

Imagined Communities in an Integrating Baltic Region

MICHAEL ARDOVINO

Abstract: The author discusses the role of imagined communities in the three Baltic societies—Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia—in the context of the post-Communist European integration movement. He uses public opinion about joining the European Union and NATO to discern what role nationality and language (two factors derived from Benedict Anderson) played in driving any desire or resistance to these supranational and intergovernmental organizations. Because the three Baltic societies differ slightly in ethnic diversity, one might expect differences in support for these organizations.

Keywords: Baltics, European integration, imagined community, national identity, nationalism

In December 2006, the Estonian government ordered a bronze statue of a Soviet soldier moved from a square in Tallinn to a more obscure location. The statue, which had been erected in 1947, was regarded by ethnic Estonians as a symbol of Soviet occupation and had become an icon of what Benedict Anderson would call *old space*.¹ The statue was perceived to be a symbol of an earlier imperialistic and colonial Soviet occupying force. However, the large ethnic-Russian population in Estonia perceived it as a symbol of liberation from the Nazis, and the Russian Duma responded by denouncing the move. As might be true of a newspaper or a museum, many saw the statue as a tool in promoting an illegitimate identity for many ethnic Estonians.² The statue's removal would more easily permit the creation (or re-creation) of a new space and a new time for Estonia. Ethnic Estonians, both politicians and the voters who elect them, would consolidate their own *imagined community*.

Investigating Baltic Manifestations of Imagined Communities

The entry of several former Warsaw Pact states into NATO and the EU has made national and ethnic identity issues within these countries more visible and politically sensitive. The nine former Communist societies (with the exception of Slovenia) have a unique perspective on this rapid and large-scale governance and economic change after having spent

Michael Ardovino is senior researcher on democracy and governance at the United States Agency for International Development's Knowledge Services Center (USAID). His PhD dissertation examines popular support for entry into NATO and the European Union in post-Communist countries. Copyright 2009 © Heldref Publications

decades under the political and military tutelage of the Soviet Union. How imagined communities affect the larger European integration movement is not exactly clear. However, public opinion in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia demonstrates that there are differences based on several factors, making the Baltic states an even more distinct part of the former Warsaw Pact countries. Survey data indicate that not every ethnic group within these societies supports joining the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). One factor of possible importance might be the manifestation of imagined communities. Baltic societies are characterized as having pervasive ethnic divisions, with Russians being the dominant minority. Because the region has been considered an important part of the “near abroad” by tsarist Russian, Soviet, and modern Russian policymakers, any further loss of Moscow’s political and economic influence caused by integration with Europe would conceivably put greater pressure on the Russian government to react. Concomitantly, minority ethnic Russians living in the near abroad might experience greater hardship, as they are politically and culturally separated from their homeland. In these cases, there is a two-way dynamic as Baltic imagined communities interact not only in a state and regional context but also in an international one.

According to surveys, up to the point of accession, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians all saw membership in the EU and NATO differently from other ethnic groups and might have taken a different electoral stance if given the chance. In other words, individual economic and social circumstances, as well as political histories, would have influenced voters’ attitudes if plebiscites had been held.

In this article, I address why voters in the Baltic countries of the EU may have preferred membership in the EU and NATO—organizations with somewhat different objectives. First, I briefly consider the manifestation of imagined communities in Europe, including the Baltics, before and during the Cold War. Next, I discuss the role that the EU and NATO might have played in reference to imagined communities in the Baltics after the Cold War. After that, I briefly discuss the Baltic experience of economic and military integration. Next, I introduce survey data and several empirical analyses expressing how the existence of imagined communities may have impacted public opinion leading to the accessions of the Baltic countries to NATO. Other economic and political factors, such as personal income and satisfaction with democracy, are controlled for and included in these analyses. In the conclusion, I discuss the impact that imagined communities had as Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia prepared for and realized their entry into greater Europe.

Nations, Nationalities, and National Identity in Modern Europe and the Baltics

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson writes about the era of the successful national liberation movements that changed the face of Old Europe.³ Political elites in the nineteenth century aspired to unify national movements early on. These elites used print languages, often pirated, as the primary tool to help consolidate power in a form of linguistic nationalism.⁴ As more modern languages pushed out older forms, statesmen used modern languages to capture the loyalties of younger generations, including more modern Germanic, Slavic, and Romance languages.⁵ Whole empires were typically composed of national groups that used their own languages. The groups could trace their history through language, which fostered a sense of community. The Habsburg, Romanov, and Ottoman empires built large political constructs consisting of Czechs, Magyars, Finns, Poles, Estonians, Serbs, and so forth. Each of these groups survived attempts to assimilate them.

Two world wars later, the demise of the aforementioned empires caused political boundaries to be redrawn around nations and their languages. Russians, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians fell under a newly forged Soviet identity—an identity that created what Thomas Banchoff labels a *civic nationalism*, that is, an effort to build one identity over preexisting ones to unite different people within a society.⁶ This attempt was ultimately counterproductive because most groups retained their former ethnic identities.⁷ Ironically, the Soviet Union subsumed more than fifteen nationalities that lived within their own constituent republics while also permitting the existence of titular nation-states that had nominal political independence under the Warsaw Pact. Postwar Western European countries simultaneously formed a completely voluntary federation called the European Economic Community (EEC), which became the European Community (EC) in 1957. The EEC's most powerful members, West Germany and France, maintained vibrant national identities by using distinct citizenship laws. French laws were more inclusive and based on residency, whereas German laws were based on a more exclusive model relying on blood ties.⁸ Both sets of laws succeeded in prolonging those countries' unique histories and languages during a larger supranational political and economic integration movement in which states "pooled sovereignty."⁹

Imagined Communities in the Context of Economic and Security Integration during and after the Cold War

During the Cold War, Western Europeans, such as the French, Dutch, Italian, and others, maintained their national identities despite increasing economic integration. The original EEC, and subsequent EC and EU, was initially a coal-and-steel trade regime when founded by designers who wanted specialized roles and functions to jump-start rebuilding postwar economies. Energy production was crucial at that point, but new needs and roles would later emerge.¹⁰

Just how the processes of economic integration might affect or be affected by national identity was not and still is not entirely clear. The EU is so complex that developing a framework to explain integration's causes and effects becomes difficult.¹¹ Theories of intergovernmental decision making¹² and historical institutionalism¹³ compete with functionalism to explain how and why the EU works, but they do not explain why European voters may or may not choose to endorse the process.

However, there seems to be a consensus among scholars that political elites make the decisions that drive economic and political integration and this process has created a void between the bureaucrats who make the decisions and the voters who have to live with these decisions. The European Council of Ministers and the European Parliament are the most visible of the three main EU bodies. The European Commission is unique because it is composed of policy experts and their functionaries who design programs without public scrutiny and therefore without accountability to any voters. Any grand plans and designs for political and economic change are created by these bureaucrats, who often enjoy insulation from dissent, creating a democratic deficit that has been exacerbated by a greater transfer of national parliamentary responsibilities to the commission.

Additionally the institutionalization of the intergovernmental Council of Ministers has not been matched by an equal increase in the power of the European Parliament as the only directly voter-elected EU institution.¹⁴ Electors cannot cast votes on the common European agenda during national elections; they can only vote on national issues and the

performance of their national governing and opposition parties and their leaders.¹⁵ Clearly, policies administered by the European Union affect all European citizens directly or indirectly even if voters do not have direct control over EU-level decision making. As a result, one might expect any voter dissatisfaction involving political, social, or economic issues to be leveled at the EU and its bodies.

NATO was founded as, and still is, the primary European intergovernmental security organization, having survived several perceived crises since 1953.¹⁶ During the Cold War, it protected Western Europe from military threats directed by the Soviet Union, no doubt making it popular in the eyes of the European electorate. NATO even today represents the embodiment of security for EU member states and, as such, directs military affairs. NATO's role and function fall under what international relations experts point out has traditionally been *high political*,¹⁷ a function that separates it from the European Union and its bodies whose function are more related to trade and investment. This resilience is probably due to at least some popular support among the electorate. After 1991, however, NATO's primarily (i.e., high political) military role has become blurred, making the distinction between high and low politics less relevant. NATO now has important secondary roles in facilitating political and economic environments in new member states to permit reform processes in a more non-security arena.¹⁸ NATO membership has shaped political elite behavior in the Baltics, for example, by encouraging policies that permit assimilation of the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia through reduction of citizenship fees and removal of bureaucratic barriers to holding elected office.¹⁹ In Lithuania, political leaders were content that Russia could not veto Vilnius's entry into NATO, but they have taken extra care not to aggravate the Russian minority in Lithuania and still must deal with Russian troops and weapons in Kaliningrad.²⁰

The Baltic NATO members also have entered into a nexus of sorts between politics, economics, and national defense as politicians, businessmen, and military leaders from the Baltic societies and the United States increasingly cooperate and collaborate. This collaboration includes planning military operations within and outside Europe, sending troops to Afghanistan, purchasing military equipment from U.S. companies, and other activities.²¹ American politicians are reassuring Russia by associating NATO with promoting democracy and economic and political integration rather than defense and security-related issues; this is especially true in countries vying for membership such as Ukraine and Georgia.²² NATO is taking on a more economic or low political role.

Voter support of NATO has little meaning, because European voters have no voice in NATO policies, even though national security may be important to them. National security becomes more important when military threats rather than social or economic policies are considered. Voters therefore might differ in their views about NATO membership despite NATO's new roles. The impact of imagined communities might have an even more obvious bearing because a more direct link between national security and national identity may exist in the eyes of electors.

The Baltic Strategies of De-Sovietization and Integration

Separatist movements in the Soviet Republic of Lithuania were one of several early indicators that the Soviet collapse was inevitable and, in December 1991, all three Baltic republics declared their independence. The new countries designed state institutions to prioritize the titular ethnic majority and deemphasized the multinational Soviet model that had existed

for decades.²³ During the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1992, politicians began a process of de-Sovietization, which included the removal of symbols, political institutions, and representatives of Soviet power from the social and political landscape. These were replaced with new national symbols and political institutions to safeguard each nation's interest.²⁴ The politicians also reinvented and recodified the social boundaries that distinguished the homeland nation from other minorities by *essentializing*, singling out traits characteristic of national identities. This process appears to be analogous to Anderson's description of the formation of a viable nation or imagined community. Politicians in many of these former Soviet republics sought to create distance between the titular nation and minority ethnic Russians even though both nationalities may have suffered economic hardship.²⁵ In fact, political elites in Estonia and Latvia drove the "ethnic politics of exclusion" the most by depriving Russian settler communities of political rights.²⁶ For many political elites, Russian settlers represented a cultural threat, and the need to exclude foreign languages necessitated the idea of "one nation, one language, one political community."²⁷

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To formally institutionalize the role of imagined communities, the governments of the newly independent states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania rolled back the Bolshevik revolutionary model that had attempted to revise history and prior imagined communities.²⁸ Estonian and Latvian lawmakers pursued different strategies in promoting their ethnic majorities. Estonian efforts were less harsh on the Russian minority; in 1992, 115,000 non-Estonians were able to gain citizenship through naturalization.²⁹

In Latvia, where the Russian population was a larger portion of the population as a whole, laws originally subjected Russian minorities to an informal population quota to maintain the numerical dominance of the Latvian population using naturalization fees, but the fees were dropped and a 1998 referendum gave children of noncitizens (i.e., Russians) born in Latvia after 1991 the right to naturalize. This program has brought in ethnic Russian minorities at a much slower rate.³⁰

The post-Communist regions of eastern, central, and southeastern Europe and the former Soviet Union experienced many of the same motivations to integrate economically, politically, and militarily that Western European states experienced after 1945. Whereas the bipolar Cold War security dilemma has changed significantly for roughly forty post-Communist states—especially those that gained political *de jure* and *de facto* independence from the Soviet Union—there are still economic (low political) and national security (high political) considerations for politicians to address. In the Baltic societies, EU accession may prove more detrimental to national identity than NATO membership and vice versa.³¹ Statesmen with limited funds often make political trade-offs, and such trade-offs often become politically contentious. For example, military strength from arms spending or modernization is politically popular but only to the extent that it does not compete with social expenditures sought by the “low political” constituents. The contradictory policies

used by Russian and Ukrainian administrations during the 1990s indicate that security preferences and economic priorities may vary among voters and leaders.³² The issues of deepening economic, political, and social integration and immigration regulations in the Baltic countries and their influence on voter opinions have become a question of national interest.

Public Opinion of Integration in Three Baltic Countries

General research addressing public opinion about joining NATO in Western Europe has suggested that differences exist between nations and individuals in those nations, a variation that seems to divide northern and Mediterranean Europe. During the 1980s, people in Great Britain, Germany, and Denmark expressed greater backing for NATO as a forum for defense policymaking than people in Spain, Greece, and Italy.³³ In 1990, skilled men in central and eastern Europe with at least a high school education tended to back EU accession. Such supporters also generally had a positive opinion of the market economy.³⁴ Subsequent studies have corroborated a link between endorsement for the EU and a positive outlook toward market-driven economics and democracy in countries such as the Czech Republic, Poland, and Bulgaria.³⁵ In ten post-Communist countries, those who have benefited from market reform are most likely to vote for EU entry, and such support is seemingly related to higher education, youth, and residence in large cities.³⁶ Other factors that influence attitudes toward EU accession include Communist Party support and awareness of historical events (e.g., the Soviet invasion of Poland and the Baltics in 1939), which likely contribute to greater public support for joining NATO.³⁷ However, such research typically does not address the roles that languages or ethnicity play in post-Communist societies, because these societies are much more heterogeneous than their Western European counterparts.³⁸ One might expect members of the same nationality to share common political values.³⁹

A Demographic Comparison of Public Support across Baltic Europe

In 1994, at the Essen meeting of the European Council, the EU Council of Ministers agreed to prepare six post-Communist countries for full accession (this number was later increased to nine), a process that took several years and entailed several steps. In 2000, popular support *within* the EU for the entry of the Baltic countries (37 percent in favor) was generally lower than for central European states, such as Poland (44 percent) and Hungary (47 percent). Public opinion varied in the candidate countries in 1997 when the accession requirements began to make an impact.⁴⁰

As with other societies in the post-Communist area, the young tended to be more educated and wealthier; they also tended to back the EU in general but with some important differences. Ethnic Lithuanians aged 15–30 backed the EU (60 percent in favor) more than did younger Estonians (45 percent) or Latvians (51 percent) respectively. In fact, Lithuanians as a whole demonstrated broader overall backing for the EU, as well as NATO. When ethnicity is addressed using the survey data, Latvians demonstrated broadest support for joining the EU (64 percent) and NATO (44 percent), and ethnic Lithuanians living in Lithuania (53 percent for the EU and 50 percent for NATO) showed greater support than Estonians in Estonia (41 percent for the EU and 41 percent for NATO). However, 36 percent of ethnic minorities (including Russians) supported EU membership Latvia, 47 percent supported membership in Estonia, and 50 percent supported in Lithuania. Countries with larger Russian

minorities showed greater support for integrating among the titular majorities.⁴¹ Bilingual people endorsed the EU more often in Lithuania (53 percent) and Latvia (48 percent) than did monolingual people (36 percent and 38 percent, respectively), but support for NATO lagged (35 percent and 40 percent, respectively). Ethnic minorities in Latvia and Estonia (mostly Russians) were apparently the least desirous of the Western military alliance. The last variable, satisfaction with democracy, varied from 83 percent in Lithuania to 40 percent in Latvia. Latvia's number may have reflected the stricter laws, relatively speaking, that existed there and hindered minorities' rights.⁴² Although Estonia and to a lesser extent Lithuania have a comparable number of ethnic minorities, such groups in Estonia were given greater political input and probably were more content with political life than were ethnic Russians in Latvia.

A Simple Analysis of Baltic Support of Integration

Survey data from 1997 do not address all the factors that influenced public opinion concerning EU and NATO accession in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. A simple logistic analysis on each of the country data sets, however, might discern if and when imagined communities interacted with simple economic factors in driving public opinion. In these cases, socioeconomic factors, such as age, income, education, place of residence, and type of employment, are controlled. However, more intangible factors that might influence perceptions of imagined communities are captured by comparing the number of languages a person can speak, his or her ethnic identity, and his or her level of satisfaction with democracy. One might have expected differing ethnic-based support for the EU and NATO because of generation replacement and individualization.⁴³

In the case of Estonia, only two variables appear statistically significant in explaining support for joining the EU and NATO (see table 1). In terms of EU support, satisfaction with democracy is only slightly significant, meaning that those who are slightly dissatisfied are less likely to favor joining the EU. Ethnicity, however, is a significant factor regarding NATO support. Ethnic Estonians are much more likely to support joining NATO, providing some evidence that ethnic identity and imagined communities manifest themselves when

TABLE 1. Analysis of Support for Joining the EU and NATO, Estonia

Variable	EU Support		NATO Support	
	Mean	Standard Error	Mean	Standard Error
Age	.027	.094	.022	.099
Education	.154	.118	.079	.128
Income	.090	.126	.139	.136
Job type	.030	.022	.008	.024
Place of residence	.402	.241	.038	.254
Languages	.125	.113	.213	.122
Ethnicity	-.112	.245	1.916**	.328
Satisfaction with democracy	-.262*	.146	-.077	.162
(CONSTANT)	-.941	.680	-3.226	.759

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .001$.

Source: Table created by author.

national security issues are considered, whereas economic explanations appear to have little explanatory power.

Economic factors, however, appear to have more explanatory power with Latvian respondents (see table 2). Latvians with higher incomes tend to back joining the EU when all other variables are controlled. Popular support for joining NATO seems to have a more nuanced view of the reasons someone might have preferred membership in the defense organization in 1997. In all three Baltic countries, the ethnic Russian minority was much less likely to support NATO membership than the ethnic Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian majorities. Latvians less satisfied with democracy, however, were less likely to support joining NATO with all other variables held constant. Socioeconomic factors also drive NATO backing to some degree as evidenced by less educated, older, and slightly wealthier voters tending to support membership.

Lithuanians appear to be the most nuanced in their opinions about joining the EU and NATO (see table 3). Public servants are slightly more supportive of joining the EU

TABLE 2. Analysis of Support for Joining the EU and NATO, Latvia

Variable	EU Support		NATO Support	
	Mean	Standard Error	Mean	Standard Error
Age	.07	.103	.269**	.112
Education	-.167	.141	-.343**	.156
Income	.322**	.157	.274*	.162
Job type	-.006	.021	.030	.023
Place of residence	.269	.234	-.117	.244
Languages	.085	.170	.191	.190
Ethnicity	-.151	.239	1.569***	.283
Satisfaction with democracy	-.330	.156	-.360**	.166
(CONSTANT)	.610	.809	-.914	.863

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.
Source: Table created by author.

TABLE 3. Analysis of Support for Joining the EU and NATO, Lithuania

Variable	EU Support		NATO Support	
	Mean	Standard Error	Mean	Standard Error
Age	.081	.124	.166	.120
Education	.248	.166	.321*	.169
Income	.113	.144	.246*	.141
Job type	.066*	.026	.067**	.026
Place of residence	.043	.242	-.056	.244
Languages	.365*	.202	.299	.210
Ethnicity	.271	.337	.862**	.364
Satisfaction with democracy	-.915***	.191	-.608**	.184
(CONSTANT)	-.337	1.024	-2.577	1.013

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.
Source: Table created by author.

than those in the private sector, as are those who speak more than one language versus those who speak one language. Those who are less satisfied with democracy in Lithuania are less likely to support joining the EU and NATO. NATO support also differs from EU support among Lithuanians, suggesting that they distinguish what the organizations represent and what would result if Lithuania joined. Those who are more educated, have a higher income, and are ethnic Lithuanians are more supportive of NATO. Of the three Baltic cases, ethnic identity is perhaps the most glaring factor regarding NATO membership because it acts as a proxy for the concept of an imagined community. Because ethnicity is statistically significant when NATO membership (in contrast to the EU) is addressed, the likelihood exists that communities are not so imagined after all. If ethnic Russians and Baltic nationals differentiate between NATO and EU, it is possible that national security and even survival were and are priorities for those living in the Baltic countries. Anderson argues that modern education promulgated the spread of state identities across new states in Europe and elsewhere.⁴⁴ If Anderson is correct, did the Soviet Union create a latent set of national identities among the Baltic people? Or did the Soviet Union fail to erase the imagined communities that already existed and perhaps strengthen them by occupying the Baltic countries and trying to impose a new identity? The survey evidence from the 1997 snapshot of attitudes toward European integration indicates that the latter is a distinct possibility.

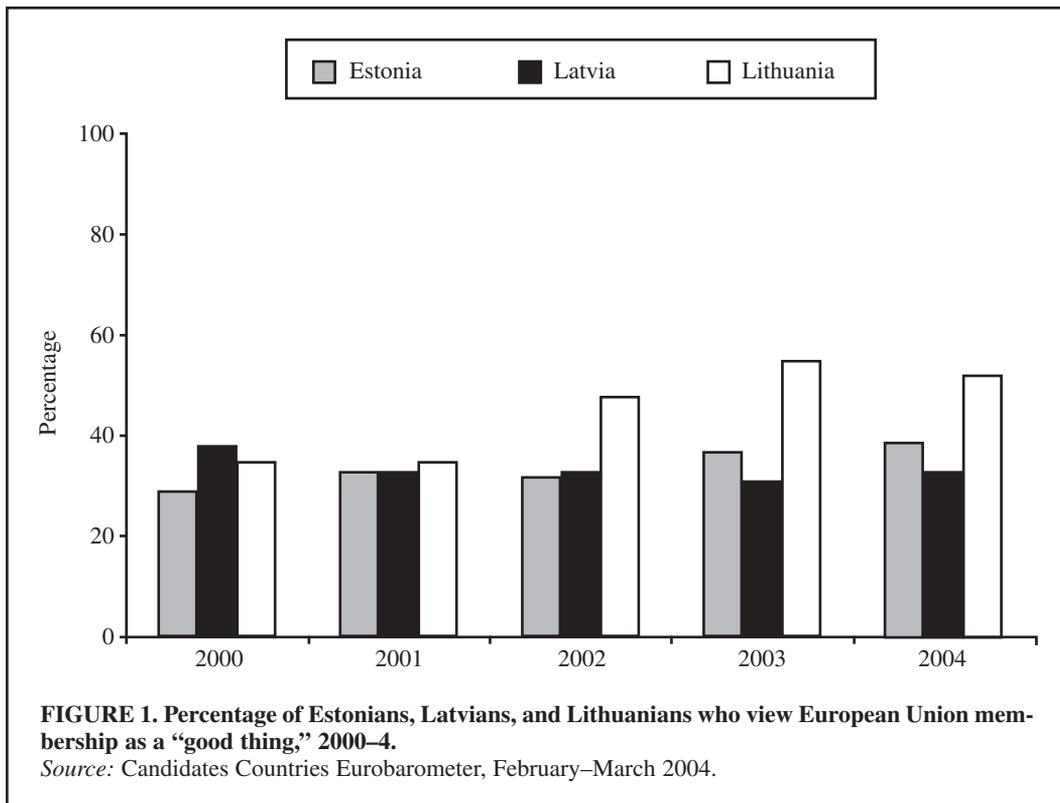
EU Support before Accession

The 1997 survey data permits a detailed analysis concerning a breakdown of EU support when accession talks began in the late 1990s. Unfortunately, a lack of data on NATO support does not allow the same type of scrutiny during the same time period. Polls taken in December 2002 indicate that 68.5 percent of the population supported NATO membership in Estonia, 70 percent supported membership in Latvia and 75 percent supported membership in Lithuania.⁴⁵

Yet figures 1 and 2 show that EU support never surpassed seventy percent in any of the three Baltic countries, again indicating NATO support might be distinguishable in the eyes of voters there. Estonians exhibited the most skepticism regarding EU accession. Their apparently wavering stance over the contention that membership in the European Union “is a good thing” clearly distinguishes them from voters in Latvia and Lithuania. In 2000, 29 percent of respondents in Estonia approved of joining the EU; by the time of actual accession in May 2004 barely 38 percent approved.

Of the three Baltic states, support for the EU was initially highest in Latvia at 38 percent in 2000. Over time, support gradually grew in Estonia and Lithuania, exhibiting a spike in support in 2002 to nearly 57 percent in Lithuania (see figure 1). Meanwhile, opposition to the EU increased gradually in Estonia and Latvia as resistance in Lithuania slowly dropped to about 10 percent (See figure 2).

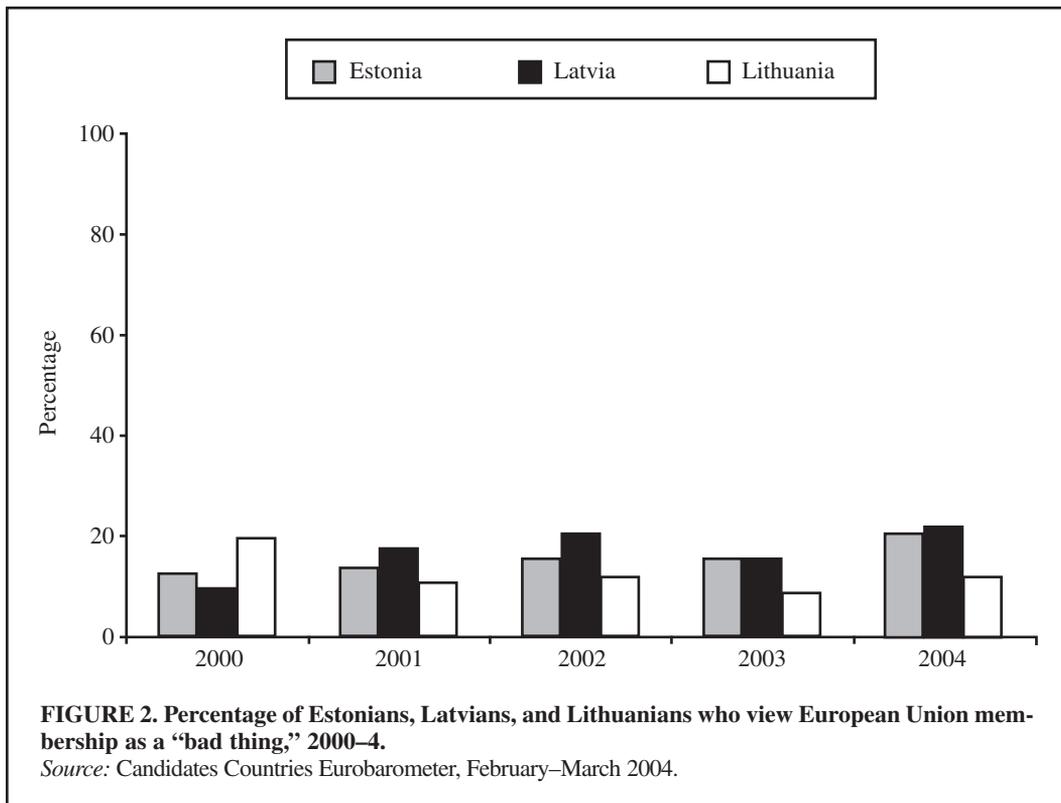
The survey data between 1997 and 2004 suggest that there are definite differences in the three countries based on factors not directly linked to economics and trade. These findings corroborate other empirical studies that reflect the division that existed between ethnic Russians living in the Baltic states and the titular majorities in 2001. Ethnic Russians saw their futures with Russia rather than the EU 18 percent more often in Estonia, 28 percent more often in Latvia, and 12 percent more often in Lithuania.⁴⁶



Satisfaction with democracy was the other consistently statistically significant variable across all three Baltic cases in the 1997 analysis. Other surveys suggest that in 2001 government performance was an important influence on public opinion across all ethnic groups. Russian speakers and Baltic nationals believed that the state is responsible for its citizens’ well-being, and minorities and majorities also agreed that a return to a Communist system of government was not an option. This finding seemingly contradicts the nationalist divide in the Baltics, because ethnic Russians may have supported a Communist system of government.⁴⁷ Yet Anderson’s notion of an imagined community, now existing in the context of what was an imperialistic and constructed Soviet state, might predict a reemergence of ethnic Russians and the ethnic majorities living in the Baltic states. “Old” and “new” Russians, Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians would now prefer to replace the supranational multistate Communist Soviet identity.

Conclusion

From 1997 until 2004, public opinion about joining the European Union and NATO varied across three Baltic societies, a variation that was likely influenced by ethnicity, and more indirectly, satisfaction with democracy. Although the 1999–2004 surveys do not specifically address why voters did or didn’t back accession, the 1997 snapshot analysis suggests that there are indeed significant factors driving integration support. Differences between Russian ethnic minorities and ethnic majorities in Estonia and Latvia existed especially on issues related to national defense and, to a lesser extent, EU membership.



Yet in 2002, a survey on EU support indicates that identity cleavages (i.e., imagined communities) still existed. Thirty-two percent of Estonians and 29 percent of ethnic Russians backed EU entry in Estonia. At the same time, 37 percent of Latvians and 25 percent of ethnic Russians in Latvia, and 44 percent of Lithuanians and 11 percent of Russians in Lithuania, supported EU entry.⁴⁸ These numbers suggest that ethnic identities are not only pervasive over time but also endured through extended and often violent political campaigns to erase and reconstruct identity. Whether membership in another political and economic entity such as the European Union or in a largely successful defense alliance can erode long-existing identities remains to be seen. Predicting likely voter attitudes before initial entry into the EU and NATO permits a timely laboratory test of the existence of imagined communities within three societies. The test is timely because these communities have to reconcile their self-imposed political identities into new and different collective matrices in the EU and NATO. Entry into the EU in particular may have facilitated the use of a new identity or imagined community. For example, the “last wave of imagined communities” (i.e., new territorial bases where people could come to see themselves as nationals who must coexist in a new type of bureaucratic empire) may have caused a new European identity to evolve.⁴⁹

However, a detailed examination of 1997 survey data suggests that ethnic identity in the Baltics is less important in aspiring to a larger European political collective than it is for enhancing national security. The need for security in imagined communities increases if there is any direct link between a manifestation of an imagined community and the willingness to join other communities (or a larger body composed of them). Satisfaction

with democracy is also relevant across all three Baltic societies, whereas economic factors—including education and income—are less relevant.

The Baltic societies are unique in comparison with other countries in the EU because they were under Soviet control. These societies are now composed of different communities with conflicting identities and must now coexist. The success of ethnic minority and nationalist political parties in the Baltics further reinforces the idea of imagined communities being institutionalized into electoral mechanisms. Even in an age of postnational European integration, evidence that strong national communities still exist makes one wonder whether communities are really imagined or not.

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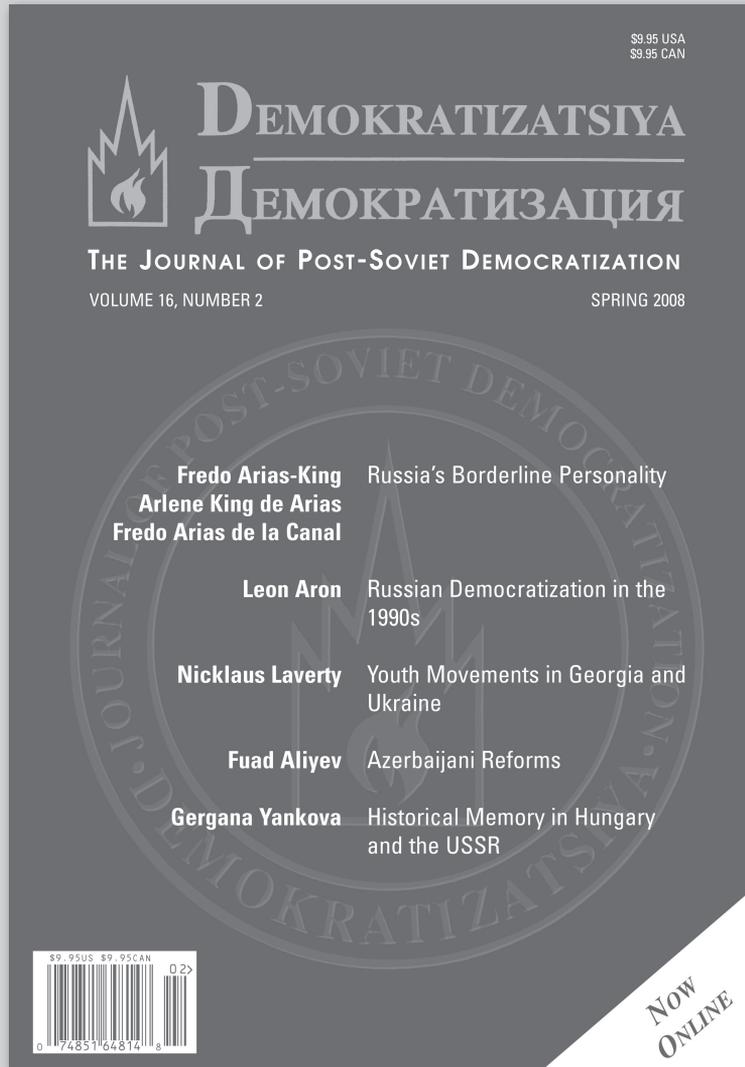
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