Regime support in ethnically divided societies: Data from the Baltic states, 1993-2004

Piret Ehin
Department of Political Science
University of Tartu
Tiigi 78-204
Tartu 50090
Estonia
E-mail: piret.ehin@ut.ee

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Abstract.¹

This paper uses multidimensional models of regime support to map and evaluate trends and forms of regime support among the six principal ethnic groups of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. It uses data from the New Baltic Barometer, a cross-national survey with six rounds of interviews conducted between 1993-2004. Building on models of political support as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, the paper tracks trends in support for the political community, regime principles, and satisfaction with regime performance. The results reveal important differences both within and across nations. Russian-speakers in all three countries express lower levels of regime support along all three dimensions. As indicated by very low levels of support for the political community among minority respondents, nation-building in Estonia and Latvia remains an unfinished project. However, growing satisfaction with economic performance among all ethnic groups in the Baltics, as well as higher levels of regime satisfaction in the better-performing Estonia, suggest that effective governance plays an important role in consolidating regime support in ethnically divided societies.

Over the past decade, the analysis of public support for modern democratic regimes has emerged as an increasingly independent and well-defined research program (Klingemann 1998, Norris 1999, Mishler and Rose 1994, 1996, 1997, 2001; Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998, Munro 2002; Anderson and Tverdova 2003, Canache and Allison 2003, Linde and Ekman 2003; Ekman and Linde 2004). Building on earlier theoretical and empirical studies on political culture, political participation, and legitimacy, the new research program focuses on the dynamics and determinants of mass political support. It seeks to clarify how modern democratic regimes acquire and maintain legitimacy and what criteria citizens use in evaluating incumbent regimes.

This new interest in regime support is spurred by a number of developments. First, many studies have recorded a worrisome trend of eroding public support, decreased political trust and declining levels of political participation in democratic states around the world (Norris 1999; Dalton 1999, Klingemann and Fuchs 1995; Putnam

¹ This research is supported by a grant from the Estonian Science Foundation for a study of Regime Support in New Democracies: Data from the Baltic states 1993-2004 (grant number 6212). I am indebted to Prof Richard Rose from the University of Strathclyde for providing the research team with data. I also wish to thank Kadri Aas and Elina Seppet for their assistance with this paper, and Kadri Lühiste and Allan Sikk for their helpful comments on an early draft of this paper.
1995). Others, notably Norris (2001) offer a revisionist reading, arguing that political participation is transforming and studies using conventional indicators are not able to record new forms of civic engagement. In any case, the controversy calls for more attention to political beliefs and attitudes that underlie patterns of political participation on which the survival of democratic regimes so critically depends.

Interest in political support has also been driven by extensive regime changes in the recent decades. The „third wave“ of democratization (Huntington 1991) has produced mixed results, ranging from consolidated democracies in the new EU member-states to consolidated authoritarianism in many former Soviet republics. The understanding that democratization need not be an irreversible process has led to a new interest in how democratic regimes earn the trust of their citizens and has revitalized an old debate on the impact of mass attitudes and the prevailing political culture on the functioning of democratic institutions (Almond and Verba 1963, Eckstein 1998, Putnam 1993, Raiser, Haerpfer, Nowotny and Wallace 2001, Mishler and Rose 2001, 2002).

Although previous studies have made important contributions to our understanding of the nature of political support, they are not without limitations. One shortcoming stems from insufficient attention to ethnicity as a potentially important determinant of regime support. To the extent modern nation-states are not culturally neutral but privilege majority ethnic groups and languages, one could expect minorities to display lower levels of regime allegiance. The few studies that have examined within-country ethnic differences in mass political attitudes report extensive differences among ethnic groups in evaluations of democratic institutions, patriotism, political competence, social capital and interpersonal trust (Silver and Dowley 2000; Dowley and Silver 2002). An analysis of World Values Survey data from 16 ethnically divided countries shows that on a range of political culture variables, ethnic differences within countries are far larger than the aggregate differences between countries (Silver and Dowley 2000). These findings suggest that the literature on political support may also benefit from deconstructing national aggregates and taking a systematic look at ethnic differences within countries.
This paper seeks to advance our knowledge about regime support in ethnically divided societies. It maps and evaluates trends and forms of regime support among the six principal ethnic groups of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania over eleven years, covering almost the entire period since the restoration of Baltic independence. Focusing on three central elements of regime support – identification with the political community, support for regime principles, and satisfaction with regime performance – this paper seeks to determine the degree of heterogeneity within and across countries, and examine variations over time. While the goal of this paper is primarily descriptive, this exercise is useful for a number of reasons. First, the paper draws attention to those dimensions of political support which in established Western democracies are generally uncontested and therefore understudied, such as support for the political community. Second, the paper identifies problems with some frequently used measures of political support and suggests alternative operationalizations for multiethnic societies. Third, this paper is among the first comparative studies mapping empirical trends in regime support in the Baltic states. Although methodologically unsophisticated, relying only on aggregate data, it lays the foundation for further research that involves testing explanations of regime support with individual-level data from the New Baltic Barometer.

**Political support: a multi-dimensional phenomenon**

In modern democratic theory, the concept of *political support* is most commonly discussed with reference to the work of David Easton (1965, 1975). Easton distinguishes between the objects of support (*political community, the regime, and the incumbent authorities*) and the types of support (specific or diffuse). The *political community* is the cultural entity that transcends the particularities of formal governing structures. The *regime* is constituted of those formal institutions that persist and transcend particular political *incumbents*.

Contemporary studies recognize the multidimensional nature of political support and rely heavily on Easton’s original classification (Norris 1999, Fuchs 1993, Klingemann 1998; Ekman and Linde 2004). Norris (1999) distinguishes among five levels of political support, including, in growing order of specificity, support for the political community, regime principles, regime performance, political institutions and political
incumbents. A similar typology is used by Klingemann (1998) who distinguishes among support for the political community ("identification with the political community"); for democracy as a form of government ("legitimacy of the political regime"); and approval of the regime's performance ("effectiveness of the political regime"). These distinctions are based on the belief that the publics can, and do, “distinguish between different levels of the regime, often believing strongly in democratic values, for example, while proving critical of the way that democratic governments work in practice”(Norris 1999: 9). In this study, I use „political support“ as a broad term denoting all forms of support listed by Norris, including support for specific institutions and incumbents, while limiting the term „regime support“ to the categories of diffuse support identified by Klingemann.

These distinctions are important also because the political implications of popular dissatisfaction vary by the type of support. As Easton (1975: 437) points out, „(n)ot all expressions of unfavorable orientations have the same degree of gravity for a political system. Some may be consistent with its maintenance; others may lead to fundamental change“ (Easton 1975: 437). As a general rule, the political implications of mass discontent increase as the object of dissatisfaction becomes more general (Dalton 1996: 264). While disapproval of specific political incumbents is unlikely to produce a serious legitimacy crisis, low levels of support for regime principles or the political community could lead to constitutional changes, revolution, civil war, and secession. Developing a working consensus on the constitutional foundations of the state is thus crucial to the stability of multiethnic societies.

This conceptual framework, however, is not universally accepted. Critics of the model doubt whether ordinary people are able to distinguish among the various dimensions of support. Instead of the fine gradations imagined by political scientists, popular perceptions may be much less sophisticated “lump attitudes.” It is also claimed that the framework may be more problematic in new democracies where limited experience does not allow respondents to separate the long-term characteristics of a regime from short-term effects of particular governments or political incumbents. Although studies such as Klingemann (1998) have empirically confirmed the existence of these analytical distinctions, using data from the World Values Survey, theoretical and methodological debates are far from over. Instances of conceptual
confusion and questionable operationalization of the key variables are still quite common (see Linde and Ekman 2003). The various levels and types of support are interlinked and more work is needed to establish the nature of these relationships.²

In light of the above, what is the value of linking the literature on political support with theorizing on multiethnic states? Multidimensional models of support allow for a more nuanced and organized analysis of political implications of ethnic cleavages. The multidimensional framework suggests that minority discontent need not be “of a kind” – it may have different underlying reasons, can take various forms and have different political implications. Identifying the types of support that are lacking or low constitutes an important step towards finding appropriate solutions and devising successful legitimation strategies.

Multidimensional models of political support can also benefit from a greater emphasis on ethnicity. Of the various dimensions of political support, support for political community has clearly received the least attention. This lack of interest may stem from the fact that in established Western democracies, popular support for the political community (based on nationhood) is generally high (Norris (1999). Limited variation thus renders the variable less intriguing and less suitable for hypothesis-testing. However, identification with the political community is the prime example of diffuse support – the absence of which, according to Easton, is potentially much more dangerous than the erosion of specific support. Yet, not all countries where nation-building remains unfinished have experienced serious ethnic conflict or civil war. It is important to understand how other sources of legitimacy may compensate for the absence of a shared national identity. This is where the Baltic experience, characterized by stability and transition success despite significant ethnic divisions, may prove highly illuminating.

² For instance, Linde and Ekman (2003) show that satisfaction with democratic performance is influenced by partisan support for existing governments. Munro (2002) demonstrates that evaluations of economic system have a strong effect on assessment of political performance.
Sources of regime support: an overview of the Baltic context

The multifaceted literature on legitimacy, from Weber to contemporary thought, emphasizes four general sources of “belief in rightful political authority” that provide a good basis for a brief overview of the relevant Baltic context. These sources include tradition, shared identity, procedural legitimacy (fair rules) and regime performance (see Beetham 1991, Beetham and Lord 1998). Tradition matters: in established regimes, legitimacy is strengthened by the perception that “this is how things have always been;” new regimes, on the other hand, struggle to earn the trust of the governed. Identity issues arise because the exercise of popular sovereignty and majoritarian democracy presume the existence of a clearly delineated populace. Democratic legitimacy cannot exist without a *demos* – a people with some form of shared identity -- around which democracy can be constructed. Procedural legitimacy requires that authority is acquired and exercised according to established, socially accepted rules. Finally, legitimacy can be derived from popular approval of the declared ends of government, and satisfaction with the system’s ability to deliver policy outcomes consistent with these goals. (Scharpf 1997, Beetham and Lord 1998). The contemporary literature on regime support has successfully converted these categories to determinants of regime support, central to much of the current hypothesis-testing.3

*Tradition.* Before the restoration of independence in 1991, Baltic states’ experience with modern statehood was limited to two decades of independence between the two world wars. The three democratic republics succumbed to soft forms of authoritarianism, before being annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940. This experience with independent statehood and democracy, however brief, proved to be a major asset and legitimation tool in the struggle for independence during the period of gradual collapse of the Soviet Union. The decision to apply the principle of *restitutio ad integrum* and to cast separation from the USSR as the *restoration* of pre-war republics, rather than the creation of new independent states, immediately made available a pool of moral arguments, legal rules, shared narratives, and national symbols that greatly facilitated the legitimation of the new order. Furthermore, the non-recognition of Soviet

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3 Several studies regard rule of law as an important determinant of regime support (Linz and Stepan 1996; Rose 2001, Rose and Misler 2002). Other studies demonstrate the strong effects of economic performance on regime evaluations (Munro 2002, Mishler and Rose 2001). The other two potentially relevant sources of regime support - tradition and identity - have received less attention in the current empirical literature.
annexation of the Baltic states by major Western powers, including the United States, was crucial for the Baltic return into the international community of sovereign countries. Despite the perceived newness of the Baltic states, tradition - based on the concept of legal continuity - is a central component of the foundation on which their legitimacy rests.

Identity. The national identities of the Baltic people developed through the national reawakenings of the late 19th century and were consolidated during the inter-war period of independence. With identities rooted in distinct languages and national cultures, Baltic peoples were able to resist assimilation under German and Russian rulers. The massive influx of Russian-speakers during the Soviet period, however, dramatically altered the ethnic composition of the Baltic states. While the interwar republics were relatively homogeneous nation-states with well-integrated historical minorities, Estonia and Latvia now rank among the most ethnically diverse states in Europe (Table 1). The privileged position of Russians and the Russian language in the USSR meant that the newcomers were under no pressure to integrate with Baltic societies or learn the local languages. In line with the logic of legal continuity from interwar republics, Estonia and Latvia granted citizenship to those who were citizens before 1940 and their descendants. Soviet-era immigrants could become citizens by naturalization, after passing a language test. Lithuania, which had not been subject to equally massive Slavic immigration in the Soviet period (the Russian-speaking minority constitutes only 10% of the population), opted for an inclusive nation-building strategy, granting citizenship to all legal residents at the time of the restoration of independence.

### Table 1. Share of titular population in total population (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Interwar census*</th>
<th>1959</th>
<th>1979</th>
<th>1989</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>67.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>57.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>83.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*In the interwar period, general censuses were held in Estonia in 1934, in Latvia in 1935, and in Lithuania in 1923. Sources: census data reported by Estonian Statistics Bureau, US Library of Congress, Kasatkina and Beresnevičiūtė (2004)
**Fair rules.** Since the restoration of independence, Baltic states have quickly and consistently moved in the direction of democratic consolidation, guided and guarded by EU accession conditionality. The frequently used Freedom House scores illustrate the progressive consolidation of Baltic democracies (Figure 1). Since the restoration of independence, all three states have been classified as “free” except for a brief period in 1992-1993 when Estonia and Latvia were classified as “partly free.” With the progressive liberalization of citizenship laws, Estonia and Latvia quickly caught up with Lithuania, and all three had the same ranking until 2004 when Estonia was elevated to “completely free” status while Lithuania lost points due to a corruption scandal culminating with the impeachment of President Rolandas Paksas.

![Figure 1. Baltic democracy scores, 1991-2004](image)

Values are the mean of Freedom House scores for Political rights and Civil liberties, both measured on a scale of 1 (most democratic) to 7 (least democratic).

Source: Freedom House

However, it is important to note that an unconditional endorsement of Baltic democracy presumes the acceptance of the “philosophy of restorationism” – and its implications for citizenship - that underlies Baltic state- and nation-building (Smith 2003). Critics of the restitutionist concept of citizenship portray Estonia and Latvia as “ethnic democracies” where citizens have full democratic rights, but citizenship remains the privilege of the dominant ethnic groups (Smith, Aasland and Mole 1994; Smith 1996, Pettai 1998, 1994). As the pace of naturalization has picked up and the share of citizens has increased to over 80% of the population in both Latvia and Estonia, these criticisms have somewhat subsided. However, assessments of Baltic democracy depend fundamentally on whether one accepts the underlying concept of
the *demos* – and the rules for inclusion and exclusion – that were adopted in the early phases of Baltic independence.

**Regime performance.** Like all post-communist countries, the Baltic states experienced a significant economic downturn in the early phases of transition. In terms of the length (5–6 years) and depth (cumulative output decline of 35–51 percent) of the economic recession, the Baltic states were closer to the CIS average than to that of Central and Eastern European states (World Bank 2002). While economic recovery was not as rapid as in Central Europe, positive growth resumed in the mid-1990s, and by 1997 the growth of Baltic economies was among the fastest in Europe (EBRD 1999). While the Russian crisis of 1998 brought growth to a temporary halt, it resumed quickly and has been strong at 5-7% in recent years. Inflation was brought under control by 1997. Relatively high levels of unemployment pose a more significant problem, with rates over 10% in Estonia and Lithuania in 2002-2003. Of the three, Estonia implemented more decisive policies of macro-economic stabilization and liberalization. Its early and unilateral adoption of a free trade regime produced a remarkable degree of economic openness (Feldmann). Estonia’s greater reform success is evident from a range of performance indicators, such as GDP per capita, average wages, level of FDI, IT sector development, and the prevalence of corruption. These differences were recognized by the EU, which invited Estonia to open accession negotiations in 1997. The invitation was extended to Latvia and Lithuania a few years later when the EU adopted a more inclusive enlargement strategy.

**Table 2. Selected performance indicators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Consecutive years of output decline</th>
<th>Cumulative output decline (%)</th>
<th>Real GDP, 2000 (1990–100)</th>
<th>GDP per capita annual growth rate (%), 1990-2002</th>
<th>Average annual change in consumer price index (%), 1990-2002</th>
<th>GDP per capita (PPP US$) 2002</th>
<th>Internet users (per 1,000 people), 2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>12,260</td>
<td>322.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>9,210</td>
<td>133.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>10,320</td>
<td>144.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSB*</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>106.5</td>
<td>-0.9**</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>7,192**</td>
<td>71.8**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIS</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Central and Southeastern Europe and the Baltics **Mean values for CIS and CEE.

4 Transparency International has for many years ranked Estonia, together with Slovenia, as the least corrupt countries in Eastern Europe. In 2004, Estonia ranked 31st among 146 countries of the world; Lithuania was 44th, while Latvia held 57th place.
Hypotheses

The following hypotheses, derived from the existing literature on regime support, will serve as focal points for the analysis of Baltic trends.

**H1.** The level of political support varies by the object of support – political community, regime principles, and regime performance.

**H2.** In ethnically divided societies, titular ethnic groups express higher levels of regime support (along all three dimensions of support) than ethnic minorities.

**H3.** Popular evaluations of regime performance covary with the actual levels of national political and economic performance both over time and across nations.

Mapping political support in the Baltics

The paper uses aggregate data from the New Baltic Barometer (NBB), a cross-national survey study directed by Professor Richard Rose at the University of Strathclyde. The NBB is part of an ongoing programme of Barometer surveys monitoring mass response to transformation in 15 post-communist societies of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The NBB is uniquely suited for studying political support among the six principal nationalities living in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. It asks representative samples of each nationality similar sets of questions about their political attitudes, economic behavior and social conditions, multiple identities, and language use. Respondents are interviewed in the language of their choice. To date, there have been six rounds of the survey, conducted in 1993, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, and 2004. Each round involved between 1000 and 2000 face-to-face interviews in each of the three Baltic countries. For more information on the survey, see [www.BalticVoices.org](http://www.BalticVoices.org).

Support for political community

Of the various dimensions of political support, support for the political community has received the least attention, presumably due to the low levels of variation in established Western democracies, where nation-building processes were completed long ago. In the studies that incorporate this aspect, support for the political community is generally measured by a question focusing on the degree of national pride. Klingemann (1998), for instance, uses two indicators from the World Values Survey to measure support for political community:
"How proud are you to be [nationality – e.g. French]? (4) Very proud, (3) quite proud, (2) not very proud, (1) not at all proud;"
- "Of course we all hope that there will be not another war, but if it were to come to that, would you be willing to fight for your country? (1) yes, (0) no."

The ensuing analysis of 39 countries shows that the Baltic states have some of the lowest levels of support for the political community among the 39 countries analyzed, aside from Germany and Japan where World War 2 experiences have, for obvious reasons, had the effect of suppressing national pride.

Both of the indicators used by Klingemann are problematic. Leaving aside some obvious problems with the second question, such as a potential gender and age bias, as well as the somewhat militaristic assumption that love for one’s country necessarily entails a willingness to fight, I will turn to the shortcomings of the first, more widely used indicator of national pride. Several studies have pointed out the problems of using aggregate measures of national pride in countries with unresolved problems of state- and nation-building, citing Estonia and Latvia as vivid examples (e.g. Ekman and Linde 2004:42; Dowley and Silver 2000). Using WVS data from 1990 and 1993, Dowley and Silver demonstrate that titular nationalities in the Baltics display high levels of pride in country, while Russian-speakers are moderately to strongly negative in pride in country. They conclude that in case of many multiethnic societies, aggregate scores are meaningless as they average together dramatically different evaluations by the major ethnic groups (Dowley and Silver 2000: 537).

However, the problem is not just one of aggregation but a more fundamental question about construct validity. In the Baltics, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, nationality continues to be a cultural category, defined by ethnicity, not a civic category based on citizenship and shared institutions (see Kohn 1946, Kolsto 2000, Brubaker 1996, Schöpflin 1996). Thus, a Russian-speaker may acquire Estonian citizenship but would not identify himself, or be considered by others as “Estonian” unless naturalization is accompanied by cultural and linguistic assimilation. In a situation where only a tiny fraction of Russian-speakers in the Baltic states identify as Estonians, Latvians, or Lithuanians (Figure 2) and many of them still do not hold citizenship of the country they live in, the given question about national pride is not applicable. While the WVS survey recorded responses such as „I am not Estonian,“ if volunteered, cases with
these misfitting values are generally dropped from analysis when aggregate measures of national pride are constructed. The inappropriate assumption of ethnic homogeneity and universal citizenship thus reduces the validity of findings based on this particular WVS question.

The NBB survey offers alternative indicators of support for the political community. Since 1993, the survey has included a question about individual identity. Early rounds of the survey asked about identification with groups, such as Estonians and Russians, or residents of a given region. Not surprisingly, the resulting pattern was largely determined by ethnic belonging. In 1993-2001, between 80-90 per cent of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians chose a Baltic nationality as their primary or secondary identity, while very few Russians (under 5 per cent with the exception of Lithuanian Russians in 2001) did so.

In 2004, however, the question measuring identity was reformulated. Instead of being asked to identify with a group of people, respondents were asked about their attachment to political/geographical entities, such as countries or regions. The formulation in the 2004 survey was as follows:

„With which of the following do you most closely identify yourself? And which do you identify with secondly? (local community/city, region, this country, Europe, Russia, other CIS country, other)“


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What may seem as a minor modification in question wording produces significant differences in results (Figure 3). Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia continue to display very low levels of attachment to the state they live in. Only 2 per cent of Estonian Russians chose „Estonia“ as their primary object of identification, while 1 per cent chose it as their secondary identification (Table 2). In Latvia, the numbers were only slightly higher, with 5 per cent choosing Latvia as their primary and 8 per cent as their secondary identification. Instead of the respective Baltic countries, Estonian and Latvian Russians identify with Russia or other CIS states (around 40 per cent choose this as first option) or with their locality or region (again, chosen by about 40 per cent of respondents) (Table 2).

Table 2. Identities by ethnic group, 2004
(\% of respondents choosing the following as their primary identity (secondary identity))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Estonians</th>
<th>Est-Russians</th>
<th>Latvians</th>
<th>Lat-Russians</th>
<th>Lithuanians</th>
<th>Lit-Russians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local community, city</td>
<td>26 (39)</td>
<td>38 (30)</td>
<td>29 (44)</td>
<td>42 (39)</td>
<td>51 (26)</td>
<td>47 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>6 (24)</td>
<td>7 (17)</td>
<td>6 (18)</td>
<td>7 (18)</td>
<td>5 (20)</td>
<td>6 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This country</td>
<td>63 (24)</td>
<td>2 (1)</td>
<td>60 (26)</td>
<td>5 (8)</td>
<td>39 (43)</td>
<td>32 (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>2 (9)</td>
<td>6 (13)</td>
<td>1 (8)</td>
<td>2 (5)</td>
<td>3 (9)</td>
<td>3 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>41 (31)</td>
<td>2 (1)</td>
<td>36 (25)</td>
<td>0 (1)</td>
<td>6 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other CIS</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>2 (5)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>4 (2)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>5 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>3 (2)</td>
<td>- (-)</td>
<td>- (-)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q: Which of the following do you most closely identify yourself? And which do you identify with secondly?
In stark contrast, 53 per cent of Lithuanian Russians identify with the Lithuanian state (Figure 3). Thirty two per cent of the respondents list the country as their object of primary identification, while another 43 per cent say that they identify with Lithuania secondly. In fact, the breakdown of responses in 2004 is remarkably similar among Lithuanians and Lithuanian Russians (Table 2). While there is a broadbased consensus on the inclusive concept of citizenship in Lithuania, disagreement over who should be a member of the *demos* continues to divide titular groups and Russians in Estonia and Latvia (Figure 4). In sum, the data suggest that Baltic Russians have not become Estonians, Latvians, or Lithuanians, but – as the Lithuanian example demonstrates – they can develop a strong civic attachment to their new homelands.

**Figure 4. Support for restitutionist citizenship policies (% agree)**
Responses to question: „Which of these statements best fits your views of who should be a citizen? (a) Those whose families were citizens here before 1940.“

**Support for regime principles**

A number of studies have shown that support for democracy as a form of government can be separated both analytically and empirically from satisfaction with political and economic performance (Klingemann 1998; Ekman and Linde 2004). In both old and new democracies, support for democratic principles is generally much higher than satisfaction with regime performance. In Klingemann’s “global analysis,” the three Baltic states have average scores of democratic support. The Russian Federation, however, stands out with exceptionally low levels of support for democratic principles. Is distrust of democratic principles characteristic to ethnic Russians outside the
Russian Federation as well? Will a disaggregation of Baltic country scores reveal significant differences between ethnic groups?

To measure support for democratic regime principles, I use a widely used indicator that conceptualizes support for democracy as a rejection of authoritarian alternatives (Rose et al 1996, 1998, Ekman and Linde 2004). The question measures support for three types of alternatives, including the return to communist rule, army rule, and strongman rule:

*Our present system of government is not the only one the country has had. Some people say that we would be better off if the country was governed differently. Do you think that we should return to Communist rule? Do you think that the army should govern the country? Do you think that it would be best to get rid of Parliament and elections and have a strong leader who can quickly decide everything?*

The majority of Baltic respondents do not support any authoritarian alternatives. The results show important differences across nations as well as among ethnic groups. Lithuanians have, overall, been more likely to endorse authoritarian alternatives than Estonians or Latvians. Baltic Russians in each state have stronger authoritarian preferences than titular populations, although the differences are not great (Figure 5). The expectation that support for authoritarian alternatives should decrease over time is not confirmed, as this trend is clearly visible only among Lithuanians.

![Figure 5. Support for authoritarian alternatives](image)

*Figure 5. Support for authoritarian alternatives* (mean value of the number of alternatives endorsed). Source: New Baltic Barometer, 1995-2004.
The level of support for each of the authoritarian alternatives gives us additional information about the nature of Baltic democratic commitments. The percentage of respondents supporting army rule is negligible, ranging from 1 per cent in Estonia to 6 per cent among Lithuanian Russians in 2004. The return to communism has a stronger appeal to Russians, with as many as 25% of Estonian Russians supporting this in spring 2000. Support for strongman rule is significantly higher among all groups. It was particularly dominant among Lithuanians, with two-thirds of respondents supporting this alternative in 1995, but has rapidly eroded in the recent years. Overall, Russian-speakers remain considerably more likely to support strongman rule than the titular groups.

![Figure 6. Support for strongman rule (% agree)](source: NBB, 1995-2004)

The finding that Russian-speakers are less committed to democracy is confirmed by an additional indicator from the 2004 round of the survey (Table 3). Russians are less likely to see democracy as always preferable to other forms of government, and more likely to endorse authoritarianism. The within-country differences are greatest in Lithuania. Another interesting finding is the greater hesitations of Estonians, compared to Latvians or Lithuanians, in endorsing democracy.
Table 3. Commitment to democracy as form of government, 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Estonians</th>
<th>Estonian Russians</th>
<th>Latvians</th>
<th>Latvian Russians</th>
<th>Lithuan.</th>
<th>Lith. Russians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democracy always preferable</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian government</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sometimes preferable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not matter</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responses to question: „With which of the following statements do you agree most? (a) Democracy is preferable to any other type of government. (b) Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one. (c) For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or a non-democratic regime.‟
Source: New Baltic Barometer, 2004

Satisfaction with regime performance

Evaluations of regime performance have received more attention than any other dimension of political support (e.g. Rose and Mishler 2002, Mishler and Rose 2002, Linde and Ekman 2003). The majority of these studies argue that regime evaluations are endogeneous to the political and economic systems. In other words, it is assumed that people are well informed and reasonable, and that public assessments of regimes correspond to actual variations in performance. Proceeding from this assumption of reasonable publics, satisfaction with economic performance in transition countries should follow a U-curve, reflecting the pattern of initial output decline, followed by resumed growth, if reforms are successful (Blanchard 1997:16, Munro 2002). Different countries should reach the bottom of the U-curve at different times, depending on the length of the recession. To the extent that evaluations of political systems are determined by economic performance (Munro 2002), we could observe a similar U-trend in satisfaction with post-communist political systems.

The following question from the NBB and NDB surveys has often been used to measure satisfaction with regime performance:

Here is a scale for ranking how our system of government works (The top, plus 100 is the best; the bottom, minus 100, the worst). Where on this scale would you put out current system of governing with free elections and many parties?

Here is a scale for ranking how the economic system works (The top, plus 100 is the best; the bottom, minus 100, the worst). Where on this scale would you put out current economic system?
Trends of regime satisfaction are similar in all three Baltic countries (Figures 7 and 8). Satisfaction with economic systems has improved markedly since 1993 among all six groups and is now strongly positive in both Estonia and Lithuania. This finding is consistent with the hypothesized U-curve trajectory, if we accept the plausible argument that support had already reached the bottom of the curve by 1993 when the first NBB survey was conducted. Evaluations of the political system, however, appear to have a definite U-shape: in all groups, satisfaction decreased until 1995-1996, before beginning to increase again in 2000. The “delayed” erosion of approval for political regimes is consistent with the expectation that publics remain relatively patient and forward-looking during the period of “extraordinary politics” (Balcerowicz 1996). Once this grace period is over, support erodes if performance does not meet expectations. Further analysis is needed to establish to what extent political and economic evaluations are independent of another, or whether the political curve simply follows the trajectory of economic satisfaction with a time lag.

![Figure 7. Evaluations of current political systems (mean values)](image)

Source: New Baltic Barometer, 1993-2004

Q: Here is a scale for ranking how our system of government works (The top, plus 100 is the best; the bottom, minus 100, the worst). Where on this scale would you put our current system of governing with free elections and many parties?
Cross-national differences in regime evaluations correspond to actual differences in performance. Inhabitants of Estonia, regardless of ethnicity, have been consistently more satisfied with the functioning of their political and economic systems than residents of Latvia or Lithuania (Figure 7 and 8). The shape of the curves is surprisingly consistent with the relative gravity of the recession in each country – cumulative output decline in Estonia was significantly smaller than in Latvia and Lithuania. The fact that in Estonia, satisfaction was much higher already in the early phases of transition seems to point to important differences in the initial conditions as well as early payoffs from the more radical reform policies pursued by the Estonian government.

Third, differences between countries are far greater than with-in country differences between nationalities. Lithuanian Russians have consistently evaluated the political and economic system more highly than Lithuanians, and approval of the regime improved dramatically in both groups between 2001 and 2004.\(^5\) Russians in Estonia

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\(^5\) This dramatic improvement is difficult to explain. It may be related high economic growth rates since 2001, or to popular rejoicing over EU accession. Evaluations appear to be surprisingly unaffected by the scandal surrounding President Paksas which is widely regarded as the biggest setback in Lithuania’s democratic development since the restoration of independence.
and Latvia are less positive than the titular groups, and the differences are slightly greater in the political realm than in economic evaluations.

A broader base of comparison gives us a better sense of the meaning of these numbers. It is thus illuminating to examine how the Baltic Russians’ assessments of the Baltic regimes compare to their evaluations of the political and economic system of the Russian Federation. The mean values for each group are shown in Figure 9. The results challenge the assumption of reasonable, output-oriented publics. Despite the extensive gap between Baltic and Russian transition success and level of democratization, Baltic Russians rate the political and economic performance of the Russian regime more positively than that of the Baltic countries: There is one exception: Estonian Russians believe that the Estonian economic system is functioning as well as the Russian one. The “satisfaction gap” is smallest in Estonia, intermediate in Lithuania, and alarmingly pronounced in Latvia, where negative mean assessments of Latvia’s performance conflict with strongly positive evaluations of the political and economic system of the Russian Federation.

Figure 9. Comparative satisfaction with Baltic and Russian regimes among Baltic Russians (mean values)
For question wording, see Figures 7 and 8 and footnote 6.

* NBB data is very well suited for this comparison because support for the Baltic and Russian regimes is measured by similar questions and answers are coded on the same scale, ranging from +100 to -100. The relevant questions read as follows: Where on this scale would you put the present Russian system of governing? And where would you put the economic system of Russia today?
Conclusions

This study has applied a multidimensional framework of political support to map attitudes towards current regimes among the six ethnic groups of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. While several previous studies have used data from the World Values survey to measure political support in the Baltics, this paper used data from the New Baltic Barometer, which provides measures better suited for the Baltic context, as well as a broader battery of questions for measuring each dimension.

Our analysis suggests that people do distinguish among different dimensions of political support. Although different types of support are not measured on similar scales, and the results are therefore not directly comparable, it appears that the level and dynamics of support vary by the object of support – political community, regime principles, or the performance of economic and political systems.

Support for the political community is ethnically based in Latvia and Estonia. Alarmingly, only a fraction of Estonian and Latvian Russian-speakers identify with the countries they live in, while over two thirds feel attached to Russia or another CIS state. The finding that many Baltic Russians also have strong local or regional identities, however, alleviates the dangers potentially inherent in strong external loyalties of numerous ethnic minorities. Acquisition of citizenship by naturalization does not appear to increase attachment to these two Baltic countries: support for political community remains very low despite the fact that nearly a half of the Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia now hold citizenship of the respective countries. The substantially higher levels of minority identification with the political community in Lithuania reflect different strategies of nation-building, as well as different initial conditions.

The lack of support for the political community among Latvian and Estonian Russians, however, does not influence other dimensions of regime support as much as one might expect. Russians appear somewhat less committed to democracy as a form of government, but the differences are not great. Titular groups and Russian-speakers increasingly agree in their assessments of regime performance. In fact, the differences in regime satisfaction between titular groups and Russans are generally much smaller than differences among countries. Hypotheses 2, positing significantly lower levels of
support among minorities along all dimensions of regime support, is therefore only partially confirmed.

Hypothesis 3, positing that satisfaction with current economic and political systems covaries with actual performance, is largely confirmed. Satisfaction with regime performance has increased in all three countries, reflecting trends in economic growth, democratic consolidation, and attainment of national priorities such as EU membership. The theoretical expectation, derived from patterns of economic performance in transition economies, that regime evaluations follow a U-shaped trajectory, was confirmed. The finding that evaluations of economic and political system are consistently higher in Estonia is in line with a range of macro-level performance indicators confirming the greater transition success of this Baltic country.

However, the assumption of well-informed, reasonable, and output-oriented publics is challenged by the finding that Baltic Russians rate the political and economic system of Russia more positively than those of their Baltic homelands. The “satisfaction gap” is smallest in Estonia and most pronounced in the case of Latvia. It is not clear however, whether the assessments of Baltic Russians defy the logic of Freedom House democracy scores and World Bank economic indicators because ethnic loyalties prevail over rationality, or because the lack of information and first-hand experience hampers the ability to judge the performance of what is now a foreign regime. In any case, a large “satisfaction gap” is likely to hinder the development of political loyalties towards the new homeland, while increasing the likelihood of ethnic political mobilization and possibly - if other circumstances are favorable - the rise of irredentist claims.

These findings about the Baltic states suggest a model of regime support with two empirically relevant dimensions, including nation-building success and performance satisfaction. Lithuania is the most successful case of nation-building, characterized by initially low but rapidly rising levels of performance satisfaction. Estonia is characterized by low levels of nation-building success but high levels of performance satisfaction. Latvia remains the weakest link, with low levels of nation-building success and relatively low levels of performance satisfaction. Generalizing from the Baltic context, we may hypothesize that different dimensions of political support
correspond to complementary mechanisms of legitimation: strong performance can compensate for the absence of a cohesive *demos*, and strong, uncontested national identity may make the difficult transition period more tolerable. The “grave political implications” that Easton associated with undeveloped diffuse support are most likely to occur if both elements remain weakly developed. The substantially higher levels of political mobilization among Latvian Russians, compared to Russians living in Estonia and Lithuania, are consistent with this prediction.

**Table 4. Two-dimensional model of regime support**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nation-building success</th>
<th>high</th>
<th>low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In many ways, this paper is no more than a background paper for further research. It mapped trends in a number of potentially interesting dependent variables and tried to devise operational measures suited to the Baltic context. Further analysis, based on individual-level data from the NBB survey, will help explain the observed variations over time, across nations and among nationalities. The rudimentary theoretical model, presented in the concluding section of this paper, should be further developed, its implications elaborated and tested with data from other multiethnic societies.
Sources


