

# Minority Ethnic Mobilization in the Russian Federation

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## Minority Ethnic Mobilization in Russia

### *An Introduction*

On 15 October 1991, the 449th anniversary of the conquest of Kazan by the Russian czar Ivan the Terrible, tens of thousands of Tatars gathered on Freedom Square, across from the Tatarstan Republic parliament. They were there to protest the government's refusal to issue a declaration of independence from the Russian Federation and the Soviet Union. The political situation in the republic had been tense for months, ever since a wave of nationalist demonstrations and hunger strikes in May had forced the government to disavow its support for allowing locals to vote in Russian presidential elections. Passions were further inflamed by the publication in the Tatar-language press of an article by the nationalist firebrand Fauzia Bairamova, which called for all real Tatars to show that they were not slaves to the Russians by demonstrating in the square. The October demonstration culminated in violence when protesters attempted to storm the parliament building and were rebuffed by police. Tensions were defused only when parliament agreed to adopt a declaration that confirmed the republic's sovereignty and to hold a referendum on the republic's independence.

Three months later and seemingly a world away, a few hundred Khakass nationalists gathered in front of the parliament in the newly created republic of Khakassia. They were protesting the election of an ethnic Russian as the chairman of the legislature as well as the legislature's reluctance to approve a sovereignty declaration. This was the first nationalist demonstration in Khakassia. The event shocked the republic's political elite and prompted the chairman's replacement by an ethnic Khakass. However, this turned out to be a pyrrhic victory, as the parliament proceeded to reject sovereignty and thereafter steadfastly opposed all Khakass demands. In the end, Khakassia became the only republic of the Russian Federation not to pass a sovereignty declaration. And the republic's first nationalist demonstration also became its last.

As these vignettes show, nationalist demands among minorities in the Russian Federation and the extent of public support for these demands were

not uniform. This study aims to explain the emergence of ethno-nationalist movements and the variations in support for ethno-nationalism in Russia's ethnic republics by focusing on the ethno-federal institutions of the Soviet Union as a source of nationalist mobilization. It accomplishes this task by analyzing the development of nationalist movements in four ethnic regions: Tatarstan, Chuvashia, Bashkortostan, and Khakassia. The analysis is based on extensive fieldwork in these regions and utilizes multiple sources of data, including interviews, content analysis of the local press, protest event counts, election results, and survey data. The study examines the similarities and differences in the development of nationalist movements in these four regions during the period of democratic transition. In doing so, it goes beyond traditional debates about the sources of ethnic mobilization to focus on the mobilization *process*. By showing how this process was structured by the institutions of the Soviet regime even after the dissolution of the Soviet state in 1991, it emphasizes that even governments that were totally dedicated to political reform were limited in the scope of their actions by the structure of the pre-reform political system and the beliefs and expectations that it had created among the populace.

#### THE MANIPULATIVE POWER OF NATIONALIST ELITES VERSUS THE STRUCTURING INFLUENCE OF ETHNIC INSTITUTIONS

Many recent studies of nationalist mobilization emphasize the role of governing elites in the development of minority nationalist mobilization. According to the commonly held "ethnic entrepreneur" view of nationalist mobilization, the emergence of nationalist movements is a function of the interaction between central and regional governing elites in ethnically divided societies. Nationalist mobilization is portrayed as part of an effort by regional elites who belong to ethnic minority groups to increase their power vis-à-vis central elites by advocating ethnic claims. The mobilization of popular support for these efforts is viewed as a means of putting pressure on the central elites. In this scenario, the members of the minority ethnic group are portrayed as purely reactive players. They are essentially pawns in a power game played out by politicians.

In this study, I argue that mass nationalist mobilization can arise independently of elite power struggles. I argue that the formation of nationalist movements in the ethnic republics of the Russian Federation was spearheaded by intellectuals and students, not by local political elites, who at first opposed the emerging movements. Although local politicians did recognize later that they could use the nationalist threat to increase their power relative to the government in Moscow, they continued to attempt to suppress popular nationalist movements in their regions. Faced with hostility from local political leaders, advocates of ethnic revival turned to popular mobilization in order to pressure local governments into supporting the nationalist program.



State institutions<sup>1</sup> structured the interaction between political elites and the rest of the population, influencing the sources from which nationalist appeals emerged, the forms that nationalist mobilization took, and the reactions of both the elites and the masses to nationalism. Paradoxically, the ethnic institutions of the Soviet Union, created by the founders of the Soviet state during the 1920s and 1930s for the purpose of extinguishing nationalism as a political force, had the effect of promoting ethnic identity and nationalist ideas among the ethnic minorities found in the Soviet Union's constituent ethnic regions.<sup>2</sup> These institutions determined how members of minority groups viewed themselves and their homeland, what type of education they received, and which career paths they could pursue. In this way, Soviet ethnic institutions enshrined ethnicity as the dominant form of self-identification among non-Russians throughout the Soviet Union. All members of minority ethnic groups, including the political elites, were equally subject to the effects of these ethnic institutions (Brubaker 1996, Slezkine 1994b, Suny 1993).

Because of the importance of ethnic institutions, nationalism quickly became the dominant form of protest among the non-Russian population of the USSR when central political elites began to liberalize (Beissinger 1998). Throughout the *perestroika* and post-*perestroika* periods, existing Soviet ethnic institutions continued to structure the interactions between regional and central political elites and between regional political elites and the inhabitants of the regions they controlled.

The explanation that I propose shows how ethnic institutions shaped the preferences and tactics of the cultural elites who initiated the nationalist movements, the messages these elites used to appeal for popular support, and the ability of those messages to resonate with the values and beliefs of potential followers. Institutions, I argue, were also critical in creating the social ties and networks of communication through which the nationalist message was spread and new activists were recruited.

## EXPLANATIONS OF ETHNIC MOBILIZATION

The most common theories currently being used to explain ethnic mobilization concentrate on explaining *why* ethnic mobilization occurs in general, why it occurs at certain times, and why it occurs in certain places. Apart

<sup>1</sup> I use a broad definition of 'institutions' taken from the historical institutionalist literature, which takes institutions to include "both formal organizations and informal rules and procedures that structure conduct" (Thelen and Steinmo 1992).

<sup>2</sup> I define 'ethnic institutions' as those institutions that are established to oversee a state's interactions with ethnic groups living on its territory. They include territorial administrative units for ethnic minorities, separate educational systems, language laws, official ethnic categories for censuses and identity papers, affirmative action programs for ethnic minorities, etc.

from institutionalism, these theories include explanations based on cultural differences, social psychology, and economic incentives.

Cultural explanations of ethnic mobilization treat ethnicity as an ascribed characteristic, not voluntarily chosen but largely determined by the accident of birth. Proponents of this view argue that ethnic ties are stronger than other types of group identification because they are based on kinship and therefore produce feelings of intense solidarity among group members, even giving an aura of sacredness to the ethnic group. Ethnic mobilization is seen by them either as a direct outgrowth of intergroup cultural differences or as part of an effort to avoid domination by a group with higher status. Because of the intense emotions produced by cultural solidarity and the unchangeable nature of ethnic identity, ethnic conflict is viewed as particularly intense and difficult to resolve.<sup>3</sup>

These cultural explanations have come under fire from the instrumentalist point of view. Instrumentalists argue that ethnic groups are essentially modern creations, formed for the purpose of securing economic benefits for their members. Ethnic mobilization is initiated by elites who seek to use the power of the group to acquire material benefits or political power. Elites persuade potential followers to join the mobilization effort by providing selective benefits to participants. Members of the group mobilize when the gains from a combination of these benefits and the potential benefits of victory outweigh the potential costs of losing (Bates 1983, Hardin 1995, Hechter 1992).

The institutionalist explanation of ethnic mobilization adopts many of the features of the instrumentalist explanation.<sup>4</sup> Like instrumentalists, institutionalists argue that ethnic identity is constructed and mutable. However, they disagree on the extent to which change is possible and about the speed at which it can occur. Institutionalists argue that identity is shaped by the institutions of the state, which establish the ethnic categories to which individuals can assign themselves and create incentive structures that induce these individuals to choose one or another ethnic identity. Identity shift thus occurs not because of the incentives of economic competition but as a result of institutional change, which is usually a slow and gradual process.

While institutionalist scholars agree with instrumentalists that differences in preferences explain whether individuals join ethnic mobilization efforts, they are more sensitive to the psychological dimension of these preferences. Although they argue that ethnic identity is constructed and can change

<sup>3</sup> See Geertz (1973), Smith (1974), Kuper (1969), Isaacs (1975), Huntington (1996), and Kaplan (1993). For applications of this view to the Soviet Union, see Carrere d'Encausse (1979), Rywkin (1990), Brzezinski (1989/90), and Horowitz (1992). For a critique, see Eller and Coughlin (1993).

<sup>4</sup> See Brubaker (1996), Suny (1993), Roeder (1991), Laitin (1991), and Laitin (1998).

over time, they recognize that most individuals see their ethnic identities as fixed and unchangeable. If individuals perceive their identities as fixed, then psychological factors such as relative status and self-esteem become important in determining individual behavior. Attitudes toward participation in ethnic mobilization are thus explained by a combination of economic incentives for participation and psychological attitudes toward other groups (Laitin 1998).

The main problem with existing institutional explanations is that they, like other explanations of ethnic mobilization, limit themselves to explaining the reasons for the emergence of ethnic mobilization in particular circumstances. Because they are not overly concerned with the process through which ethnic mobilization becomes a potent political force, they focus almost exclusively on the behavior of political elites as the key explanatory variable in determining the timing and location of ethno-nationalist mobilization. As I show in the next section, most institutionalist explanations simply assume that the important political decisions are made by the governing elites, who then induce the masses to follow their decisions.

This study is an effort to move beyond these elite-focused accounts of why ethnic mobilization occurs. The key question motivating the inquiry is not *why* but *how*. In the ensuing chapters, I show how ethno-nationalist movements emerge on the political scene as a result of government-sponsored liberalization, how they use institutionally provided resources to create organizational structures, how they frame their demands to resonate with their target audience, and how they recruit their supporters. The nature of these processes, I argue, is determined by the ethnic and political institutions established by the state.

#### A PROCESS-ORIENTED INSTITUTIONALIST EXPLANATION OF POST-SOVIET ETHNIC MOBILIZATION

Several scholars have pointed to Soviet ethnic institutions as the main explanation for ethnic mobilization during the 1980s and 1990s. Brubaker (1996, 41–42) elegantly describes the nature of Soviet ethno-federalism and argues that the structure of the Soviet state played a critical role in the breakup of the Soviet Union. Roeder (1991) points out that the extent of nationalist mobilization depended on a region's position in the four-tier Soviet ethno-federal hierarchy. He argues that the Soviet government sought to control ethno-politics by giving control of ethnic regions to indigenous elites, by punishing members of the elite who sought to use nationalism in order to gain popular support, and by allowing the elite to have a monopoly over mobilizational resources within the ethnic community. By controlling these resources, ethnic elites could determine "when the ethnic group would be mobilized to action" (199). Both the number of resources and the extent of

elite control over them decreased with each step down in the administrative hierarchy. Laitin (1991) adds elite incentives to the institutionalist model, showing that regional political elites activated nationalist movements not whenever they had the resources to do so, but only in those situations when doing so would help to increase their power vis-à-vis the central government. Treisman (1997) builds on this work by spelling out how regional elites used the institutional resources provided by ethnic institutions to help in their competition for power with the center.

These studies have greatly increased our understanding of the role played by state institutions and by governing elites in fostering ethnic nationalism. This study continues their effort by extending the institutional explanation beyond the political elites. While the existing studies have concentrated on the role of political elites in mobilizing ethnic minorities, I show that the support of political elites is not a necessary component of a widely supported nationalist movement. In several of Russia's ethnic republics, cultural elites formed successful nationalist movements despite opposition from both local and central political elites. This study analyzes the process by which cultural elites mobilized their followers and shows which factors determined the extent of popular support for minority nationalism.

In focusing on elite bargaining, some of the existing studies treat ethnicity as largely epiphenomenal and blur the distinction between ethnic republics and administrative regions. Treisman, for example, argues that the demands and actions of the ethnic regions were similar to the tactics used by Russia's nonethnic regions to extract benefits from the center (1997, 247). I argue that the presence of mass separatist movements in the ethnic regions made the struggle for power between the ethnic regions and the center fundamentally different from the bargaining game between Moscow and Russia's nonethnic provinces.

Finally, while the existing studies have noted the connection between administrative status and resource allocation and the importance of these resources for the formation of nationalist movements, they have not explained the process by which differences in administrative status affect political mobilization. The following account of ethno-nationalist mobilization shows how institutional differences led to variations in resource availability, which in turn caused the wide regional differences in the ability of nationalist leaders to mobilize the population and achieve their goals.

A mass-based explanation of ethnic mobilization needs to explain three things. First, it must explain how and why the movement leaders choose to begin the mobilization process. Second, it must explain how the movement leaders convince others to support the movement. And third, it must explain how and why a significant proportion of the population joins the movement. In the rest of this chapter, I present a summary of the argument. Each of the points mentioned here is elaborated in subsequent chapters.

## Movement Formation

The emergence of a protest movement requires a change in the political opportunity structure,<sup>5</sup> sufficient organizational resources among prospective challengers, a common identity among prospective founders of the protest movement, and incentives for these prospective founders to actually take part in the organization of protest activities (McAdam 1982).

Protest movements tend to form during periods when the political structure begins to show signs of change that serve to modify the calculations on which the balance of power in the political establishment is based (Kriesi et al. 1995). There are many possible sources of such change, including war, demographic change, economic decline, changes in the international balance of power, industrialization, and many others (McAdam 1982, 41). Regardless of its origin, the change in the political structure leads to expanded political opportunities for actors who were previously excluded from the political system.

Openings in the political opportunity structure can occur either as part of a systemwide political crisis, which affects all potential insurgent groups, or through smaller changes in the balance of power, which often result from long-term socioeconomic changes and usually affect only one or two potential protest constituencies (McAdam 1982, 42). In the Soviet Union, Gorbachev's liberalization program led to a systemic crisis of the political system, allowing the emergence of many kinds of protest movements.<sup>6</sup> Gorbachev's reforms encouraged the emergence of protest movements in three ways. First, his stated policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *demokratizatsia* (democratization) emboldened protesters by making it clear that the expression of opinions opposed to official policy would no longer result in repression. As some pioneering dissidents began to state their opinions openly and even held public demonstrations for greater liberalization without negative consequences to their liberty, other potential activists emerged and sought to capitalize on the new openness in order to publicize their demands. In Tatarstan, for example, initially groups of fewer than 100 pro-democracy activists gathered in public squares and parks to discuss liberalization. Seeing that these meetings were not broken up by police, environmentalists and nationalists began to hold their own meetings and, eventually, demonstrations.

Second, the central government's prohibition on repression reduced the power discrepancy between governing elites and potential protesters at the

<sup>5</sup> The concept of political opportunity structure refers to those aspects of the political environment that act to encourage or discourage popular mobilization (Tarrow 1994, 18).

<sup>6</sup> Most notably, these included the pro-democracy movement (Zdravomyslova 1996, Fish 1995), the environmentalist/antinuclear movement (Dawson 1996), and the women's movement (Sperling 1997), as well as the nationalist movement discussed in this study.

local level. Local administrators who were perceived as “hard-liners” or holdovers from the old regime were threatened with removal from their positions. Thus, protest in Bashkortostan began in earnest after the Moscow government persuaded the relatively liberal party leadership of the republic’s capital city (*gorkom*) to declare that it had no confidence in the conservative Bashkortostan Communist Party *obkom*, forcing the collective resignation of the latter. Such examples made surviving leaders in other regions more reluctant to use repressive tactics against protesters for fear of likewise being punished by central elites.<sup>7</sup> This point is related to the first point, but with an important difference. The first point addresses the effect of central government policy on protesters, whereas the second addresses its effect on local governing elites.

Third, as the Soviet political crisis continued to deepen and spread, regional elites who had managed to forestall the emergence of significant protest by preventing the emergence of a free press and continuing to repress activists found themselves under increasing pressure from the center to “get in line” with the rest of the country on liberalization, at the same time that they were becoming increasingly subject to the weakening of government authority that resulted from the breakdown of chains of command across the country. As a result of these processes, the power discrepancy between local governing elites and their potential challengers was significantly reduced, making the formation of social movements more attractive for potential activists.

Most studies of social movement emergence examine how changes in political opportunity structure affect protest movements exclusively on a national level (Kriesi et al. 1995, Rucht 1996, Urban 1997). In the Russian Federation, the political opportunities available to potential protesters varied dramatically from region to region. Some regional governments exhibited a greater willingness to liberalize and were less likely to use repressive methods. In other regions, elites were divided and therefore more likely to form alliances with challenging groups. In yet other regions, the governing elites remained united and opposed to liberalization (Fish 1995). Furthermore, different protest movements were faced with different political opportunity structures. In some regions, governing elites who were willing to form alliances with pro-democracy or environmentalist groups continued to use repressive measures against any sign of nationalist activity. In other regions, the situation was precisely the reverse, with nationalist groups being favored as partners over pro-democracy activists. This regional and sector-based variation in the political opportunity structure largely determined the timing

<sup>7</sup> Repressive tactics were, of course, still used against protesters by both the regional and central governments. However, the frequency of repression was significantly reduced, and the threshold after which protest was answered with repression became much higher during this period.

of the emergence of protest movements in each region and the sequence in which different types of protest movements emerged.

In describing the emergence of social movements, McAdam writes, "A conducive political environment only affords the aggrieved population the opportunity for successful insurgent action. It is the resources of the minority community that enable insurgent groups to exploit these opportunities." (1982, 43) Research has shown that the emergence of new protest movements is strongly assisted by the presence of significant stocks of social capital among the aggrieved community<sup>8</sup> (McAdam 1986). Protest movements are able to form when the aggrieved community possesses a strong network of already-existing associations and organizations that can help provide the material resources needed by the newly forming movement, supply the initial leaders of the movement, and simplify communication between members. The presence of existing organizational networks also helps in the recruitment of new members by increasing the number of links between potential recruits and by allowing emerging movements to use the existing organizations' structures of selective incentives (McAdam 1982, 44-8).

The importance of existing organizations to the emergence of social movements provides one of the key links between the political process model and historical institutionalism. The types of organizations that exist among the population are frequently determined by state institutions, particularly in an authoritarian political system such as the Soviet Union. Minority nationalist movements in the Russian Federation benefited especially from the institutionalization of the study and development of minority culture. Ethno-nationalist organizations were formed in the universities, social science institutes, and writers' unions located in each ethnic region. These organizations, often headed by sympathetic administrators, provided a safe haven for the nationalist movements, insulating activists from reprisals by employers. These organizations also provided activists with scarce material resources, including meeting space and photocopying and printing facilities. Although the republic's political leadership opposed the movement's formation, sympathetic university administrators allowed the Tatar nationalist movement to hold initial organizational meetings and its first convention at the university meeting hall. The ability to tap into preexisting social networks within the workplace simplified the task of recruiting core activists for emerging nationalist organizations.<sup>9</sup> Once the Tatar nationalist activists decided to establish a

<sup>8</sup> Social capital is defined as "[t]hose aspects of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam 1993, 167).

<sup>9</sup> The workplace played a critical role in the lives of Soviet citizens. It was a source not only of employment, but frequently also of housing, childcare services, and even social activities. Furthermore, for most Soviet citizens workplace Communist Party cells provided the only legitimate locale for political activity. Considering this structural legacy, it is not surprising that the initial formation of nationalist movements took place in the workplace.

nationalist organization, they easily recruited hundreds of fellow academics, who made up the bulk of the attendees at the first movement convention. Finally, membership in government-supported academic institutes gave nationalist leaders a forum to express their ideas, lending them an air of legitimacy as scholars and making their statements appear more authoritative. At a time when access to the media was still sharply restricted, scholars were able to use their academic credentials to obtain permission to make public statements about the nationalities question in newspapers and on the radio.

Who were the initial activists? And why did they choose to participate in the nationalist movement? In the early stages of movement formation, movement leaders were comprised almost entirely of scholars from the social science institutes and universities. In Tatarstan, nine of the eleven movement founders were scholars based at the republic's Academy of Sciences branch or at Kazan State University. The academy fostered the development of a common identity among scholars who had devoted their careers to the study of the culture, literature, language, or history of their ethnic group. They perceived themselves not simply as part of the Soviet intellectual elite, but as the intellectual elite of their ethnic group, a position that for them carried with it a duty to press for the continued cultural development of their ethnic group. In essence, they saw the task of leading the nationalist movement as part of their position in society and their identity as *ethnic* scholars.

These scholars were at the forefront of nationalist organization because for them, activism brought greater benefits and lower costs than it did for members of other social groups. In addition to the psychological rewards of taking a position as leaders of the ethnic group, scholars also were likely to receive material rewards for their participation. These scholars' jobs were closely linked to the cultural development of their ethnic group. If nationalist activism resulted in greater funding and opportunities for cultural development, these scholars would be first in line to head new programs, conduct new studies, write new textbooks, and instruct new language and history teachers. In other words, cultural development would increase these activists' chances for career advancement and make their chosen careers more central to government policy and therefore more prestigious. But if existing cultural policies were maintained, the likelihood was high that trends toward increasing assimilation and language loss among members of the ethnic group would continue. In that case, ethnic scholars would become increasingly irrelevant as demand for new texts and instructors declined. These scholars' calculations proved correct. In the ethnic revival that was spearheaded by the nationalist movements, new universities, academies of science, and institutes were established in every republic, increasing career opportunities and prestige for ethnic academics.<sup>10</sup> Members of other social groups, by contrast,

<sup>10</sup> A new university was established in Khakassia. Republic academies of science were created in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and Chuvashia. New academic institutes focusing on social science and history were opened in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan.



did not stand to gain materially from the success of nationalist movements and were correspondingly less likely to participate in the early stages, when success seemed unlikely.

Although the political liberalization of the mid-1980s resulted in the expansion of opportunities for all types of protest movements, the institutionalization of ethnicity ensured that ethno-nationalist movements would become the most important source of protest activity during the ensuing protest cycle. Academic institutions focused on the study of ethnic groups played a particularly crucial role in this process, in effect acting as an incubator for nationalist leaders and then providing them with the material and organizational resources necessary to successfully launch a protest movement.

### Convincing Followers

For a protest movement to be successful, it is not enough for it to acquire organizational resources and a cadre of dedicated activists. It also needs to formulate an appeal that will strike a chord among potential supporters and ensure that its message is widely disseminated. The movement needs to convince people that its demands are legitimate and that now is an opportune time to press these demands. It will be successful if it is able to create a perception among the target population that they have been the victim of an injustice, that this injustice is correctable, and that the present circumstances increase their likelihood of success while keeping the costs of participating to a minimum (McAdam 1982).

The process through which movement activists seek to influence potential supporters is known as *framing*. Frames are defined as interpretive schemes that condense and simplify a person's experience by selectively highlighting and encoding certain situations, objects, events, and experiences. Frames serve to "either underscore and embellish the seriousness and injustice of a social condition or redefine as unjust and immoral what was previously seen as unfortunate but perhaps tolerable" (Snow and Benford 1992, 137). In this manner, frames "organize experience and guide action" (Snow et al. 1986, 464). In order to persuade potential followers to join the movement, movement organizers formulate their demands in a way that resonates with the grievances of the target population. If they are to achieve this end, grievances must be described using language and symbols that are congruent with the target population's beliefs and values, while at the same time being compatible with the goals of movement activists (Tarrow 1994, 123).

Framing is used not only to convince potential followers that their situation is intolerable, but also to convince them that political action can change the situation for the better, that participation in the movement is the most effective way of bringing about such a change, and that success is particularly likely at the present time. During this "cognitive liberation" process, movement activists first must convince the target population that their plight is the result of systemic rather than individual factors (McAdam 1982, 49–50).

Second, activists have to assign blame for the injustice and propose a “line of action for ameliorating the problem” (Snow and Benford 1992, 137). Finally, activists need to show potential supporters that the political system is becoming increasingly vulnerable to challenge, increasing the probability of achieving the goals of the movement.

Framing processes played a crucial role in popularizing the appeal of nationalist movements. To be successful, nationalist leaders had to frame their demands in language and imagery that could resonate with the population. Seventy years of Soviet ethnic policy had decisively molded the perceptions, beliefs, and identities of minority ethnic group members. The nationalist leaders who were successful were those who crafted their messages to correspond to the political ideas of the population. These ideas were shaped by the four ethnic institutions of territorialized ethnicity, republic boundaries, ethnic hierarchy, and passport identity.

The establishment of ethnic administrative units that were considered to “belong” to the members of an ethnic group produced a series of demands related to a perceived discrepancy between the theoretical titular ownership of the region and the actual domination of many aspects of local affairs by members of other ethnic groups, particularly Russians. Nationalist leaders advocated a dramatic expansion of the use of the titular language in administration, education, and other spheres of public life. Some leaders argued that lack of knowledge of the titular language among the Russian population was a mark of their disrespect for the titular ethnic group and its culture. This demand reflected the importance attached by Soviet ethnic policy to the development of native languages and the direct link between language and ethnic identity in the Soviet definition of nationality. Nationalists also argued that the governments of ethnic regions were responsible for the cultural development of their ethnic groups, that members of the titular ethnic group had a right to play a dominant role in local administration, and that quotas in hiring should be instituted in order to rectify the economic imbalance faced by indigenous groups. All of these arguments were based on the assumption that members of the titular ethnic group, by virtue of their indigenous status, should have special rights within their homeland.

The boundaries of most ethnic regions did not fully correspond to the areas inhabited by members of the titular ethnic group. Most ethnic groups had sizeable and compact diaspora populations living in areas adjacent to the ethnic region. While in many cases around the world such a situation has led to irredentist claims against neighboring regions (Horowitz 1985), the importance and legitimacy attached to boundaries ensured that irredentist appeals were virtually nonexistent in most ethnic regions of the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Several exceptions to this rule led to violent interethnic conflict, most notably in North Ossetia/Ingushetia and Nagorno Karabakh. These cases, however, involved calls for either a return to earlier Soviet-era boundaries (North Ossetia) or the transfer of entire subordinate

Because irredentist appeals were precluded, nationalist leaders could express their concern about the future of the diaspora population only in terms of cultural and linguistic issues. Calls for the republic government to provide books and teachers for co-ethnics living outside the republic were legitimate; territorial claims were not.

Nationalist demands for sovereignty and self-determination were based on the perceived unfairness of the hierarchy of regions within the federal administrative system. Nationalist leaders pointed to the differences in economic development between their regions and regions at the next-highest level of the federal hierarchy. They claimed that the best way to improve the regional economy was to increase local control of budgets and state enterprises at the expense of the union republic to which the region was subject. Similarly, they argued that regions with higher status had better cultural facilities and better opportunities for cultural development. Yet even though nationalist leaders perceived the inequality created by the asymmetric federal system, they did not argue for its replacement by a symmetric federation where all ethnic regions would have equal status.<sup>12</sup> Their views had been shaped by the long-term institutionalization of asymmetric federalism, and they did not question this institution's legitimacy. They argued only that the Soviet government had unjustly prevented *their* region from claiming its legitimate place at a higher level in the hierarchy. Other, supposedly less developed regions could remain at their previous position in the hierarchy.

Finally, passport ethnicity reified the existing ethnic categories, made preferential hiring policies feasible, and made individual attempts at assimilation highly visible to co-ethnics. Because all Soviet citizens were required to belong to an ethnic group, had this identity inscribed in their passports, and were not allowed to change the passport inscription, passing as a member of another ethnic group was virtually impossible. Individuals had to state their ethnic identities in filling out paperwork whenever they came into contact with the state bureaucracy, increasing the salience of ethnic identity for the individual. Because of the importance of passport ethnic identity in hindering assimilation, nationalist leaders argued vehemently against issuing new passports that did not include such labels. Passport ethnic identity also increased the legitimacy of preferential hiring policies by removing any uncertainty about individual ethnic identity. Each individual could quickly and definitively judge the effect of such policies on him-or herself. The lack of ambiguity increased the support for such policies among the titular ethnic group, whose members stood to benefit materially.

administrative regions to a different union republic (Nagorno Karabakh). To my knowledge, there were no cases of irredentism involving areas inhabited by co-ethnics that were not previously part of an ethnic administrative unit.

<sup>12</sup> Andrei Sakharov, an ethnic Russian, was the most visible proponent of a fully symmetric federation.

Even if nationalist leaders were able to convince the population of the validity of their claims, participation in protest would remain unlikely if people believed that the campaign was unlikely to succeed or that they were likely to suffer high costs for participating. Unauthorized public demonstrations had been illegal in the Soviet Union for many decades and were usually met with swift police action and lengthy prison terms for the participants. If the protest campaign were to generate mass appeal, it would need to assure the population that dissent was no longer being repressed and that the movement was strong enough to achieve its objectives. To achieve these goals, nationalist leaders acted publicly to demonstrate their strength and publicized protest activities in other regions in order to show that a wave of protest was sweeping the country. To show that nationalism was becoming increasingly widespread throughout the country, nationalist leaders wrote and spoke publicly about the example of the Baltic republics, where nationalist rhetoric was being combined with peaceful protest. At the same time, they underplayed violent events in the Caucasus, which could have scared potential participants away from the movement. The experience of peaceful protest and nationalist mobilization in other parts of the country served to create an atmosphere in which public dissent was increasingly seen as a normal part of the political process. This acculturation to new modes of behavior put pressure on recalcitrant local elites to allow peaceful protest in their regions as well.

To show their local strength, nationalists organized outdoor public rallies. As these rallies were allowed to take place by regional governments, more and more people came to believe that participants were safe from repression. As a result, participation in these rallies grew over time. As the rallies grew, the appearance of movement strength further increased, leading to even more participation. Similarly, the publishing of articles by nationalist leaders in official newspapers gradually convinced the population that the long-forbidden nationalist discourse that had become widespread in other parts of the country was now considered acceptable by the local authorities as well. This belief also encouraged participation in the movement. Finally, the election of many nationalist leaders to local Supreme Soviets was a further indication of their strength.

Nationalist leaders were able to influence public opinion because of their level of access to the media. The policy of *glasnost*, enforced from above, ensured that previously banned opinions could be expressed on the pages of newspapers and magazines and on local radio and television programs. Nationalist leaders were able to use these media particularly effectively. Their status as respected scholars and writers, who had often contributed to these media in the past on less controversial topics, gave them greater access to the media and their opinions greater weight in the community than would have been the case had they come from a different social group with lower status.