Opportunity and Constraint: Russian Diaspora Population as a Transnational Social Movement

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##### Introduction

The field of transnational social movements is of growing interest and importance to the study of international relations in general. The term “globalization” refers to the continued interconnectedness of actors to one another in the international arena. These actors can be states, non-governmental organizations (NGO’s), terrorists, intergovernmental bodies, supranational authorities, individuals within and among states and so on. Robert Keohane, international relations theorist and professor, defines globalizations as, “…an increase of the thickening of interdependence, the globalization of patterns, not just regionally but worldwide, and the shrinking of distance. Essentially, it's the process by which distance is shrunk, so that it's easier to have an effect in a faraway place than it was. In my view, globalization is not merely to be seen as economic, as it often is. It's social, it's ecological, and it's political [and] military”.[[1]](#footnote-1)Whichever actor uses this interconnectedness to its advantage is of secondary concern to the implications of such an opportunity for action in the global arena. In other words, it’s first important to identify globalization and its components: fluid capital flows across state borders; increased global communication; global warming; spread of ideas; cosmopolitan identity formation, etc. These developments are therefore available to a growing number of actors around the globe and the utilization of some components (communication) and not others (military technology) is dependent upon the actor, its goals and aspirations, and the relative ease with which an actor can seize the opportunities mentioned above.

In terms of transnational social movements, non-state actors—such as NGO’s, terrorists, rights groups, etc—have the ability to operate more freely and effectively in an international system dominated by states. The modern state system as we know it began with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, an agreement that of which ended the devastating Thirty Years’ War and established the norm of non-interference in the domestic decision making of defined territorial national bodies. From its inception the state system and the norm of non-interference both have witnessed implicit and explicit violations of their pillared foundations: power asymmetries have led to hierarchal relations of states; coercion and intervention in foreign states has been pursued consistently by those able; and modern international treaties dealing with the norm of human rights seek to define the relationship between rulers and ruled contrary to the widely accepted norm of non-intervention. Despite these violations, the state system of sovereign relations still persists today, if for no other reason than its expediency, effectiveness and serious lack of any alternative. Globalization and its proponents are perceived by some to offer such an alternative to a system dominated by states. In fact, some believe that states have been steadily losing sovereignty due to globalization’s forces of integration.[[2]](#footnote-2) Such an observation however is highly problematic because states have never been as sovereign as globalization supporters maintain.[[3]](#footnote-3) Instead, a different view holds that sovereignty still exists and states will continue to exist and operate effectively for the foreseeable future. Within this system though, new non-state actors, such as transnational social movements, are able to garner monetary and political support, mobilize effectively and influence domestic and international actions of states. The nature, identity and effectiveness of transnational social movements will differ along a wide spectrum depending on causal factors such as, but not limited to: material constraints; territory; salient or dissipated identity of members to one another within group; antagonism or accommodation of states, etc.

This paper concerns itself with the transnational social movement of minority rights and protection within states. The self-preservation or protection of minorities within states has been valued and pursued by minorities themselves or powerful states, respectively. The former of these two groups will be emphasized within this paper. In order to analyze the effectiveness of the social movement of minority rights, a comprehensive elaboration of its formation, theory and application is attempted here. Progressing sequentially and logically, this paper addresses the following topics: definition of minority rights and the embodiment of them in international treaties; identity formation of minority groups; decisions of minorities to include or exclude themselves from the state they inhabit; imagined communities, and how social movements organize themselves and operate internationally and domestically. Moreover, what strategies in particular do social movements pursue in order to achieve their goals? Three strategies in particular – resource mobilization, political opportunity structures, and issue framing – will be elaborated upon.[[4]](#footnote-4) Political opportunity structures are assumed to be the most important strategy with the highest potential for success. Finally, after creating a theoretical framework of minority groups’ action, this paper studies the case study of the Russian Diaspora in the newly independent titular republics (Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, Kyrgyzstan, etc.) of the former Soviet Union. In particular, how do Russians in different republics identify with one another? What explains the strength or weakness of this identity? What level of repression or inclusion do they face in different states and how do they react to the position they find themselves? Finally, drawing upon recent literature of transnational social movements, what tactics and strategies do Russian minorities adopt to pursue their goals and aspirations?

##### Theory and Framework

The Encyclopedia of Human Rights elaborates upon the importance of minority rights protection and the motivation behind the social movement: “the need to provide protection for groups that are inferior in numbers to the majority of the population and at risk of discrimination, persecution or repression due to their cultural, ethnic, racial, religious, linguistic or social differences from the majority”. This elaboration then offers an international norm for states and governments to follow and also a motivating rationale justifying action by minority groups. The causal reasons for acting (repression, contention, economics, etc.) may differ between minority groups and different tactics, strategies and actions are pursued by different minority groups. However, the underlying impetus for an identity formation of a minority group, mentioned above, is more or less agreed upon. The Encyclopedia mentions that minority rights were most saliently pursued during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries for religious minority rights in order to stem the intolerance, social tension and resultant violence and wars which erupted in and between international actors. During the 19th century, minority rights were pursued within the Ottoman Empire to alleviate social tension due to ethnic divisions. A third salient example of minority protection is embodied in the 1815 Congress of Vienna that of which established protection for national minority rights. These three relevant examples were pursued for the interests of major international actors and later on, states, for reasons such as religious wars (Thirty Years’) and domestic strife. However, in contemporary terms, the issue of minority rights is a very contentious topic because for some states, minority protection may not be a national interest; some states enjoy benefits derived from subjugating minorities and placing social primacy upon majorities. According to Stephen Krasner, author of *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*, forced or even suggested minority protection is a clear violation of Westphalian sovereignty: the right and ability to exclude outside actors from the decisions and policies pursued within one’s own state. The relationship of ruler to ruled is unequivocally decided upon domestically and this norm has been operating, not universally, since at least 1648 (Peace of Westphalia). Therefore the existing international treaties including, *inter alia*, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 27), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities serve as non-binding prescriptions to mitigate the effects of minority repression. While not universally agreed upon or implemented, these treaties are frameworks which seek to address the topic of minority rights. How identity formation occurs, to what degree it forms, and how the social movement in general develops and operates is another question.

##### Identity Formation of Minorities

In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson studies and seeks to explain the phenomenon on nationalism and its formation, continuity or change. He hypothesizes and later concludes that nationalism, “an imagined political community – and imagined as both as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson 6). Considering that most citizens of a “nation” may never meet their national counterparts, their co-equals by definition, the idea of strong nationalism as an idea seems highly improbably. History and empirical evidence however show that nationalism is a highly influential idea. The nationalism of minorities therefore is a topic highly relevant to this paper and future research. How do minorities within states identify with their kindred of another state? Which criteria do members of an imagined nation value and is there universal consensus within the nation? According to Anderson, nationalism is a highly malleable idea at both the individual and communal level. Because nationalism is not static, its saliency and strength within Diaspora communities and minority groups within different states will differ depending upon perceived existential threats or opportunities and the internal dynamics of these groups. With respect to this paper, the transnational social movement of minority rights protection is studied in terms of the Russian Diaspora in the newly independent republics of the former U.S.S.R. Is there a disparity between Russian identification among the minority groups? Furthermore, how are these groups acting and do they affect change domestically? Before analyzing the actions of transnational minority groups, it is important to understand how identities of such groups are constructed.

According to Anderson and many other scholars identity embodied in such ideas as nationalism or minority group status is highly malleable and open to change (Suny 2000; Kolsto 2000; Tilly 2002; Tarrow 2002; Buhaug, Cederman and Rod 2008.) Depending on existential forces such as repression, intolerance, overt violence, etc. identity is either strong or weak and can be either enduring or subject to abrupt dissipation. How minority groups are treated and how they interpret perceived threats and opportunities is just one factor which explains how identities are formed. For this paper then, the governmental policies of the newly independent titular nations of the former U.S.S.R (Belarus, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, etc.) towards their Russian minorities is of significant importance. Whether a policy implemented is antagonistic or amicable the identity of a minority group and its subsequent action, either contestation or outright exit from the political or social scene, is to a degree dependent on that source of welcome or blame, respectively. Michele Commercio, author of the article “Emotion and Blame in Collective Action: Russian Voice in Kyrgyzstan and Latvia” touches upon this important relationship: “Though there are several explanations for different types of voice, the Kyrgyz and Latvian cases suggests that this variation is, in part, related to whether a minority has a concrete source of blame for its grievances” (Comemrcio 489).[[5]](#footnote-5) In other words, the saliency of a disaffected identity is directly related to *inter alia*, the availability of a credible and discernable source of blame.

##### Decisions to ‘Exit’ or ‘Voice’ Concerns

Once an identity is formulated and exhibits an operational capacity (mobilization) then the group must next decide whether or not to voice their concerns on the one hand or leave their situation on the other. A comprehensive elaboration and study of this decision making process is performed by Albert O. Hirschman is his work, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States*.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Hirschman explains that members of groups, organizations or any social group have two options to respond to perceived quality changes (negative) of their respective groups: they can escape the relationship called “exit”, or they can stay and try to affect change, called “voice”. Exiting a relationship in terms of social movements can be done physically by migrating, or mentally embodied by the “ghettoization” of epistemic communities within states characterized by a majority different ethnically from the minority. The decision to exit or utilize a voice is influenced by many causal factors such as: group size; a salient identity; level of repression; perceived opportunities or constraints, etc. Furthermore, a mix of these causal factors is interpreted at both the individual and group level. In other words, an individual can choose to emigrate for convenience reasons but the group might choose to stay and fight for equality because it collectively perceives an opportunity for change.

Hirschmann’s elaboration of exit and voice has serious social, political and economic implications, especially for minority groups who feel disaffected. In general Hirschman hypothesizes that the great availability of exit, the more willing minorities will depart from the organization they are in. Voice, on the other hand, will be utilized if there is a definable and possible chance of creating change. What is important to note is that opportunity structures—political inclusion—is not necessarily under the control of minority groups, but instead determined by the majority group. In terms of transnational social movements, the forces of globalization are creating opportunities for minority groups to work around or bypass this constraint. However, they must first decide whether or not inclusive action is warranted or possible. If such action is deemed possible, then what is required next is to look at how transnational minority groups operate in the international state system.

##### Social Movement Tactics

One of the leading scholars detailing transnational protest is Sidney Tarrow and his works *Power in Movement* (Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed., 1998), *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), co-authored with Doug McAdam and Charles Tilly, and *The New Transnational Activism* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) comprehensively detail tactics and strategies adopted by social movements and the effectiveness of doing so. In *The New Transnational Activism,* drawing upon Mark Kesselman’s book review in *Political Science Quarterly*, Tarrow “focuses on how key actors seek to develop resonant frames within which to identify grievances, select propitious targets and venues through which to press demands, and broker networks and alliances among disparate groups”. The implications for such action are paramount to the study of transnational social movements because by adopting certain tactics, minority groups can effectively challenge and influence domestic policy. While the tactics enumerated within the book are not universally applicable or effective, they do serve as a “menu of choices” to be surveyed and manipulated by social groups depending upon their specific situation.

Tarrow identifies six major processes in particular that social movements can use to pursue and achieve their goals and aspirations. In his review, Kesselman distinguishes the processes as such:

*“Two are rooted in domestic arenas, framing issues for a national audience in a way that highlights their global character and internalizing (assimilating) global issues within the national context. Two are closer to the international arena, framing grievances to highlight their transnational character (he calls this externalization) and constructing transnational coalitions. The final two processes facilitate the transition between the national and the transnational, diffusing ideas and demands across national lines and promoting a shift”.*

To further elaborate upon the different contexts minority groups find themselves in and the tactics they employ depending upon the domestic and international constraints and opportunities afforded them, Bert Klandermans’ book review of Tarrow and Tilly’s *Contentious Politics* analyzes the authors’ theory.[[7]](#footnote-7) The primary thesis of the authors regarding contentious politics is "that similar mechanisms and processes operate across the whole range of contentious politics, and that existing opportunity structures and established repertoires shape the forms and degrees of contention."(161). Whether contentious politics are carried out through political action, protest, social movements, civil wars or revolutions depends upon the existing structures of opportunity for groups. In other words, political inclusion in unlikely to be available for minority groups in authoritarian or unitary states characterized by heavy repression. Instead, migration or underground revolutionary movements may grow because of severe political repression. The case is reversed in liberal democratic states: considering that political integration and tolerance is valued, there is little need for militant extremism. Referred to as contentious repertoires to identify the menu of choices available to groups, Klandermans comments “Contentiousrepertoires change over time and differ between regimes. The question iswhy. This is where mechanisms such as brokerage, diffusion, coordinatedaction, certification and identity shift; and processes such as mobilization,demobilization and scale shift come into play…” In terms of social movements and disaffected minority groups, contentious politics explains how different minority groups of the same ethnicity (Russians in former U.S.S.R republics) challenge the perceived inequalities in their respective states. The three major strategies employed by social movements are: resource mobilization, political opportunity structures and issue framing. Below, these strategies are explained and then considered by their importance, connection to one another and likelihood to lead to successful implementation of the social movement’s goals. After being considered theoretically, the political opportunity structure strategy is used to explain the social movement success (or lack of) for ethnic Russian minorities in the former Soviet Union Republics.

##### Resource Mobilization

McCarthy and Zald (1977) argue that resources (material, moral, organizational, human capital and cultural) lead to increased social movement activity and success.[[8]](#footnote-8) They emphasize "the variety and sources of resources; the relationship of social movements to the media, authorities, and other parties; and the interaction among movement organizations".[[9]](#footnote-9) McCarthy and Zald first argue against the psychological approach to studying social movements which hold that "an increase in the extent or intensity of grievances or deprivation and the development of ideology occur prior to the emergence of social movement phenomena...as well...before collective action is possible within a collectivity a generalized belief (or ideological justification) is necessary concerning at least the causes of the discontent and, under certain conditions, the modes of redress".[[10]](#footnote-10) In other words, McCarthy and Zald aver that relative deprivation; belief systems of those affected and societal grievances are not the main causal factors leading to social movement activity. These criterions are pervasive, but the activity of social movements and their success are caused instead by mobilizing resources to affect change. Societal discontent is treated here as a weak causal factor instead of a strong one. The authors further note, "there is always enough discontent in any society to supply the grass-roots support for a movement if the movement is effectively organized and has at its disposal the power and resources of some established elite group" (1215, from Turner and Killin 1972, pp. 251).[[11]](#footnote-11) However, discontent within society is not a necessary condition for social movement activity due to collective action's major hurdle: the free rider problem. In other words, "since social movements deliver collective goods, few individuals will 'on their own' bear the costs of working to obtain them" (1216).[[12]](#footnote-12) Instead, those individuals willing to bear the costs will only act if they locate similar individuals willing to share the costs. One of the final characteristics to note regarding resource mobilization is that social movements can mobilize more effectively (or not) depending upon their relation to the structure of society and authorities. Here, there is some overlap with the political opportunity structure approach as will be explained below. In general though, McCarthy and Zald note the importance of social movement's relation to society: "Society provides the infrastructure which social movement industries and other industries utilize. The aspects utilized include communication media and expense, levels of affluence, degree of access to institutional centers, preexisting networks, and occupational structure and growth" (1217). Of major importance is the notion that social movements will co-opt, when possible, influential elites belonging to the governing institutions or private interests. As will be shown below however, this hierarchal relationship can have negative effects upon the social movement. As shown in the Zapatista's movement in Chiapas, Mexico, this is one of resource mobilization's major shortfalls. Scholarship on the transnational social movement mobilization has tended to reflect a dependency of Southern (poor) groups upon established Northern (rich) organizations for material support a la money and existing networks. However, Andrews (2010) argues that this purported power inequality has been challenged by recent scholars and in particular the Zapatista movement of the Chiapas region within Mexico. Resource mobilization theory holds that peripheral groups with less resources and access to networks (South) will seek outside support from more influential bodies (North). This strategy was pursued by the Zapatista social movement in Chiapas, Mexico. However, certain conditionalities were demanded by the North in exchange for support. The Zapatista movement lost leverage and leadership within their own social movement due to the political and bureaucratic conditions placed upon the funding given to them for their mobilization. In order to ameliorate these effects, the Zapatistas redefined the North-South relationship; built equitable and reciprocal networks with similar Southern social movements; and consolidated the leverage they possessed: local knowledge of problem, grassroots support and movement authenticity. In terms of mobilization, the North-South relationship operates along a very fragile spectrum: Southern movements lack necessary funding and can receive such from Northern organizations. This relationship helps to partially address the concerns of Southern groups, but not completely; the financial and bureaucratic conditions places constraints upon Southern leadership. A natural reaction then, when social movement capacity allows for it, is a redefinition of the North-South relationship and the fostering of inter-Southern networks. Given this natural shortfall of resource mobilization, another social movement theory needs to be explained. The political opportunity structure strategy helps to foster effective resource mobilization and mitigate the negative effects of any exploitative North-South relationship.

##### Political Opportunity Structures

The political opportunity/political process theory claims that certain political contexts are conducive to social movement action. The structure of political opportunities will either lead to or constrain social movements and alterior strategies such as resource mobilization. The climate may be signaled to potential activists and/or structurally allowing for the possibility of social movement activity (matters of legality); and the political opportunities may be realized through political concessions, social movement participation, or social movement organizational founding. Opportunities may include: (1) increased access to political decision making power; (2) instability in the alignment of ruling elites (or conflict between elites); (3) access to elite allies (who can aid in a social movement’s goal attainment; and (4) state repression.[[13]](#footnote-13) McAdam (1982) states that, "*any* event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured occasions a shift in political opportunities" (p. 41).[[14]](#footnote-14) An example of an emphasis upon the more formal nature of political opportunities is provided by Jenkins and Klandermans (1995): "social movements develop in a context defined by *the state and the representation system*, which afford opportunities for mobilization and set limits on the effectiveness of movement strategies" (p. 7).[[15]](#footnote-15) Both of these definitions lead social movement theorists to believe that the primary causal factor for movement success or failure is the political opportunities available to social movements; structure, not agency define success.

Stevenson and Greenberg (2005) study the strategies pursued by actors trying to influence environmental policies in cities.[[16]](#footnote-16) They find that the strategies chosen by actors vary greatly depending upon the social context they find themselves in. The authors claim "strategies to take action and mobilize others in a network of inter-organizational relationships can vary depending on the social context, which consists of [*inter alia*] the political opportunity structure defined my government regulators..." (651). Moreover, they highlight the importance of political opportunities as opposed to resource mobilization theorists: "even peripheral actors, usually assumed to be powerless in network studies, can influence policy if they use a direct-contact strategy and the political opportunity structure is favorable" (651). Using Joppke's study (1993) of anti-nuclear social movements in the U.S and Germany, Stevenson and Greenberg show how political opportunities are of primary importance to other strategies employed, including resource mobilization. The U.S. has a "pluralist political regime" (Joppke, 1993: 11) which fosters the competition between social movements for a limited amount of resources. In other words, a favorable political opportunity structure led to resource mobilization. On the other hand, Germany had a very centrally located decision making authority regarding nuclear policy. The political opportunities were severely lacking in this respect and therefore the social movement did not mobilize resources but instead became extremely radical and exhibited an anti-establishment nature. According to Hirschman's theory, the German social movement had a choice to 'exit' the political scene by not challenging the establishment any longer. However, Hirschman's intervening variable, loyalty, which was extremely salient in this instance, led the anti-nuclear social movement to perceive a vested interest in continuing their struggle. Therefore they exercised their 'voice'. As will be explained below, when faced with similar unfavorable political opportunities and lacking any serious sense of loyalty, ethnic Russians in Central Asian republics 'exited' the political scene by immigrating. The three strategies chosen by actors either centrally located or on the periphery and depending upon the political opportunities, are: (1) directly contacting the institutional authorities; (2) utilizing a broker or mediating body; and (3) forming a coalition of like-minded groups to challenge institution (659). These three strategies are arranged in a scale of increasing costs and effort needed to pursue them. The authors assume that social movements will therefore choose the strategy with the lowest costs and least amount of effort. And in increasing order of costs and effort the strategies are arranged as: (1) direct contact; (2) brokerage; and (3) coalition formation. Using their case study of actors trying to affect environmental policy in cities, the authors find that the most successful and commonly pursued strategy was direct contact with authorities even if the political opportunities were lacking (670).

Barret and Kurzman (2004) study the transnational social movement of eugenics research during both the inter-war period between WWI and WWII and after WWII.[[17]](#footnote-17) What is important in this study are the findings that suggest political opportunities, not resource mobilization, were necessary conditions for the movements growth. "The lack of international political opportunity before World War I... hindered eugenic mobilization during these periods, while the emergence of opportunities and cultural conduciveness during the inter-war period was associated with movement growth and effectiveness" (487). By political opportunities, Barret and Kurzman draw from Dough McAdam's definition which attributes four dimensions to political opportunities: "the relative openness or closure of the political system, the stability of elite alignments that 'undergird' the polity, the presence of elite allies for a given movement, and the state's capacity and propensity for repression" (492 from McAdam et al. 1996).Moreover, political opportunity structures, both at the national and international level, have been given primacy evidenced by the adoption of eugenics research in some countries but not others with similar resources and close geographical proximity. Barret and Kurzman note, "A similar analysis could be applied to the international eugenics movement, for example by comparing places that adopted eugenic sterilization policies with places that did not: Estonia and Latvia but not Lithuania, Alberta and British Columbia but not Saskatchewan in Canada, Veracruz but not Puebla in Mexico...Such an approach would help us understand the differing outcomes of the movement in different settings" (491). In terms of transnational social movements, Barret and Kurzman highlight the necessary, but not sufficient, condition that sub-national, national and international political structures must be conducive to a social movement’s aims and goals if policy implementation is to occur. They conclude by stating, "That eugenics generated more international mobilization after World War I than in the decades before, we argue, demonstrates the importance of international political opportunity: as the density of the international arena thickened, it supported a higher level of transnational social movement activity" (518).

McCammon et. Al (2001) argue that the political opportunity structure theory for social movement success is far too narrow in explaining the success of women suffragists during the time period of 1866 to 1919.[[18]](#footnote-18) They aver that theorists of political opportunities need to go "beyond" the narrow definition of formal political institutions and instead include the much broader realm of polity and society-centered opportunities. The authors write "We use polity- and society-centered theories to argue that not only did opportunities for granting suffrage to women emerge from changing dynamics in formal politics that altered the political interests of political decision-makers, but opportunities emerged in gendered ways as well" (51). Moreover, "political dynamics, and changing gender relations both influenced whether political actors voted for suffrage" (51). In essence, opportunity structures writ large foster movement success by enabling secondary strategies such as coalition building and resource mobilization. Furthermore, McCammon et. Al support this paper's claim that structural opportunities or constraints (political process) are more important than agency (resource mobilization) when considering a movement's success. This is so because the former of these two theories determines the likelihood and possibility for success of the latter. The authors conclude by offering hypothetical scenarios where new opportunity structures should be analyzed to determine their affect upon movement success: African Americans achieving political inclusion as a result of changing race relations; and working-class political success as a result of changing economic relations between employers and employees.

Kitschelt (1986) defines political opportunity structures as: "comprised of specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization, which facilitate the development of protest movements in some instances and constrain them in others" (58).[[19]](#footnote-19) The author reenforces the hypothesis of this paper that structural contexts, political opportunities in particular, shape the agency and actions taken by social movements. Comparing the anti-nuclear power social movement in four democracies -- France, Sweden, the United States of America and West Germany -- the author notes that "[c]omparison can show that political opportunity structures influence the choice of protest strategies and the impact of social movements on their environments" (58). Kitschelt notes further that "[f]irstly, with respect to strategies, political opportunity structures set the range of likely protest activities...Secondly, political opportunity structures facilitate or impede movement impacts" (66). A more direct criticism of resource mobilization as a primary strategy for policy implementation is put forth by Kitschelt: "High mobilization does not necessarily lead to profound impacts if the political opportunity structures are not conducive to change. Conversely, lower mobilization may have a disproportionate impact owing to properties of the political opportunity structure" (72). More directly, "protest mobilization also does not yield plausible associations with movement impacts. The numbers of participants in the various protest activities, for instance, even when standardized for country size, turns out to be a poor predictor of movement impact. The United States has had a comparatively low level of mobilization, but its nuclear program is stalemated [as of 1986]. France, in contrast, has had much greater mobilization, but its program has experienced little disruption" (73).

The political opportunity structure theory facilitates social movement action and the potential success for policy implementation. Furthermore, secondary strategies such as resource mobilization are either supported or constrained as a result of the political context they operate in. In other words, this paper hypothesizes that the political opportunity structure determines to a high degree the effectiveness of other strategies. In terms of the social movement of the Russian minority population in the former Soviet republics, the openness or closed nature of the former Soviet republics will dictate whether or not ethnic minorities will organize and pressure their governments. An important intervening variable in this paper’s calculation is Albert Hirschman’s idea of ‘exit’ and ‘voice’; facing deterioration in the state’s ability to provide minority rights will ethnic minorities exit the state or engage in political protest? Using the case studies of Latvia and Uzbekistan, this paper hypothesizes that if political opportunities are favorable, then ethnic Russian will mobilize in these states to challenge what they see as a grievance. If political opportunities are not available then whether or not ethnic Russians ‘exit’ *a la* immigration or ‘voice’ their grievances will be determined by their level of loyalty to their titular nations.

##### Latvia

Of a total population of 2,231,503 persons, roughly 29.6% or 660,524 are ethnic Russians. Ethnic Russians reside primarily in urban centers; they are the largest ethnic group in four of the country's seven largest cities. During Soviet domination, ethnic Russians immigrated in large numbers to all three Baltic States, and especially Estonia and Latvia. Ethnic Russians enjoyed administrative primacy and the Russian language was made the de lingua franca of school and government. Although minorities other than Russians were treated well during the Soviet era, the same trend would not continue for ethnic Russians after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. According to the Minorities at Risk Report on Latvia, "The first concerns [regarded] the 1994 Citizenship Law which includes quotas on the naturalization of minorities. The law barred non-citizens from political office, as well as from voting in general and local elections”.[[20]](#footnote-20) The more recent 1998 revision of that citizenship law has come into line with OSCE standards as detailed by Peter C. McMahon's article, "Managing Ethnicity: The OSCE and Trans-National Networks in Romania".[[21]](#footnote-21) McMahon's article (2005) first identifies the desire of Eastern European countries in general and Romania in particular to join Euro-Atlantic institutions such as NATO and the European Union. Countries such as Romania, after the fall of the Soviet Union, had large minority populations of Russians and Hungarians and therefore faced conditional requirements of minority protection in order to accede to those Euro-Atlantic bodies. McMahon argues that eventual implementation of such domestic protections was a result of "spearheading initiatives of the...Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)...and the achievements of trans-national involvement in Romania".[[22]](#footnote-22) Furthermore, McMahon draws upon an interview with Gutmanis Armands, the Undersecretary of State of the Republic of Latvia, who said of trans-national influence in Latvia: "Latvians knew that the West, whether it was represented by the HCNM, by an official from the EU or the Council of Europe, or by foreign ambassadors, wanted Latvia to change its policies toward its Russian population".[[23]](#footnote-23) These examples of top-down influence were complemented by bottom-up input and grassroots experience from NGO's and local civic society movements. McMahon notes "the [OSCE] missions...are usually visible in the country's capital city and are active throughout the country...they are often charged with the broader tasks of working closely with local actors...”[[24]](#footnote-24) The conditionalities demanded by the OSCE and other relevant bodies created favorable political opportunity structures which ethnic Russian could take advantage of. Russians in the former Soviet republics all faced similar threats of assimilation but did not have at their disposal similar political opportunity structures. Favorable political opportunities in the Baltic States fostered mobilization within the Russian population. On the other hand, lack of favorable political opportunities in other republics, namely the Central Asian republics, led to a decreased level of mobilization or no mobilization at all. Instead of mobilizing to 'voice' their grievances, ethnic Russians in Central Asia exhibited higher immigration rate back to the Russian Federation due to a lack of any loyalty to their newly independent titular nations. Immigration rates from Latvia to the Russian Federation during the period from 1992-2003 in percent of population were 2.4%. This percentage shows a much smaller percentage when compared to the mean percentage of all of the other former Soviet republics: 7.19%.[[25]](#footnote-25) This lower immigration rate shows that ethnic Russians in Latvia perceive a favorable political opportunity to affect change as exemplified by EU and OSCE pressure and conditionalities. Furthermore, the prevalence of peaceful protest within the parameters of state institutions shows that ethnic Russians are exercising their 'voice' instead of 'exiting' the state through immigration. Along with the 1994 immigration law, albeit reformed, the 1999 Language Law led to further ethnic tension. The law stipulated that Latvian was to be the sole state language, and starting in 2004, minority schools were to teach Latvian in 60 percent of the classes. Instead of exiting the political scene however, Russians have mobilized due to the favorable political opportunities. The Minorities at Risk Report explains that, "These grievances have been articulated by a number of conventional political parties and organizations, including The Russian Party, For Equal Rights, For Human Rights in United Latvia; the Russian Cultural Societies Association of Latvia; and the Russian Community of Latvia. So far, the primary forms of group resistance have been symbolic protest and a few political rallies, despite government restrictions on group members’ ability to engage in public demonstrations. There has been no evidence of rebellion".[[26]](#footnote-26) The Minorities at Risk Report notes that the lack of rebellion is a result of a very important consideration: "With more access to the political process afforded to the Russian minority, conventional political parties will most likely continue to be the main vehicle for achieving group goals".[[27]](#footnote-27)

Due to favorable political opportunities both within Latvia and from abroad, ethnic Russians perceived the ability to affect change through institutional means such as political parties and non-governmental organization pressure. One major political opportunity was the accession hopes of Latvia to both NATO and the European Union. The conditionalities demanded by these groups amongst other relevant bodies led to favorable treatment by the governing elites towards the Russian minorities. Ethnic Russians have mobilized effectively into a handful of political parties and non-governmental organizations due to the favorable political opportunity structure. There has been a smaller immigration rate to the Russian Federation from Latvia compared to other former Soviet republics; instead, Russians have ‘voiced’ their grievances instead of ‘exiting’ the state *a la* immigration.

##### Uzbekistan

Peyrouse (2008) details the high migration rates from the Central Asian republics following the fall of the Soviet Union which were results of, *inter alia*, political repression, administrative discrimination, forced language assimilation.[[28]](#footnote-28) Peyrouse refers to the majority ethnicities of the Central Asian republics as titular; for example the titular ethnicity in Uzbekistan is Uzbek. Peyrouse notes, "representation for the Russians of Central Asia largely depends on the political situation of the republic, the space left for 'civil society' to function there, and the degree of authoritarian hardening of the regime. Thus, in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, no opposition parties can exist and ethnic minorities do not have the right to political organization".[[29]](#footnote-29)

The migratory outflows of Russians from Central Asia to Russia proper began in the 1970's following Leonid Brezhnev's policy of indigenization. This process began to open up administrative positions to the titular ethnicities even before the fall of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the acceleration of inflows of the Uzbek majorities towards urban areas began around this time creating ethnic tension and leading to immigration out of Uzbekistan. "In Uzbekistan, the portion of the population living in cities increased 70 percent between 1970 and 1979".[[30]](#footnote-30)

With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 these reversing migratory flows accelerated. In particular Uzbekistan has seen a dramatic increase and consistent outflow of the Russian minorities. "According to some researchers, more than 500,000 Russians left between 1990 and 1997. According to other estimates, approximately 5 percent (about 75,000 people) of the Russian population left Uzbekistan each year in the 1990's...At the beginning of the present decade, between 40,000 and 50,000 Russians were still leaving Uzbekistan each year”.[[31]](#footnote-31)” The ratios of Russians to the rest of the population in various areas of the country have collapsed".[[32]](#footnote-32)

The major motivations for immigrating from the Central Asian republics to the Russian Federation were economic, social and political. As far is this paper is concerned, the social and political reasons will be of particular importance because initially all former Soviet republics were affected similarly in an economic sense; the fall of communism led to the complete collapse of the Central Asian economies. With regards to social and political concerns, all of the republics pursued rapid nationalization the state's language, administrative apparatus and educational systems. These were major reasons for Russians to 'exit' and not 'voice' their grievances; there was no political opportunities to do so. "Though Central Asian authorities were justified in supporting their [titular] nationalities, the ethnicization of public administration particularly touched the Russian population, which had benefited from symbolic privileges and status under the Soviet system".[[33]](#footnote-33) The Central Asian republics differ markedly from the Baltic republics in terms of social and political constraints placed upon ethnic Russians. "The republics of Central Asia...combine several negative criteria that accentuate the will of Russian minorities to leave: low levels of coeducation with the [titular] populations, poor knowledge of the national languages, dire economic situations, a negative outlook on the future and unstable geopolitical environments".[[34]](#footnote-34) While some of these problems can not be controlled by the governing elites (i.e. geopolitical environments) some problems can (language laws, coeducation) and the tension arising from these grievances are furthermore exacerbated due to titular apathy. Moreover, there are no outside bodies which can check the governing elites from imposing harsh ethnic restrictions upon the Russian minorities.

According to the Minorities at Risk Project, ethnic Russians in Uzbekistan have not exhibited any inclination for rebellion or violent protest.[[35]](#footnote-35) Furthermore, there has been little political mobilization of ethnic Russians due to two very important variables: lack of political opportunities and availability of immigration to the Russian Federation. The Minorities at Risk Project notes, "Ethnic Russians have no recent history of protest and seem likely to deal with grievances in the future as they have in the past: through emigration to Russia and a reliance on Moscow to pressure the Uzbek leadership for change".[[36]](#footnote-36) In other words, instead of 'voicing' their grievances through state institutions and mobilizing, ethnic Russians will 'exit' either physically through immigration or mentally through relying upon Moscow for protection. In Peyrouse's article "large proportions of the Russian populations in...Uzbekistan (34 percent) expressed a hope to leave, but only...4 percent, had made an irrevocable decision".[[37]](#footnote-37) The ability to immigrate is contingent upon physical, financial and political conditions; not everyone wishing to leave has the means to do so. This phenomenon however does not mean that these hopeful immigrants will now mobilize against the unfavorable political opportunity structures. Instead, they will either form isolated communities of minorities with little to no connection to the center, or they will wait until they are able to immigrate.

The position of ethnic Russians in the Central Asian republics and in Uzbekistan in particular highlights the importance of political opportunity structures for social movements. If a minority lacks a favorable political opportunity structure, then that minority has two choices: 'exit' the state or 'voice' their grievances. A group will only 'voice' its grievance however if there is a perceived opportunity for institutional change and if they feel a sense of loyalty to their state. Both of these requirements seem to be lacking with regards to the ethnic Russian population of Uzbekistan. As a result high immigration rates and mental 'exit' from the state are pervasive.

##### Discussion

Transnational social movements have proven able to influence the policies which states implement. This ability has important implications for the future of international relations; while not necessarily losing sovereignty, states are now operating in a system which can allow for social movement activity and influence.

The tactics employed by social movements vary depending upon, *inter alia*, the structure of political opportunities, ability to mobilize many different types of resources and the resonance of the goals they are seeking to achieve.

Before addressing this paper’s case studies it is important to note that the identity of a social movement is highly malleable. It can be most easily affected by existential forces, namely states and governing elites. The saliency or dissipated nature of an identity will result in a more active or subordinate social movement, respectively.

This paper has chosen the minority rights social movement of ethnic Russians in Latvia and Uzbekistan. These groups have shown that the most important strategy for social movements to employ is to take advantage of political opportunities available to them. These include: governing openness; co-opting elites; using outside groups to influence domestic bodies; ability to protest; political and non-governmental organizations, etc. Political opportunities do not necessarily lead to goal achievement; instead secondary strategies such as resource mobilization and frame resonation are important steps in ensuring policy implementation. The important thing to note is that these latter two strategies become increasingly difficult to pursue when political opportunity structures become unfavorable. In fact, when political opportunities are extremely lacking, and when social movements feel no loyalty to the state then the actors within the movement will simply ‘exit’; in other words, in the face of perceived insurmountable political obstacles, movements will choose not to protest.

The two case studies of Russian minorities in Latvia and Uzbekistan exemplify this relationship between political opportunities, secondary strategies and choices to voice grievances or exit from the state. In Latvia, favorable political opportunities such as EU and NATO accession hopes for the Latvian government led to resource mobilization and frame resonance. This process eventually resulted in markedly better conditions for ethnic Russian minorities within Latvia compared to their brethren in Central Asia. Even though protest occurs intermittently in Latvia, this is more a result of perceived dissatisfaction *coupled* with loyalty to the state and a hopeful outcome for policy implementation. In other words, ethnic Russians have not chosen to ‘exit’ the state but have instead ‘voiced’ their grievances. The opposite result has consistently occurred in Uzbekistan.

Even before the fall of the Soviet Union, but especially immediately following that phenomenon, immigrant flows from Uzbekistan and the other Central Asian republics increased dramatically. At the same time, the new independent republics of Central Asia began nationalizing quickly and reversing the trend of administrative primacy for ethnic Russians which were characteristic of the Soviet era. These developments coupled together show a relationship opposite that of occurring in Latvia: due to a lack of political opportunities, ethnic Russians had to choose between ‘exiting’ the state or staying and ‘voicing’ their grievances through existing institutions or through rebellion and violent upheaval. Considering ethnic Russians felt no loyalty to the newly nationalizing republics, they overwhelmingly chose the former of these two options; migration rates and preference to do so in the future precluded the initiation of any other social movement strategies. In particular, resource mobilization was so unlikely to occur because ethnic Russians perceived no goal or opportunities worth fighting for.

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