Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, groups that previously formed national minorities became new majorities in newly independent states whilst Russians in these states became minorities. With Russians constituting national minorities in all fourteen former republics (excluding Russia), the question of their recognition and rights emerged in a context of nationalizing states. This paper offers an overview of the national minority situation in the fourteen Non-Russian Post-Soviet states over the past quarter of a century, focusing on varying levels of state-minority relations while paying special attention to the demographic changes of the Russian population in each state. The examination of the state-minority relations will focus on three interrelated aspects. First, the official definition of each state, and the institutionalization of national holidays, anthems and official language(s) will be analyzed. Second, this paper analyzes the official status granted to national minorities as stipulated in the constitutions and other official documents of the non-Russian states. Third, access of minority representatives to key political and institutional positions and their ability to influence policy that directly concerns national minority rights will provide the practical assessment of Russian national minority political rights in each state.
Studying national minorities in the post-Soviet states

At the time of the disintegration of the Soviet Union 25 million Russians resided in the former republics outside of their homeland. This dramatic change in world politics sparkled a new debate on state minority within the broader literature on state-minority relations. The main scholarship debates in state-minority relations have focused on the institutionalization of state-minority relations through electoral systems, parliamentarian representation, government systems, power sharing arrangements, and the prospects of these institutional practices to achieve stability in deeply divided societies.¹ The treatment of ethnic minorities by a nation-state can take different forms, ranging from ethnic diversity elimination to accommodation of ethnic diversity. Methods of diversity elimination include genocide, population transfers, and assimilation, and can be employed through violent or non-violent means. Other diversity management methods can take the forms of accommodationist strategies including integration, power sharing and consociationalism, or exclusionary strategies such as hegemonic control.²

Nation building process, aimed at institutionalizing the privileged position and ownership of the state by a titular group is not necessarily incompatible with support for cultural pluralism.³ In order to make the political system more accessible to ethnic


groups, accommodationist strategies can give ethnic minorities a voice in decision making processes by facilitating parliamentary representation of political parties representing ethnic minorities. In spheres of language and culture these strategies can take the form of collective rights to establish cultural organizations and other institutions designed to protect and develop national heritages; language rights in education, local government and the courts, and in general to be willing to accommodate multiple processes of cultural reproduction.

Contrary to accommodative strategies, exclusionist strategies aim to banish minorities from the political realm or at least restrict their access. Ethnic minorities might face political exclusion in the form of restrictive citizenship laws, denial of the right to run for public offices, or the right to vote. However, these strategies are not confined to the political sphere as they may also be economic or social. Economic exclusion, for instance, can deny ethnic minorities the right for land ownership, or the right to engage in certain professions. The most extreme form of exclusion is the denial of citizenship as it effectively stripes members of the minority group of all political rights, and often restricts their social and economic rights. Hegemonic control is another form of exclusion, though it is characterized as a more moderate of

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5 Lapidus, p.328.


exclusionist strategy. “Hegemony is about converting societal resources into state action on behalf of the dominant ethnic group”\(^9\) in order to secure the primacy of that group within the nation-state.\(^10\) In India, for example, the hegemonic position of Hinduism enabled the promotion of religious assimilation of other religious minorities, establishment of linguistic superiority, and it also undermined political challenge from minorities.\(^11\)

Since 1991 many of the listed methods have been utilized by the post-Soviet states towards their Russian minorities. The exceptions are genocide and forced population transfers, which were not deployed partly because of international scrutiny.\(^12\) Partition and session are exemplified by the cases of Ukraine (Crimea) and Moldova (Transnistria). Both countries contained significant territories where the populations developed opposing national identities, pro-Soviet/Russian or pro-European identity,\(^13\) which ultimately resulted in the secession of the Russian speaking populations.\(^14\) Hegemonic control over the state by the national majority can be found in Latvia and Estonia, where the Russian minority’s access to social and political rights is denied through restrictive citizenship laws.\(^15\) Finally,


\(^13\) Lucan Way, "Authoritarian state building and the sources of regime competitiveness in the fourth wave: the cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine.” *World Politics* 57.2 (2005): 252.


\(^15\) Aasland and Flåttten, 1024-1025.
consociationalism and power sharing, which usually involve constitutional arrangements that guarantee power sharing through cultural autonomy, mutual veto, proportional representation, and grand coalitions, have been attempted in Moldova, where a constitutional change in 2000 led to the establishment of a parliamentarian system with proportional representation.¹⁶

Thus far, existing scholarship tended to focus on each state individually, or at most on contained sub-regions. Limiting the analysis to a single country or a contained geographical area, however, can miss out potential state-minority relations outcomes as well as mask potential causal mechanisms at play. Overall, the studies on various manifestations of minority recognition and rights in the post-Soviet states are predicated on the assumption that recognition of collective rights, such as official status to the minority language, is an indicator of states' willingness to accommodate the national minority and to stabilize state-minority relations. The underlying premise of this view is that the national majority has successfully established state-ownership and that the state acts on behalf of the majority in its regulation of ethnic minorities. In other words, this view presupposes that the newly independent states pursue nation-building projects by institutionalizing the primacy of titular groups, their cultures, languages, economic welfare and political domination over the state.¹⁷ However, conceptualizing these states as nationalizing states does not necessarily mean that these states pursue identical nationalizing policies, are engaged in nation-


building projects with the same degree of intensity, or treat their minorities exactly the same.\(^{18}\)

The Demographic changes of the Russian minority in the Near Abroad

The inflow of Russians to the contemporary Post-Soviet states occurred during the 20\(^{th}\) century; however it is not confined to the Soviet era. During the Soviet occupation, deportations of the native populations from their homelands\(^{19}\) and the massive migration of Russians were very uneven between the republics,\(^{20}\) resulting in diverse perceptions of the Russian minority in these republics following their independence. Thus, when examining the state-minority relations in each of the Post-Soviet states, it is necessary to approach this question with an awareness of the greater demographic trends of the Russian population in the Near Abroad over the past century.

Figure 1 presents the percentage of Russians in each state from the 1926 census conducted in each of the examined states (for the republics that were already dominated by the USSR at that time this was the 1926 census conducted by the USSR, for the rest the data is from each state’s national census from that decade) until the beginning of the 21\(^{st}\) century.\(^{21}\) The census data for the entire Soviet era is presented in the USSR census data. The proportion of the states’ populations that is Russian in each Post Soviet republic after 1989 is collected from national censuses from each states (the first census in the period between 1998 and 2008, and the second


\(^{21}\) All figures are presented in the Appendix.
one in the period between 2009 and 2014) or from estimations of the demographic composition of states where the data from national censuses was not available.

These demographic changes in the proportion of the Russian population in Post-Soviet republics since the 1990’s indicate a somewhat unsurprising trend of a decline of the Russian minority in the fourteen Post-Soviet states examined here. However, there are some interesting tendencies that stand out and provide historical demographic context to the discussions of current policies regarding the Russian minority. First, the Kyrgyz Republic and Kazakhstan represent the most extreme change in the size of the Russian minority. The size of the Russian minority in each country during the census from 1926 – 11.73% in Kyrgyz Republic and 20.57% in Kazakhstan - reached its peak at the end of 1950s’ – 30.18% in Kyrgyz Republic and 42.69% in Kazakhstan (and remained at that level in Kazakhstan for another decade) before dropping to pre-Soviet occupation levels. Second, and unlike in Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic, in Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, and Belarus the proportion of the total population comprised of Russians during the Soviet occupation reached its peak at the end of 1980’s, just prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Third, for the remaining republics, namely the republics of Central and Caucasus, the share of the Russian population during the Soviet era did not change as dramatically as for the other two groups. The trend of the Russian population is very similar for all of them, except in Armenia, where the share of Russians has been declining during the entire Soviet era dropping to less than 1% according to the 2011 census.

Figure 1 shows that in some cases, including Turkmenistan (6.7%), Lithuania (6.3%), Moldova (5.9%), Azerbaijan (1.7%), Georgia (1.5%), Tajikistan (1.1%), and Armenia (0.4%), the proportion of Russian populations dropped to less than 7% according to the first census conducted by the independent republics. Intriguingly, the
findings in the following sections indicate that some of these cases are of crucial importance for understanding the motivations behind state-minority in the Post-Soviet states, precisely because any recognition of the Russian minority and its language by these states is unexpected, and unexplained, by the scholarship on state-minority relations.

A caution about the inferences from demographic trends presented in figure 1 is warranted for three reasons. First, there is an inherent difficulty in differentiating between “Russians” as an ethnic group and Russian speaking national majorities (for example, Russian speaking Ukrainians). Second, scholars and demographers tend to assume that identities have an objective existence outside of the process of counting them, which makes any census an inherently political process. Lastly, the data are comprised of estimation of the size of the Russian minority in some states (as it is in the case of Uzbekistan, where a census has not been conducted since 1989) and of states where the census was criticized for being highly politicized (Ukraine).

**National character of Post-Soviet states**

**Constitutions and relevant legislation**

Constitutions and their preambles typically lay out the constitutive principles of the state and its ideological framework. Therefore, analyzing the constitutions of the fourteen republics can reveal the way in which ethno-linguistic diversity is officially addressed. Furthermore, analyzing all amendments to the constitutions and

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state laws relevant to the status of the Russian minority adopted since 1991 can help identify persistence and change in the official status of the Russian minority in the fourteen republics.

It is important to note that the most salient cleavage between the national majorities and the Russian minority in the post-Communist sphere is the linguistic one. Similarly to Romania and Slovakia, where “majority and minority alike define themselves in national terms and regard language as a fundamental link between people and a national space”, it is the status of the Russian language that has been contested in the post-Soviet states, thus also making it the focus of the scholarship in these states. Accordingly, the preliminary analysis of constitutions focuses on the official treatment of minorities, paying special attention to the most salient feature of conflict between the majorities and the Russian minorities, i.e. the Russian language. Even though the founding documents have granted territorial autonomy to some units, as will discussed in the following analysis, with the exception of the former autonomous republic of Crimea, these units are not based on Russian ethno-linguistic grounds, rather on non-Russian or multi-ethnic grounds.

In this paper, the analysis of constitutions and relevant pieces of legislation is focused on a series of questions: does the constitution explicitly identify a single group as owning the state? Does the constitution recognize the existence of ethnic, etc.


linguistic or national minorities? The sociological reality of ethnic or linguistic
diversity is not always reflected in the founding documents of these states, as some
might choose to convey an official stance of ethnic and linguistic homogeneity.\textsuperscript{27} If
ethnic or linguistic minorities are formally acknowledged, does the state provide any
resources to assist these minorities to develop their language and culture? State
support for ethnic and linguistic minorities—indicates that the state takes part of the
responsibility for the sustenance and development. Does the state promote the status
of a particular minority language through a corresponding legislation? Promotion of a
minority language gives this language a special status, for example: regional
language, right to be educated in one’s language in publicly funded schools, language
of inter-ethnic communication etc. Finally, does the language of the ethnic minority
enjoy the official status of a state language?

Figure 2 presents a detailed analysis of the constitutional and other legal
provisions pertaining to the Russian minority in each of the former Soviet republics.
This figure shows variation in the constitutional arrangements that address the status
of national minorities across time and space. The changes in the official status and
rights guaranteed to the Russian minority are examined annually across all republics
since their independence until the beginning of 2015. The variation (or lack thereof)
in the official treatment of national minorities, and Russian language in particular, are
represented according to the size of the Russian minority in each state, using the Post-
Soviet census data presented in Figure 1. Minority rights and recognition range from
mere recognition of ethnic diversity, through state support for ethnic minorities, to the
promotion of the minority language and official status for the minority language.
Thus, minority recognition is coded in ascending order, ranging from '0' for a mere

\textsuperscript{27} Székely and Horváth, 428.
recognition to ‘3’ for official status to the Russian language. The focus of the analysis in this paper is on the treatment of the Russian minority across post-Soviet states, thus the categories of promotion and official status to the minority language refer only to the Russian language.

As Figure 2 shows, there has been little change in the treatment of the Russian minority according to the official documents in the past quarter of century. The only changes in the official status of the Russian language occurred in Belarus, Ukraine and Tajikistan. After the adoption of the Belarusian constitution in 1994, which stated that the Russian language is the language of inter-ethnic communication in Belarus, the constitution was amended in 1996 stating that Russian, in addition to Belarusian, is an official state language. The Ukrainian constitution granted a special status to the Russian language as a language of international communication. The law on regional languages passed in 2012 during Yanukovich’s presidency allowed for regional languages for national minorities where they constitute more than 10% of the population to become the working language of the region. Shortly after the elections of 2014, the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) issued a notification on the expiration of the regional languages law effective immediately. In Tajikistan the constitution adopted in 1994 granted the Russian language a special status of language for inter-ethnic communication, but in 2009 a language law passed by the Majlisi

28 Constitution of the Republic of Belarus 1994, Section 1, Article 17.2.

29 Constitution of the Republic of Belarus 1994 [amended in 1996], Section 1, Article 17.


32 Constitution of Tajikistan 1994, Chapter 1, Article 2.
Oli (Tajik Parliament) referred to Tajik as the only official state language\textsuperscript{33}, thus undermining the special status provided to Russian by the constitution.

Figure 2 reveals that there is no overwhelming correlation between the size of the Russian minority and the rights they are entitled to. In Lithuania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan the Russian minority constitutes less than 10\% of the population and, accordingly, the Russian language is not granted with any formal status. Conversely, in Kazakhstan and Ukraine the Russian minority constitutes a substantial minority and the Russian language is granted with the adequate status. However, the disproportionate language rights granted to the Russian minority in Moldova, Belarus, Kyrgyz Republic and especially Tajikistan until 2009, are puzzling in light of the relatively small size of this minority in these states. In contrast, in Estonia and even more so in Latvia, where the size of the Russian minority out of the total is the biggest in the Post-Soviet states, the state does not recognize the Russian language in any official way.

The analysis of Russian minority recognition at the state level does not present the complete picture of the treatment of the Russian minority in the examined states, as some of the regions within these states recognize the Russian language as an official regional language or an additional official language. All successor republics are unitary states that have avoided federalism as a method for appeasing the demands of national minorities, despite some attempts (and successes) of the Russian minority to achieve some form of local or regional autonomy.\textsuperscript{34} However, sub-state regions in some of the post-Soviet republics proclaimed Russian as their official language. Thus, irrespectively of the nationwide recognition of the Russian language, or the lack


\textsuperscript{34} Wilson, 36-40.
thereof, the Russian language is recognized in several autonomous regions. In Ukraine Russian is an official language in 8 regions – Kherson oblast, Mykolaiv oblast, Odessa oblast, Kharkiv oblast, Dnipropetrovsk oblast, Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (former Ukrainian oblsts) and the former Crimea autonomous region. In Moldova Russian is an official language in the autonomous region of Gaugazia and in Transnitria. Finally, In Georgia, Russian language enjoys an official status in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia.

The decision of these nation-states to grant official status to minority language does not necessarily indicate an intention to accommodate the minority or outline power sharing arrangements between the groups. Rather, allocation of resources, including language rights, is a powerful tool of state control that can be used to achieve various goals. In Ukraine, the recognition of the Russian language initially seemed to form a positive model for minority relations, however it proved to be a highly contested and destabilizing model. Similarly, in the Kyrgyz Republic and in Tajikistan (until 2009) the official status of the Russian language does not necessarily indicate minority recognition, but does indicate some other motivation that leads political elites to grant the Russian language an official status. In the Kyrgyz Republic the Russian language is not only the language of inter-ethnic communication, but it is also the language of communication for the Kyrgyz in state institutions and commerce, despite the relatively small proportion of Russians in the population.35 Similarly, the official status of the Russian language in Belarus and Kazakhstan does not necessarily indicate minority recognition as much as it speaks to the dominance of the Russian language for all groups. The wide usage of the Russian language in

Kazakhstan made the Russian language "the lingua franca for the state to a degree not matched in other Soviet states". In addition, both Kazakhstan and Belarus are autocracies whose leaders, Nazarbayev and Lukashenko respectively, have formed special relations with, and dependency on the Russian Federation. Whereas Kazakhstan, Belarus, Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic have formed strong security, political and economic links with Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Moldova, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan are united by distrust to their previous colonial center.

The role of the Russian Federation in undermining democratic processes in the post-Soviet sphere is examined in the literature on democratization, but with the exception of the Baltic States, it is not thoroughly examined in the study of ethnicity and nationalism in the post-Soviet states, thus Russia's kin-state policies might prove to be of relevance here.

**National Holidays and Anthems**

Post-Soviet states share the common history of subordination to the Soviet regime, but they also shared the Soviet symbols that were present in the public sphere. These symbols of the Soviet regime were seen as a part of the colonial legacy of the USSR and, therefore, were replaced with the symbols of the national majorities in

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each state. However, a closer analysis shows that, like the variation in the status of the Russian language in the Post-Soviet states, the recognition of Soviet symbols also varies considerably across the states.

The newly independent states had to (re)construct their national identity, which proved to be an easier task for some states than it was for others. The Baltic States and the states of Transcaucasia had brief experiences with independence, national identity and a common language to rely on in their nation-building. Another advantage they had was a lack of substantial divisions within the national majority, which the Ukrainians, Belarussians and Moldovans did not enjoy. The Central Asian republics faced a more severe obstacle in their nation building process as the national majority within each state, which by and large was created by Soviet ethnographers, had a very limited set of pre-Soviet national symbols to rely on.

However, all these states had in common the need to choose which parts of the past where 'usable' for the nation-building process. Each newly formed state had to choose from various, and often competing, traditions and legacies which features would constitute the national character, and which would not. National holidays and state symbols therefore are another indicator of the place of Russians in the public sphere, in addition to the legal status of the minority in key state documents.

Figure 3 presents one aspect of this picking and choosing from the "menu", namely, the holidays commonly celebrated during the Soviet era. Whereas all Post-Soviet states introduced new national and religious holidays following their independence, some of the republics decided to keep Soviet holidays, while others did.

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41 Smith, *The post-Soviet states: mapping the politics of transition*, 76.


43 Sakwa, 213.
not. The only holiday from the Soviet regime that continued to be celebrated as a state holiday in the Baltic States is Labor Day. The celebration of Victory Day remains the centerpiece of Russia's calendar today\textsuperscript{44}, which is also celebrated by all post-Soviet states excepting the Baltics. This is also the case with International Women’s day. Belarus is the only state to celebrate the October Revolution Day, an example of a unique case of a former colony attempting to reintegrate with its former imperial core,\textsuperscript{45} and the Military Day is celebrated both, in Belarus and the Kyrgyz Republic.

This suggests that the communist ideology, with all its symbols, was perceived in the Baltic States as having been a failure, and everything associated with the old Soviet regime as backwards, including the national holidays. The rest of the republics decided to incorporate some of the symbols of the Soviet era into their nation-building process and accept it as part of their past, which was not universally perceived as a traumatic experience of colonialization as it was in the Baltics.

Out of the fourteen Post-Soviet states, the Baltic States are the only ones to commemorate victims of the Communist regime. Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania commemorate the victims of deportations during the Soviet occupation and the fighters for independence. Latvia alone has five days of remembrance for the Soviet occupation. In contrast, the remembrance days in the Non-Baltic republics do not commemorate the victims of the Soviet regime, in fact, for some of them the Soviet heritage is seen as a positive experience and equated with modernization and progress.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 225.

\textsuperscript{45} Kuzio, "History, memory and nation building in the post-Soviet colonial space," 259.

A brief overview of the national anthems in each republic will reinforce the findings in the previous sections. Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania restored their national anthems written in the late 19th century that were banned during the Soviet occupation. Ukraine’s anthem also dates to the end of the 19th century, although it became Ukraine’s official anthem for the first time with its independence from the Soviet Union. Armenia and Azerbaijan restored the anthems from their brief periods of independence in 1918-1922, and 1918-1920. Following the Rose revolution and the resignation of president Shevarnadze, the Georgian anthem was changed in 2004 to a new one adopted from Georgian operas. Independent Moldova initially adapted the Romanian national anthem, and in 1994 adopted a new anthem celebrating the native language. The Kyrgyz Republic adopted a national anthem written and composed in 1992. The national anthem of Turkmenistan was written and adopted in 1992 by its former leader, Saparmurat Niyazov, and slightly altered after his death. Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan kept the music from their time as Soviet Republics but wrote new lyrics. In 2006 Kazakhstan adopted a new anthem, initially written in 1956. Finally, the anthem of Belarus was written in 1955 for the Socialist republic of Belarus, but the lyrics were changed in 2004.

Two Hypotheses for the variation in state-minority relations

In some of the former Soviet republics the first years of independence were marked by the rule of former Communist leaders who managed to rapidly transform from representatives of the Communist party to national founders. The pragmatic leaders defined statehood and citizenship on a territorial basis by referring to the nation as including various ethnic groups, rather than being ethnically based. Others, such as the leaders of the Transcaucasian and Baltic states, took a more nationalist turn in restoring their pre-Soviet experience of statehood, reconstructing their national
identities, and eliminating most markers of the Soviet regime. For the political elites engaged in nationalizing policies in these states, it proved to be much easier to remove most of the symbols associated with the Soviet occupation. Finally, some of the central Asian former republics, which had no pre-Soviet national identity to rely on and a very positive, and even nostalgic, view of the Soviet experience chose to provide ethnic accommodation to the Russian minority, as was the case in Tajikistan, or even to grant official status to the Russian language, for example in Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic.

The legacy of the Soviet Union has been identified as having played an important role in the nation building processes and the prospects for minority integration in the Post-Soviet states. Whereas the Baltic States were forced to give in to the Soviet occupation and experienced massive deportations, Ukraine was incorporated as a "most favored Lord" and experienced the greatest mobility prospects for its political elite. Kazakhstan and other central Asian republics were incorporated and treated as colonies. The fact that “the new non-Russian states would seek to privilege the cultural and political role of their titular nationalities was the unsurprising legacy of Soviet rule”. Moreover, Soviet legacy of deliberate population displacement and mass migration of Russians to the republics has added to the crucial demographic changes in these states.

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47 Blakkisrud and Nozimova, 184.
48 Laitin.
49 Ibid.
50 Lapidus, 328.
The legacy of these Soviet nationalizing policies helps in explaining the exclusionist strategies used by states that exhibited the most extreme impacts of the Soviet rule. Thus, the method of incorporation of the republics and the treatment of the titular groups by the Soviet regime, ranging from restrictive to relatively open, suggests a possible explanation as to why in some post-Soviet states the Russian minority is treated with suspicion while in others it is accommodated and its rights are guaranteed. According to this view, we would expect to find accommodationist policies to the Russian minority in Ukraine and Belarus, hegemonic policies in the Baltic States and exclusionist policies in Central Asia.

This hypothesis explains why the Russian minority is not recognized in Latvia and Estonia, but it does not explain why the previous colonies in Central Asia officially recognize the Russian minority and its language enjoys an official status. In other words, the expectation that countries incorporated as colonies into the Soviet Union would reverse the colonial policies, in particular policies on the Russian language, is not confirmed by the empirical evidence.

The current demographic trends of Russians in the “Near Abroad” provides another possible explanation for the variation in treatment of this minority. The proportion of the states’ populations that is Russian in each former Soviet republic was constantly shifting and significantly dropped during the first decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as is illustrated in Figure 1. Priit Järve argues that the demographic size of the Russian population in each of the Baltic States explains state

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52 Järve, 39-63.

strategies.\textsuperscript{54} The share of Russians out of total population is the biggest in Latvia and the smallest in Lithuania. This demographic threat, according to Järve, explains why Latvia choose exclusionist strategies to manage ethnic diversity by denying Russians of Latvian citizenship, Estonia has been slightly more moderate in its treatment of the Russians, and Lithuania chose the most permissive path towards the minority.\textsuperscript{55} In general, small minorities are more likely to be accommodated by the state, typically through cultural autonomy.\textsuperscript{56}

This hypothesis can account for the exclusivist policies in Baltics, but it does not explain more accommodative policies in Kazakhstan and Ukraine, where the Russian minority posed a demographic threat as well. More importantly, this hypothesis specifies the negative relationship between state policies and the size of a minority, but says little about possible positive relations between the two. Thus, it does not explain why Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan chose such diverse policies toward the Russian minority. Overall, the preliminary findings indicate that there is no direct link between minority size and the type of state policies.

**Access to key political positions**

The next step in evaluating the treatment of the Russian minority in Post-Soviet states is assessing the practice of political institutions in providing effective access for the Russian minority to key political positions in government. Key political positions are understood here as the highest positions in government, namely government ministers and the heads of government. For the purposes of this analysis data was collected for all ministers and heads of states from 1991 until today in each

\textsuperscript{54} Järve.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{56} Lapidus.
of the republics. The data was collected from a variety of sources as none of these governments provide complete information on all ministries and state officials since their independence. The main sources were government websites and the CIA World Leaders database. In the cases of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and the Kyrgyz Republic, there is no data prior to 2001 (which is the earliest point of entry in the CIA World Leaders dataset. It was not possible to find verified information on state ministers from official sources between 1991 and 2001). The personal names of all political officials in the dataset were used as indicators of their ethnic origin. The ethnicity of senior politicians in the fourteen states was not available in all official sources, thus it was verified using online sources.57

It is clear that ethnic categorization of government officials based on their names is problematic. However, there is no evidence to suggest that Russians in the non-Baltic states voluntarily changed their last names to make their ethnic characteristics less “sticky”, or were forced to change their names by the state. In the case of the Baltics, the states issued regulations on the spelling of names to correspond to the orthography rules of the state language. In Latvia the names of non-Latvians had to be modified to fit the standards of the Latvian language in spelling and in name endings corresponding to the last names of Latvians.58 In Estonia the Names Act also specified the appropriate spelling of names for Estonians,59 thus

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57 The online sources used here consisted of online newspaper articles and Wikipedia web pages when having no alternative. In a recent study on the accuracy of coverage by Wikipedia, Adam Brown found that for politicians with a dedicated webpage the biographical details contained no errors. Adam R. Brown, “Wikipedia as a data source for political scientists: Accuracy and completeness of coverage,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44.02 (2011):339-343.


differentiating even further Estonian names from the non-Estonian names. In Lithuania, the State Commission of the Lithuanian language only recently allowed using the original spelling of non-Lithuanian names. These regulations on the standardization of name spelling in states did not eliminate the “stickiness” of Russian names, only forced them to conform to the national spelling of names. For example, in Lithuania the name Vladimir Prudnikov, had to be changed to Vladimiras Prudnikovas, however it remains a typical Russian name uncharacteristic of Lithuanian ethnic names.

Table 1 presents a list of Russian government ministers in each of the former Soviet republics. In Armenia and Azerbaijan there were no Russians in senior positions, which is not surprising given that the proportion of Russians there is insignificant. There were three Russians in Latvia’s governments, filling eight different positions over the years. In Kazakhstan there were eight Russians in senior government positions, the highest among all post-Soviet states, which also should not be surprising since the size of the Russian minority in Kazakhstan is 23.7% according to the latest census. However, with the exception of the current minister of energy, Vladimir Shkolnik, all Russian ministers in Kazakhstan were in office during the first decade after Kazakhstan’s independence. The Kyrgyz Republic presents the most surprising finding on the access of Russians to senior government positions. Three of Kyrgyz Republic's Prime ministers were Russians who, like many other Kyrgyz state

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officials, are not fluent in the Kyrgyz language. Unlike in Kazakhstan, the Russian ministers in Kyrgyz held their position within the past ten years.

Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus present a more ambiguous picture and are excluded from Table 1. Belarussians and Ukrainians are both Slavic peoples, which makes it extremely difficult, and possibly erroneous to categorize politicians in key positions to one or the other ethnic group. Unlike in the rest of the Post-Soviet states, surnames in Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus overlap and are ambiguous indicators of ethnicity. In other words, the imposition of theoretical categories on the complex ethno-linguistic reality of these states would be flawed. It is also not worthwhile because in the context of these states the main division often lies between the Russian speaking minority (which is comprised of Russians and Russian speaking Ukrainians, for instance) and the dominant majority, predominantly speaking the official national language.

**Conclusion**

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the balance of power between Russians and national majorities in the Post-Soviet republics was overturned. National majorities in each state initiated (or resumed) nation and state building processes, and advanced diverse nationalizing policies to which the Russian minority was subjected. The Russian minority in the Post-Soviet states presents a unique opportunity for comparative analysis of the treatment of a single minority by different states. Unfortunately, to date there is no comprehensive, comparative analysis of the entire post-Soviet sphere in relation to this single national minority. The purpose of this

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paper was to take a first step in providing a general overview and map the diverse manifestations of minority rights and recognition in this sphere in relation to the Russian minority. More specifically, it aimed at substantiating the argument that there is considerable variation in the official treatment of the Russian minority in these states, and that this variation cannot be fully, if at all, explained by size of the Russian minority or the Soviet legacy. The conclusions of this analysis are by no means final, and the findings only raise questions rather than infer causation. However, this overview does present potential directions for future examination of the Russian minority in the Near Abroad. First, the deviant cases of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (until 2009) present an opportunity to examine the reasons behind the unexpectedly broad recognition of the Russian language and effective access to the highest positions of power in these states. Second, the relative absence of scholarship on kin state nationalism in the entire post-Soviet regime left the questions of Russia’s potential influence on state-minority relations and the status of the Russian language in these countries, understudied. In the same vein, the degree of national cohesion of the national majority should not be assumed, but examined, as it also might have played a role in the resulting treatment of the Russian minority in each state.
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**Data Sources**


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Appendix

Figure 1: Russian population trends in each Republic 1920s’-2000s’
Figure 2: Official recognition of the Russian minority

Figure 3: Holidays formerly celebrated in the USSR
Table 1: Russians in key government positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Russians Total</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Dates in Office</th>
<th>Position in the Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Vladimir Shkolnik</td>
<td>2014 - present</td>
<td>Minister of Energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Valentin Dvorecheski</td>
<td>1991 - 1992</td>
<td>Minister of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Igor Rogov</td>
<td>2000 - 2002</td>
<td>Minister of Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sergei Kulagin</td>
<td>1993 - 1994</td>
<td>Minister of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Alexander Pavlov</td>
<td>1994 - 1998</td>
<td>Minister of Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2002 - 2003</td>
<td>Minister of Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Konstantin Kolpakov</td>
<td>1995 - 1997</td>
<td>Minister of Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vladimir Shumov</td>
<td>1992 - 1994</td>
<td>Minister of Internal Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nikolai Radostovets</td>
<td>1999 - 2000</td>
<td>Minister of Health and Social Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyz Republic</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Alexander Kostyuk</td>
<td>2001 - 2005</td>
<td>Minister of Agriculture, Water and Processing Industries</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>2005 - 2007</td>
<td>Minister of Labor and Social Welfare</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nikolai Tanayev</td>
<td>2002 - 2005</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Igor Chudinov</td>
<td>2007 - 2009</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Minister of Industry, Energy, and Fuel Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Olga Lavrova</td>
<td>2012 - present</td>
<td>Minister of Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feliks Kulov*</td>
<td>2005 - 2007</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1996 - 1998</td>
<td>Minister of Environment Protection and Regional Development</td>
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<td>2013 - 2014</td>
<td>Minister of Education and Science</td>
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<td>Ministry of Environment Protection and Regional Development</td>
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<td>1999 - 2000</td>
<td>Minister of Economy</td>
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<td>2005 - 2006</td>
<td>Minister of Economy</td>
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<td>Vladimir Norov</td>
<td>2006 - 2010</td>
<td>Minister of Foreign Affairs</td>
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<td>Lithuania</td>
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<td>Vladimiras Prudnikovas</td>
<td>2006 - 2008</td>
<td>Minister of Culture</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Dimitri Shashkin</td>
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<td>Minister of Defense</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Minister of Education and Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Felix Kulov is half Kyrgyz and half ethnically Russian politician who is only fluent in the Russian language and is leading a Russophile political party in Kyrgyzstan.