NATIONS, STATES, AND CITIZENS:
AN EXPLANATION OF THE CITIZENSHIP POLICIES
IN ESTONIA AND LITHUANIA

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1. Introduction

One policy decision by leaders of a newly independent state divides the population into two mutually exclusive groups and can affect whether or not entire segments of the population receive a critical set of political and social rights. The policy is citizenship, and the decision is how to define the citizenry. Citizenship has not received the publicity of other changes in the post-Communist world, such as economic transition or the development and evolution of ruling institutions. Yet, citizenship can affect voting, occupation, and residence and can create tensions between those who receive it and those who do not. The exclusion of minority groups in one state can affect the actions of other states due to the heterogeneous populations of central Europe and Eurasia. Perceived oppression of Russians in former USSR republics has led some to call on the Russian government to protect its "brothers and sisters" in other states. Groups such as the OSCE (formerly CSCE) are monitoring events surrounding citizenship precisely because of their potential to spark actions outside the normal political arena, violence, tensions between states, and further territorial division.

Thus, whether or not all permanent residents may become citizens is a central question in post-Communist states, and nowhere has this issue been more controversial than in the Baltic region. In Lithuania, provisions for "automatic" citizenship were quite inclusive. In Estonia, however, many...
were excluded from the initial base of citizens. These cases, therefore, present a puzzle. Why did two Baltic states, similar in many ways, adopt very different approaches to automatic citizenship?

The goal of this study is a better understanding of the differences in the citizenship choices made by the governments of Estonia and Lithuania. While presenting a detailed discussion of the provisions of the citizenship laws, this article goes beyond a description of the laws themselves by examining the factors driving the inclusiveness of the policies. I examine five factors (two internal and three external) that likely affect the citizenship policies. I find that perceptions about "the nation" are quite important in understanding the policy decisions. Yet, looking at these perceptions alone would miss important direct effects from European organizations and a complex pattern of relationships among the variables.

This article helps fill a gap in the literature on the causes of the specific citizenship outcomes. Most of the few works that have appeared on citizenship in the post-Communist states are highly descriptive. These articles are quite useful for getting an idea about the inclusiveness of the policies but lack a general theory of the causes. A large number of works from political theory also examine citizenship. However, they tend to address certain questions such as what is a citizen, why is citizenship important, and what kind of rights citizens should have without looking at specific factors that drive this debate in the real world. While interesting, these writings also fail to address the causes of differences in citizenship policies.

Even the few works which contain potential explanations for citizenship policies do not provide an answer to the puzzle of the differences in Estonia and Lithuania. Brubaker's work on citizenship and national identity in Germany and France, his smaller work on the Soviet successor states, a piece by Stepan, and three works by Ginsburgs stand as the most useful for developing a theory that explains citizenship in newly independent states. I draw heavily on Brubaker's work particularly in examining the impact of an