population of the *region* participated in that single event, the apex of mobilization in the Gorbachev era and probably one of the largest collective events of all time.

Interestingly, however, apart from the Baltic Way, the rate of collective action among Estonians in particular never returned to the peak levels of 1988, according to my data.[26] As Figure 2 shows, a rise in the rate of collective action among Russian-speakers accounts most of the events in that republic from 1989 to 1991. Estonian ethnic and nationalist collective action appears to have peaked in June, August, and November of 1988.

The explanation for this pattern probably lies in the relatively progressive position the Estonian government adopted during this phase of the transition. Although Latvians mobilized earlier and faster than their neighbors did, republican Party elites responded more quickly and more radically in Estonia. The Estonians were the first to adopt a declaration on sovereignty, the first to adopt a new law on language, and they stood at the front of efforts to enhance republican economic autonomy (see Table 1). The timing and radical nature of these actions reduced the rate of protest in the years that followed by taking those demands off the table—much to the protesters' satisfaction. Interestingly, these events also contributed to the intensification of mobilization in Latvia and Lithuania, as activists in those republics were acutely aware of Estonia's progressive position and began to press their governments to 'catch up' with their neighbor.

The Baltic movements took a crucial step towards consolidating their gains in early 1990, when the Popular Fronts and Sajudis won decisive victories in relatively competitive elections to the republican legislatures. Taking seriously their mandate for radical change, these bodies promptly moved beyond demands for greater sovereignty to embrace the call for full independence. While the Latvian and Estonian legislatures declared only the beginning of a transition to independence, however, the Lithuanian legislature took the decisive step of declaring that republic independent. Moscow responded with an economic blockade, and Gorbachev demanded that all republics—including Lithuania—participate in the development of a new federal treaty. The Lithuanian leadership stepped back but it did not fold, adopting in June a 100-day 'moratorium' on the declaration of independence. In fact, Gorbachev's call for the negotiation of a new federal treaty was itself a kind of concession, and it seemed apparent that Moscow's political leverage over the Baltic governments had all but vanished.

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were therefore obliged to negotiate any changes in their relationship with the USSR under the terms of Soviet law.

[26] In contrast to my data, Beissinger (2002) observes similar event counts and rates of participation among Estonians in 1988 and 1989. In accord with my data, Beissinger observes the same drop-off in Estonian mobilization after 1989, compared with sustained mobilization among Latvians and Lithuanians.

Table 1: The Timing of Key Political Events in the Baltic Republics, 1986-1991

	ESTONIA	LITHUANIA	LATVIA
STATE ACTIONS			
Legalization of national flag	Jun 1988	Oct 1988	Oct 1988
Native-group lang. declared state lang.	Jun 1988	Nov 1988	6 Oct 1988
Declaration on republican sovereignty	16 Nov 1988	18 May 1989	28 Jul 1989
Law on language adopted	18 Jan 1989	25 Jan 1989	5 May 1989
Limits on immigration adopted	Jun 1990	N/A	Feb 1989
Law on citizenship adopted		Nov 1989	
Soviet annexation declared illegal	12 Nov 1989	Sep 1989	N/A
Competitive elections to legislature	18 Mar 1990	Feb 1990	18 Mar 1990
Declaration on independence	30 Mar 1990	11 Mar 1990	4 May 1990
Number of 'firsts':	4	3	1
POLITICAL ORGANIZATION			
Founding of popular front	Apr 1988	May 1988	Jun 1988
Founding of Russian-speakers movement	Jul 1988	Nov 1988	Oct 1988
Removal of 'old guard' CP leader	Jun 1988	19 Oct 1988	4 Oct 1988
Formal end to CP's 'leading role'	Feb 1990	7 Dec 1989	28 Dec 1989
Formal split in republican CP	Mar 1990	Dec 1989	Apr 1990
Number of 'firsts':	3	2	0

[Underlining indicates first action on a particular issue or area.]

Sources: Taagepera (1989: 24); Mastro (n.d.); Lieven (1994); *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*; *RFE/RL Research Report: USSR*

In each of the Baltic republics, ethnic and nationalist protest spiked around the time when the republican Supreme Soviet took these major steps toward independence. Two of the five highest monthly counts in Estonia correspond to the declarations on sovereignty and independence in November 1988 and March 1990. The rate of collective action in Latvia jumped around the initial declaration on sovereignty in June 1989 and even more sharply in May 1990 around the beginning of the transition to independence. In Lithuania, spikes in June 1989 and April 1990 follow closely behind the declarations on sovereignty in May 1989 and of independence in March 1990. Once again, the protesters evidently were emboldened by—and emboldening to—the increasingly radical republican leadership.

In contrast to Estonia, which remained relatively quiescent after 1988, Latvia and Lithuania experienced a resurgence of protest in January 1991. These events were a courageous response to the USSR's strongest and most desperate attempts to repress the Baltic drive toward independence. In late 1990, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze resigned his post and warned of an impending reactionary coup. Early the next year, Gorbachev warned the Baltic republics that their efforts to withdraw unilaterally from the USSR would not be tolerated. Residents of all three republics responded to the imminent threat of action from Moscow by constructing and manning barricades to defend the houses of government day and night. In Vilnius, in the early morning of 13 January 1991, Soviet soldiers killed 15 civilians as they occupied that city's television tower and other sites they considered strategic. In Riga one week later, Interior Ministry forces (known as 'Black Berets') attempted to occupy the press ministry building; their actions

resulted in the deaths of six persons, including a respected journalist who was covering the event.

Baltic citizens responded to the crackdown with a host of demonstrations affirming their commitment to full independence. The fact that this higher rate of action was sustained throughout 1991 in Lithuania but not in Latvia reflects the Soviet forces' prolonged efforts to destabilize the former. Virtually all of the ethnic Lithuanian events that occurred in the spring and summer of 1991 were explicitly devoted to resisting the continued occupation of sites in Vilnius, or to protesting the murders of several Lithuanian customs agents at newly established border posts.
So far, the discussion has focused on mobilization among ethnic Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians. The data examined here also offer some clues about the goals and dynamics of mobilization among ethnic Russians in the region. As shown in Figure 2, ethnic Russians appear to have mobilized in response to the successes of the republican nationalists. Ethnic Russians in Estonia began to take to the streets in the summer of 1998, shortly after the Supreme Soviet declared Estonian to be the republic's official language. Their counterparts in Latvia and Lithuania followed suit a few months later as the Supreme Soviets in those republics passed similar declarations. In all three cases, the start of street protests by ethnic Russians corresponded with the founding of the major organizations claiming to represent those communities—Yedinstvo (Unity) in Lithuania, Intermovement in Estonia, and Interfront in Latvia. These organizations explicitly presented themselves as a 'counterweight' to the Popular Fronts and Sajudis.[27]

Latvia experienced something of a wave of ethnic-Russian protest in 1989, surging in February and March and again in May. In that four-month window, large groups of ethnic Russians took to the streets ten times. Those spikes correspond to the passage of laws aimed at restricting immigration and promoting the use of the Latvian language across a broad range of activities. Meanwhile, the Latvian declaration on republican sovereignty, adopted in July 1989, appears to have provoked a less aggressive response; ethnic Russians held just one large protest in July and only four more in August and September.

This pattern suggests that ethnic Russians were primarily motivated to mobilize by fears of ethnic exclusion. Declarations and laws linked to a crucial ethnic marker—proficiency in the Baltic languages—were apparently perceived as more threatening than the declarations of sovereignty that represented the core of the Baltic movements' nationalist agenda. By no means were those nationalist goals irrelevant, however. Two of the largest spikes in Russian protest—March 1990 in Estonia and May 1990 in Latvia—correspond directly to the passage of those republics' declarations of independence, suggesting that some ethnic Russians also were directly concerned about the prospect of their separation from the Soviet Union.

In 1991, the more reactionary elements of the Russian-speakers' movements rallied in support of the crackdown by Soviet forces in the region. In Estonia, Russian speakers in the mostly ethnic Russian northeast began demonstrating in support of economic autonomy for that corner of the country, suggesting that they already considered independence a 'done deal.' Many of the demonstrations Russian-speakers organized during this period occurred on dates that were officially commemorated on the Soviet calendar: Soviet Army Day, Victory Day, and May Day in particular. These are, in effect, expression of Soviet nationalism, and for the most part they account for the final peaks in collective action prior to full independence.[28] In the wake of the failure of the reactionary

[27] For a contemporary sketch of one of these organizations, see Ilves (1991: 71–83).
[28] Lieven (1994: 197) provides a colorful description of these events: 'Most [pro-Soviet] demonstrations were not merely small, but also attended largely by the elderly. The sight of badly dressed, misshapen Russian women shrieking hysterically at these meetings was one with which every observer became familiar. It is not the stuff of which successful counter-revolutions are made.'

coup in Moscow in August 1991, all three republics declared the leading Russian-speakers organizations illegal on the basis of their vocal support for the putschists.

Conclusions
This analysis shows how the goals and dynamics of the protest movements that swept the Baltic republics during the Gorbachev era related to specific changes in the structure of political opportunities they faced. More generally, this analysis suggests that ethnic and nationalist protest are shaped, at least in part, by the forces that influence other kinds of social movements more commonly viewed as 'rational' or strategic. The fact that the Baltic movements responded to increasing access to state power, unstable elite alignments, and decreased state repression implies that participants in these events carefully evaluated their political environment before acting. In contrast to the emphasis on a cultural and symbolic agenda one might expect from an identity-oriented interpretation, these movements intended explicitly to transform state power. Their fundamental goals were to redefine the geographic boundaries of state authority and to put power over public authority in the hands of particular ethnic groups. As they accomplished these goals, they motivated potential losers—primarily ethnic Russians residing in the region—to counter-mobilize. Both sides found allies among local and federal elites, producing a tense face-off in 1991 as the USSR spiraled toward break-up.

One important question this article has not attempted to address is how or why the Baltic movements remained non-violent. The most violent incidents in the region occurred in early 1991, when security forces sought to occupy key sites in Riga and Vilnius, and even those confrontations resulted in just 21 deaths. That number is by no means insignificant, but it does seem small considering the central role the Baltic revolutions were playing in the destruction of one of the world's most powerful and traditionally repressive states.

In fact, that very power hints at one of the strongest explanations for why the Baltic revolutions remained peaceful. Given the coercive power of Soviet security forces, Baltic protesters surely recognized that any attempt to enact their agendas by force would fail badly. As it happened, the Baltic movements did a skillful job in 1987 and 1988 of probing the limits of official tolerance, and then moving those limits through repetition of the claims and tactics that lay right up against the boundaries they had identified. By the summer of 1989, fear of a massive military crackdown was greatly diminished following the emergence of the so-called Gorbachev Doctrine, under which Communist regimes in Eastern Europe were allowed to fall without Soviet intervention. Only the following year did the Baltic movements dare to take the ultimate step of declaring their independence from the USSR—and then backing slightly away from those declarations in response to Moscow's threats.

This tactical interpretation differs from the sociological explanation offered by Petersen (2001), who views non-violent mobilization and armed rebellion as sequential stages of resistance and argues that the transition from one to the other depends on the strength and structure of local communities. Comparing armed Lithuanian resistance to Soviet occupation in the 1940s and 1950s with non-violent Lithuanian protest against Soviet rule in the 1980s, Petersen argues that the emphasis in the 1980s on passive resistance reflected the weakening of Lithuanian communities through modernization and Communist rule.

Without disputing the notion that community structure shapes the likelihood and character of collective action, I believe we may more fruitfully view mobilization for violence and mobilization for protest as at least partially distinct processes that respond to different incentive structures and usually draw on different sets of individuals, even within a single community. Put another way, I do not see ethno-nationalist violence as a later or higher stage of resistance so much as an alternative—though sometimes overlapping—

mobilizational path. This distinction often becomes evident in particular mobilizational waves through clashes between 'radical' or 'hard-line' organizations that endorse the use of violence and 'moderate' or 'soft-line' organizations that emphasize non-violent forms of contention. Which mobilizational stream gains ascendancy in any given situation depends on host of contextual factors and event-driven contingencies, not the least of which is the military might of the power they are confronting.

In the Soviet Union, actors seeking a change in status vis-à-vis Moscow were virtually assured of destruction if they chose to use violence, even in the Gorbachev era, as evidenced by the violent suppression of the Azerbaijani revolution in 1990. By contrast, the response to non-violent protest was far more ambivalent from the start, in part because the Communist Party relied on the pretense of mass mobilization and public demonstrations to legitimate its rule. For groups seeking to challenge Soviet authority, this incentive structure almost over-determined a tactical emphasis on non-violent contention.[29] Following the reactionary putsch of August 1991, the Soviet regime finally crumbled, and the Baltic protesters never had to fire a single shot. In the context of Gorbachev's reforms, their strategy had been impeccable: the Soviet Union had been held together by force, so they finally defeated the Soviet enemy by peacefully turning its own institutions against it.

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[29] As Beissinger (2002: 271–319) shows, the incentives were very different for groups threatened by the shift of political authority from Moscow to the republics, and most of the violent ethno-nationalist mobilization that occurred during this period involved clashes between republican groups over borders or between groups within Soviet federal units.

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