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Occasional Paper #286
Conflict in Kyrgyzstan?

Michele E. Commercio

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Although there are different definitions of conflict, use of the term often implies the presence of struggle that is manifested in contentious behavior such as mass mobilization, public protest, sporadic acts of violence, or war. Donald L. Horowitz points out that most definitions of conflict "embody an element of struggle, strife, or collision, and in this way distinguish conflict from competition."[1] Horowitz's definition of conflict involves "a struggle in which the aim is to gain objectives and simultaneously to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals."[2] Various phenomena within certain Soviet successor states, however, indicate that it is time to reevaluate our perspective on conflict. This paper suggests that whereas conflict may or may not involve struggle that is manifested in contentious behavior, conflict does generate unstable outcomes. A shift in focus from process to outcome provides a more thorough understanding of less traditional forms of conflict in post-Soviet states.

In an effort to revisit the typical perspective on conflict, this paper analyzes the case of the Russian minority in Kyrgyzstan, and it focuses in particular on grievances expressed by Russians in Kyrgyzstan, and how Russians have reacted to those grievances. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russians in Kyrgyzstan have been dissatisfied with informal discriminatory personnel practices that render putting food on the table a challenge. Russian responses to those practices, however, have not been contentious. Rather than struggle to protect their interests, aggrieved Russians have either eked out an existence through Kyrgyzstan's informal economy or emigrated from Kyrgyzstan. Those Russians who have remained in Kyrgyzstan are troubling because they are dissatisfied, frustrated, and unproductive, and a high rate of post-Soviet Russian emigration from Kyrgyzstan has generated a fairly severe brain drain. Either outcome is unstable for Kyrgyzstan's political and economic development.

THE RUSSIAN MINORITY IN KYRGYZSTAN

Russians in Kyrgyzstan are greatly outnumbered by Kyrgyz, who make up 65 percent of the country's population, and are slightly outnumbered by Uzbeks, who make up 14 percent of the population. Today, Russians are Kyrgyzstan's second largest minority, accounting for 12.5 percent of the population.[3] Although Kyrgyzstan's formal policies are relatively accommodating toward Russians, informal practices that restrict economic opportunity generate widespread frustration among Russians. Consider the following remark made by a thirty-two-year-old Russian woman who resides in Bishkek:

> The attitude toward Russians [needs to change], but it will not improve. It's possible to study Kyrgyz, but why bother? Even if you speak Kyrgyz, you will not get a good job because you don't have the same eyes.[4]

Interview data from Russian residents of Bishkek shed light on informal aspects of

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post-Soviet politics, such as the use of "administrative discretion to pursue a nationalizing agenda," and indicate that informal discriminatory personnel practices are prevalent in Kyrgyzstan.[5] These practices, especially that of excluding Russians from key positions in the state sector, intensified when Kyrgyzstan became independent in 1991:

> Indeed, after the proclamation of independence, politics [i.e., practices] to exclude them [Russians] from governing and management positions, from those spheres in which they predominated earlier—education, public health, culture, services—intensified. Now access to the majority of "soft" jobs in the state sector (the state apparatus, banks, taxes, customs, law enforcement, judicial organs, and so on) is very difficult. It is here that the strongest discrimination of Russian speakers appears.[6]

Research suggests that there is a widespread sense of perceived ethnic discrimination among Russian residents of Bishkek, which stems primarily from informal nationalization practices or from informal rules and procedures that privilege the economic flourishing, political hegemony, demographic prevalence, language, and culture of a country's core nationality.[7] I asked fifty likely Russian permanent residents of Bishkek, or individuals who were planning at the time of the interview to remain in Kyrgyzstan, how life had changed for Russians since 1991. The majority of respondents (89 percent) claimed that their lives had been adversely affected by Kyrgyz nationalization[8] (see table 1). The data reveal that Bishkek Russians are dissatisfied with informal personnel practices favoring the Kyrgyz. The following quotations illustrate the adverse impact of personnel discrimination on Russians, particularly at the management level:

> We [Russians] cannot work in any government organization. There are very few Russians working in government structures, although Russians make up 50 percent of the population—still, they don't work for the government. In practice, Russians also cannot work as managers, there are very few Russian bosses, directors, or managers. We can't do anything! *(39-year-old male)*

> The Russian-speaking population does not occupy positions in the government or in ministries. In general, there are no Russians in management positions, Russians do not have jobs... Russians have been deprived of work, we have no jobs, and we therefore have no money. *(39-year-old female)*

> Naturally it's harder for Russians to find good jobs now—they pay more attention to national [Kyrgyz] personnel. Maybe it's not so open, but you can sense it. *(48-year-old male)*

Table 1. How has life changed for Bishkek Russians since the collapse of the Soviet Union? (percentage of responses given for each category)

Personnel Discrimination	*Kyrgyzstan Is for the Kyrgyz*	*Language Obstacles*	*Unemployment Due to the Industrial Collapse*
38	32	12	7

In spite of the fact that the government's signature slogan is "Kyrgyzstan: Our Common Home," informal discriminatory personnel practices convey a "sense of [Kyrgyz] ownership" of the state.[9] Over time, these practices have created the impression among Russians that they are guests in Kyrgyzstan. Contributing to this sentiment is the fact that job vacancies resulting from post-Soviet Russian emigration are now filled by Kyrgyz workers. The following quotation alludes to this problem:

> At this time, the Kyrgyz population is promoted at the expense of the Russian population because they buy the things migrants leave behind, apartments for example, inexpensively, and they get the jobs that migrants vacate, or that Russians are fired from. Now, for the most part, management positions and all other positions are filled by Kyrgyz. *(23-year-old Russian male)*

Although not dictated by formal policy, a lack of state language skills prevents qualified Russian workers from getting better-paid positions, especially at the management level. And though employers hesitate to tell Russians that they cannot hire them because of their nationality, they will tell them that a lack of proficiency in the state language is a reason to hire a Kyrgyz over an equally qualified and experienced Russian.[10] The following quotations suggest that a lack of state language skills is used as a pretense to exclude Russians from powerful positions:

> There is discomfort related to the Russian language. They declared that the state language would be only Kyrgyz, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the population speaks Russian. In addition, more than half the population considers Russian their native language, the language in which they think. At times, due to a lack of knowledge of the state language—in budgetary spheres and state organizations—they fire Russians. So discrimination exists, discrimination based on language. Surely this is serious discrimination. *(50-year-old Bishkek male)*

> The Kyrgyz themselves are very kind, there's no nationalism. But politics, laws that divide Russians and Kyrgyz, are troublesome; they disturb the friendship that exists between Russians and Kyrgyz—especially the law on the state language. When looking for work, nationality has a very significant meaning. When there's competition over a good job, the first issue is knowledge of the Kyrgyz language. *(46-year-old Bishkek female)*

> Russians face oppression, it's impossible to get work. If you don't know Kyrgyz, you will have problems here. For the most part, at the good workplaces, in government—everywhere—the bosses, managers are all Kyrgyz. There are some Russians, but very few. *(25-year-old Bishkek male)*

Discriminatory personnel practices, however, are not the only cause of unemployment among Russians, which is a post-Soviet phenomenon that also contributes to Russian grievances. In the early 1990s, Kyrgyzstan experienced an industrial shutdown that caused many Russians to lose jobs they had held for years. State socialism, a planned economy, and a mutually dependent economic system that closely linked Soviet

Table 2. What needs to change in order for Russians to be satisfied with conditions in Kyrgyzstan? (percentage of responses given for each category)

Improve the Economy	*Eliminate Discriminatory Practices*	*Other*
51	40	9

republics together shielded individuals from unemployment for decades. The Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic's lack of resources made the republic particularly dependent on other republics. In 1991, the source of roughly 12 percent of the republic's gross domestic product was transfers from the Union budget; about 98 percent of the republic's trade was with other Soviet republics; and, more than 40 percent of the republic's imports came from Russia.[11]

Due to the disintegration of interrepublican economic ties that occurred when the Soviet Union dissolved, most of Kyrgyzstan's large industrial enterprises were forced to close. This put factories out of business, and their employees out of work. For example, shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a large glass factory in Tokmak had to shut down when deliveries of raw materials ceased. Suddenly 1,300 people, predominantly of Slavic origin, were unemployed.[12]

Although this industrial shutdown had an adverse impact on Kyrgyzstan's economy in general, it had a particularly adverse effect on Russians because Russians dominated heavy industries that relied on external raw materials and markets for production. During the Soviet era, there was a defined division of labor in the Kyrgyz Republic: Russians worked in the heavy industrial and technical-science sectors of the economy, and Kyrgyz worked in the light industrial and agricultural sectors. In 1989, there were 1.6 employed Russians for every employed Kyrgyz. Russian workers outnumbered their Kyrgyz counterparts in industry by a ratio of 2.1:1. In heavy industry, the ratio was 2.7:1 in favor of Russians, and in mechanical engineering and metalworking the ratio was an even higher 3.2:1.[13] Although statistics on the rate of unemployment according to nationality are unavailable, 14.5 percent of Kyrgyzstan's economically active population was unemployed in 2000.[14] Robert Kaiser sums up the economic effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union on Russians in the non-Russian republics:

> Russians outside of Russia tended to be highly concentrated in heavy industries of all-Union significance that frequently depended on external raw materials and external markets for their finished goods. These factories have tended to suffer most from the economic dislocation associated with the disintegration of interrepublican economic ties, and so unemployment among Russian blue-collar workers tends to be relatively high.[15]

To understand the relative importance of general economic conditions, versus informal discriminatory personnel practices that worsen those conditions, I asked Bishkek Russians what needed to change in order for them to be satisfied with conditions in Kyrgyzstan (see table 2).

Economic concerns have the strongest impact on how Russians in Kyrgyzstan perceive their environment. In particular, respondents are dissatisfied with a lack of industrial development and job creation, low and/or unpaid salaries and pensions, a low standard of living, and economic

Table 3. Number of Russians who emigrated from Kyrgyzstan each year

1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
32,893	32,032	59,294	89,984	41,463	18,718	14,020	9,891	7,869	9,281

Source: Data are from the Natsional'ny Statisticheskii Komitet Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki, Bishkek, 2000.

instability. Respondents are almost equally dissatisfied, however, with informal discriminatory personnel practices that block access to the jobs that do exist. In sum, the core of Russian grievances is a combination of (1) poor economic conditions within Kyrgyzstan, and (2) informal discriminatory personnel practices that worsen those conditions because they restrict economic opportunity. These factors have generated a widespread sense of perceived ethnic discrimination among Bishkek Russians, who feel that their Russian identity compromises their ability to earn a living in what is already a challenging economic situation. It is not surprising that Russians in Kyrgyzstan have reacted, in some way, to this situation.

RUSSIAN RESPONSES

There are two Russian responses to the situation described above: Russians either scrape together a minimal existence via Kyrgyzstan's informal economy, or emigrate from Kyrgyzstan. Unfavorable economic conditions within Kyrgyzstan, resulting from industrial collapse and informal discriminatory personnel practices, have forced most Russians who remain in Kyrgyzstan to survive via an informal economy. Although empirical data on Kyrgyzstan's informal economy are scarce, anecdotal evidence abounds. For example, while the breadwinner of the host family I lived with in Bishkek had a full-time job at a dental clinic, he subsidized his meager salary by working at home *every evening* to produce dentures. He then bartered the dentures for basic food products, such as meat and potatoes. The following excerpt from my journal provides another example of how Bishkek Russians survive via the informal economy:

> I think I should spend a day or two riding around in taxis because so many drivers are Russian, and highly educated Russians at that. One taxi driver I met today, Gennaidi, is an engineer. Because he can't get a job as an engineer, he drives a taxi to feed his family. If he's lucky (as in if he gives a ride to a foreigner), he makes about 50 cents a ride. *(January 15, 2000)*

Russians who cannot find work in their respective professions resort to low-paying informal economic activity—such as driving taxis, selling cigarettes on the street, or selling oranges at the local market—to earn a living. Russians who are able to emigrate from Kyrgyzstan, however, avoid this situation.

Although Russian emigration from Central Asia is not a new phenomenon but the continuation of a trend that began in the late 1970s, Kyrgyzstan has lost a significant portion of its Russian population since gaining its independence. Between 1989 and 1999, the country's Russian population diminished by roughly 34 percent.[16] On the basis of a fairly constant life-expectancy rate, this decrease can be attributed primarily to emigration.[17] Table 3 shows the number of Russians who left Kyrgyzstan each year, between 1990 and 1999.[18]

Russian emigration from Kyrgyzstan during the past decade has occurred in two phases. During the first phase (1990–1), at least 64,925 Russians left Kyrgyzstan.[19] One factor in this exodus was the imminent collapse of the Soviet Union, which caused Russians to feel anxious about their future as a minority in an independent Kyrgyzstan.[20] The appearance of Kyrgyz nationalist organizations and the development of an increasingly nationalistic environment in Kyrgyzstan contributed to this anxiety. The second factor that sparked the first phase of Russian emigration was the violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks that erupted in southern Kyrgyzstan. In June 1990, the local authorities in Osh agreed to transfer land that was inhabited by Uzbeks to homeless Kyrgyz. In reaction, particularly vocal Uzbeks demanded that Uzbek be designated an official language of Osh, and that parts of southern Kyrgyzstan be incorporated into Uzbekistan. The rejection of these demands sparked violence that destroyed thousands of homes and buildings and killed an estimated 230 people.[21]

During the second phase of Russian emigration (1992–4), an astonishing 190,741 Russians left Kyrgyzstan. In the peak year, 1993, 89,984 Russians abandoned Kyrgyzstan.[22] By this time, the Soviet Union was defunct, and adverse effects of the rapid disintegration of the all-Union economy were affecting local economies. High rates of unemployment and deteriorating economic conditions within Kyrgyzstan motivated this wave of emigration. At the same time, Russians began to feel discriminatory effects of new policies, such as the 1989 law on the state language, which designates Kyrgyz as the state language, the language of government, and the primary language of education institutions. In addition, the law requires managers and employees of various institutions to be proficient in the state language.[23] This policy, which was used as a mechanism to oust Russians from strategic economic and political positions in Kyrgyzstan, led to the "nativization" of local and state levels of government.[24] A local author describes this nativization thus:

> From the moment of the [official] proclamation of independence in 1992, they began to build a national state, in which all key posts in political and economic structures were filled by representatives of the titular nationality.[25]

Although the rate of Russian emigration from Kyrgyzstan slowed after 1994, Russians continued to leave Kyrgyzstan throughout the 1990s. Even at the lowest point of emigration (1998), almost 8,000 Russians left Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, there was an increase in the number of Russians who left Kyrgyzstan in 1999, as compared with 1998. The director of the Federal Migration Services of Russia in Kyrgyzstan attributes this increase to unresolved political, economic, and social problems:

> According to data of the National Statistics Committee, the tendency of the increase in migration losses in the country has stabilized since 1994. However, an analysis of developments during 1999 attests to a repeated revival of the emigration mood of the population. . . . The continued tendency of the Russian-speaking population to leave Kyrgyzstan is supported by a whole series of unresolved problems in the Republic.[26]

Almost 11,000 individuals visited the Federal Migration Service of Russia in Kyrgyzstan during 1999, and just over 9,000

Russians emigrated from Kyrgyzstan that year.[27] One journalist conveys the significance of the recent increase in the rate of Russian emigration by comparing the number of people visiting the Federal Migration Services of Russia in 1999 to the number in 1998:

> If last year every day five to seven people visited representatives of the Federal Migration Services of Russia in Kyrgyzstan to receive permission [from the Russian government] for a move, then this year already sixty to seventy people do so [every day]. While some fill out applications and receive consultations inside, others patiently stand in line in the small courtyard. . . . They all want, as quickly as possible, to get through this red tape to get ready for the move.[28]

Interview data suggest that the increase in Russian emigration was caused by a heightened sense of distress among Russians, which stems from two distinct but interrelated factors: (1) poor economic conditions within Kyrgyzstan, and (2) informal discriminatory personnel practices that privilege the Kyrgyz. In Bishkek, I asked 110 Russian potential migrants, or individuals who were planning at the time of the interview to migrate to Russia, which factors had contributed to their decision to leave Kyrgyzstan, and what would need to change for them to remain in Kyrgyzstan. The responses to both questions indicate that the combined effect of destitute economic conditions and informal discriminatory personnel practices motivates contemporary Russian emigration from Kyrgyzstan (see table 4).

The most frequently cited motivation for emigration was economic. Respondents worry about job scarcity, increasing prices, unpaid and/or low salaries and pensions, a lack of basic services such as gas, heat, and electricity, economic instability, and the financial stresses of daily life. Bishkek Russians also worry about informal discriminatory practices that hinder their ability to earn a living. Although discrimination as a motivation for emigration arose in fewer than 20 percent of the responses, my interviews indicate that informal discriminatory personnel practices contribute to dissatisfaction with economic conditions within Kyrgyzstan, and thus to Russian emigration. Consider the following quotations:

> Russians need to be supported, but here nothing is changing because of the Kyrgyz mentality: They always help each other out, they are a community of fellow countrymen. It is a problem that I am now a member of a national minority. As a result of this, I cannot find work. For example, when I went to an office to apply for a position, the manager was Kyrgyz. Immediately there was an attitude that I am second class. Now, with pleasure, I am moving to Russia. *(27-year-old male)*

Table 4. Main motivations for Russian emigration from Kyrgyzstan in 1999 (percentage of responses given for each category)

Kyrgyzstan's Poor Economy	*Informal Discriminatory Practices*	*Concern for Children's Future*	*Relatives Reside in Russia*
42	15	13	14

> After the collapse of the Soviet Union, we began to notice that we are Russian. Earlier, there was no difference whether you were Russian or Kyrgyz. The rights of Russians have simply diminished—in terms of getting a job and so forth, nationality began to have some kind of meaning. Earlier this wasn't the case. Now it is more difficult for Russians to find work. *(45-year-old female)*

Though potential migrants distinguish among concerns regarding the economy, informal discriminatory practices, and their children's future, these factors are not independent; there are strong linkages among them. Russian parents are concerned that there will be a dearth of jobs in Kyrgyzstan in general, and that informal discriminatory personnel practices will prevent their children from getting respectable jobs that are available. Consider the following quotations from interviews with Russian potential migrant parents:

> My children have no future here. It is, and it will continue to be, difficult for people who don't speak Kyrgyz to find good work as managers, directors, heads of departments. Even though my children study Kyrgyz, it's all the same—they have no future here. Even if they speak Kyrgyz well, it will be difficult for them to find a good job simply because they are Russian. *(35-year-old female)*

> My children must be able to study and then find a job. I see no future here for my children because all opportunities are for the native population. My children study Kyrgyz, but it's all the same. *(44-year-old male)*

Naturally, a desire to live closer to relatives who reside in Russia also motivates Russian emigration from Kyrgyzstan. After ten years of consistent immigration to Russia, many Russians in Central Asia today have relatives in Russia.[29] Although there are no formal policies to encourage Russians who have left Kyrgyzstan to come home, President Askar Akaev is aware of the economic instability created by a high rate of Russian emigration, and on occasion he has appealed to these Russians. For example, in 1999, he stated:

> To those [Russians] who still remain in Russia, I want to say: "Return to your native land. You must miss your native mountains, Ala-Too, and the summits of the Tian'-Shan, and your native lake Issyk-Kul."[30]

Table 5 reveals that if President Akaev wants to preserve a Russian presence in Kyrgyzstan, he must improve Kyrgyzstan's economy and eliminate informal discriminatory personnel practices.

In response to the question—"What needs to change in order for you to remain in Kyrgyzstan?"—respondents focused on Kyrgyzstan's poor economy and on informal discriminatory personnel practices that limit

Table 5. What must change in order for you to remain in Kyrgyzstan? (percentage of responses given for each category)

The Economy	*Informal Discriminatory Practices*	*Corruption*	*Other*
61	23	11	5

economic opportunity. Respondents emphasized the need for economy stability, jobs, paid and increased salaries and pensions, a higher standard of living, industrial development, and the regular provision of gas, heat, and electricity. In addition, respondents underscored the need to eliminate discriminatory personnel practices favoring the Kyrgyz. The following quotations from interviews with Russian potential migrants illustrate the inimical impact of these practices on Russians:

> Life's deteriorated for Russians. The economy's worse; Russians cannot work in government organizations. There are very few Russians in government agencies. Moreover, in practice Russians cannot work as managers—there are very few Russian managers. We can't do anything here. *(39-year-old male)*

> Life's gotten worse for Russians. There's no work, no jobs. If a Russian has work, it's a midlevel position and he cannot move up because there are no opportunities for Russians to do so. Here, in Kyrgyzstan, they don't consider us people. *(50-year-old female)*

> The availability of manager positions for Russians has decreased here, but everything's closed, hidden. They hire their own—they get positions through relatives. So getting a job doesn't depend on qualifications, it depends on nationality. In Kyrgyzstan, Russians cannot be managers—unless, of course, they have a lot of money. In general there are no good jobs for Russians; Russians cannot find good work. *(33-year-old male)*

In sum, a heightened sense of distress among Russians caused by poor economic conditions within Kyrgyzstan along with widespread informal discriminatory personnel practices that bear on economic opportunity together explain the increase in the rate of Russian emigration from Kyrgyzstan noted above. A high rate of Russian emigration from Kyrgyzstan has created an unstable economic situation in Kyrgyzstan. Although they do not make up a large percentage of Kyrgyzstan's population, Russians are crucial to Kyrgyzstan's economy because they are, for the most part, skilled and experienced technical specialists. Kyrgyzstan's brain drain began in the early 1990s, when large numbers of highly educated Russians emigrated from the country. Unfortunately, data on the type of individual who emigrates from Kyrgyzstan are hard to come by, but more than half (66 percent) of the potential migrants interviewed in Bishkek had either vocational or higher education; 34 percent had only a high school diploma.

There is a consensus that Kyrgyzstan has experienced a brain drain; that Kyrgyzstan lost many Russians who "were born in Kyrgyzstan, or had lived [in Kyrgyzstan] five to ten years, had secured a home and a job, and had a defined socioeconomic status."[31] Specialists agree that the main consequence of Russian emigration from Kyrgyzstan is the loss of

> human capital, highly skilled workers . . . The migration of the population from the Kyrgyz Republic means a loss of labor resources, of highly skilled personnel. This "brain-drain" reduces the chances of a quick reconstruction of state enterprises, and also of intensive growth of the private sector.[32]

V.V. Vishnevskii, the president of the Slavic Foundation, an organization that defends the interests of Russians in Kyrgyzstan, agrees:

> There are huge economic losses connected to emigration, . . . but the main loss for Kyrgyzstan is the loss of human capital, of highly qualified workers. Specialists, scholars, engineers, doctors, musicians, teachers and highly skilled workers have moved to Russia, Western Europe, the United States, and Israel in search of better employment conditions and a higher standard of living. This "brain drain" robs Kyrgyzstan of its vitality; it does major economic, political, and moral damage.[33]

Vishnevskii made the same point during an interview: "Kyrgyzstan is losing qualified specialists today. The main consequence of emigration is a tremendous loss of intellect."[34] Ultimately, Kyrgyzstan has lost rooted, highly skilled workers in search of better employment and a higher standard of living. According to the director of the Federal Migration Services of Russia in Kyrgyzstan, diminished human capital resulting from contemporary Russian emigration is a loss for Kyrgyzstan:

> The Kyrgyz are losing a skilled labor force, they are losing technical workers. We see who is leaving, and it's the skilled labor force. I have in mind drivers, builders, doctors, teachers.[35]

CONCLUSION

The case of the Russian minority in Kyrgyzstan emphasizes the need to reevaluate our perspective on conflict, and in doing so to shift our focus from process to outcome. Though conflict may or may not involve contentious struggle, it does generate unstable outcomes. Although Russians in Kyrgyzstan exhibit no public struggle, they are dissatisfied with post-Soviet conditions. Widespread frustration has spawned a noncontentious reaction, which has generated an unstable outcome: the loss of highly skilled, experienced technical specialists, and the swelling of an unemployed, unproductive, and aggrieved population.

The case of the Russian minority in Latvia sheds light on this argument. Because Russians in Latvia are organized to protect their interests and thus exhibit public struggle, a focus on process rather than outcome might lead to the conclusion that there is conflict in Latvia. Formal discriminatory policies and informal discriminatory practices have generated a widespread sense of dissatisfaction among Russians in Latvia. Consider the following quotations from Russians who at the time of the interview had no intention of leaving Latvia:

> Life has gotten worse for Russians because it is now very difficult for Russians to get high-paying jobs. Russians with higher education have lost their jobs because, even if you know Latvian, you cannot work in state or government agencies. For the most part, Latvians work there. They hire only Latvians, even if you do know Latvian. So it's much harder for us to find work because of the fact that we are Russian. *(44-year-old Russian woman)*

> Even if you speak Latvian, it's unlikely you'll aspire to anything grand—now they've passed a law that divides the highest category of language proficiency! Now there are more crite-

Table 6. The number of Russians who emigrated from Latvia each year

1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
30,740	19,694	14,223	8,395	6,264	5,606	3,442	1,904

Sources: Data are from Demographic Statistics in the Baltic Countries and the *Demographic Yearbook of Latvia*.

ria, so that only a Latvian could meet them because it is possible to know Latvian this well only if you are Latvian. So there's a language problem. It's a different matter that they can discriminate against you because you are Russian—not always, I emphasize, not always, but there are reasons for me to say this. When a Russian, even one who knows Latvian, when they simply push him aside. They don't fire him, but they very tactfully say "Goodbye, you are free!" *(49-year-old Russian male)*

Without a doubt, it is harder for Russians to find good work, first because it is necessary to know Latvian perfectly, and second because there is discrimination based on nationality. In either case, in all state agencies and schools there is no doubt that preferences are given to Latvians. This is not an open situation, but it does exist. Today they will not hire a Russian in a state agency, even if he speaks Latvian, simply because he is Russian. *(47-year-old Russian woman)*

In Latvia, nongovernmental organizations and political parties represent, directly or indirectly, the interests of Russians. As a result, struggle is manifested in contentious behavior that includes petitions, protests, and appeals to international organizations on behalf of Latvia's Russian community. However, despite such discord and the fact that Russians in Latvia are dissatisfied with policies and practices that show preference to Latvians, the reaction to frustration has not resulted in instability. On the contrary, it has resulted in stability.

Dissatisfaction with policies and practices that restrict economic opportunity has not resulted in a high rate of post-Soviet Russian emigration from Latvia. Between 1989 and 1999, Latvia's Russian population diminished by roughly 22 percent.[36] Moreover, since 1992 there has been a steady decrease in the rate of Russian emigration from Latvia[37] (see table 6).

This low rate of emigration is due to the fact that Latvia's economy has grown at a steady rate over the years, and to the existence of a small, private Russian business community in Latvia that enables Russians to make a living, despite constraints posed by discriminatory policies and practices. Many Russians in Latvia are like the couple discussed in the journal excerpt below, who prefer to participate in this community rather than emigrate from the country in which they were born:

My transcriber, Yulya, and her husband are Russian. They run a small, private business selling computers and computer equipment. No Latvians work there, only Russians. When I walked into their office on Friday, Yulya was speaking with a customer in Latvian—pure Latvian. Because the customer was Latvian, Yulya and her husband spoke to the woman in Latvian. At one point, Yulya forgot a word, so she said it in Russian and her husband supplied the Latvian

translation. The conversation continued in Latvian. *(November 11, 2000)*[38]

Scholars and local experts agree that Latvia's private Russian business community is sizable. Russians—having been ousted from the state structure by citizenship and language requirements and by informal discriminatory personnel practices—have created an economic niche in Latvia that has gradually produced a Russian economic elite. According to Pal Kolsto:

> In political and cultural terms, then, we may note a marginalization of the non-Latvian population. In socioeconomic terms, however, no such marginalization seems evident. . . . Whereas the Russians have few opportunities for improving their societal status qua group, they do have considerable possibilities for making careers within private enterprise. As long as there exist alternative social ladders that well-qualified and ambitious Russians can climb, it is less frustrating that career possibilities within the state apparatus are in practice closed to them.[39]

Writing about Russians in Estonia and Latvia, Graham Smith argues that

> rather than struggle to retain their occupational niches within public sector management, many have moved over to the private sector, making up what constitutes one of the fastest growing social groups within the Baltic states, a new Russian business elite.[40]

It has been suggested that about 80 percent of privately owned businesses in Latvia are owned by non-Latvians.[41] Of the employed Russian respondents who participated in a 2000 Baltic Barometer Survey, 68 percent were employed in the private sector, which means that they were self-employed or worked for privatized firms, new private enterprises, or self-owned businesses.[42] Some Russians in Latvia "have adopted behavior typical of a diaspora by starting business enterprises, primarily in trade and financial operations, and are therefore thriving economically."[43] Anatol Lieven—pointing out the ethnic division between Latvia's political and economic elite—argues that "for the moment, [Russian businesspeople] are doing very well in Latvia, and more and more intelligent and determined young local Russians are rising to join their ranks. So far, they have faced no serious obstacles in the economic sphere."[44] Even representatives of Latvia's Russian population, who tend to disapprove of this development because they view it as promoting segregation, admit that Russians have found a separate economic niche. For example, the leader of Latvia's Socialist Party acknowledges that

> in the early 1990s, nationalism was very developed here, and it still exists today. If you are Russian, a Latvian firm will not hire you or will do so only with difficulty, and if I am Latvian, a Russian firm will hire me only with difficulty. We have a stratification of society, a division into two diasporas: Latvian and Russian, two societies. . . . Russians work for Russian businessmen, Latvians work for Latvians.[45]

The president of the Association of Latvian-Russian Cooperation confirms this assessment:

> In Latvia, there is a Russian business community and many Russian businessmen make regular trips to Russia. . . . A two-community system is beginning to appear in Latvia. One structure consists of Latvian organizations, which are made up primarily of Latvians, while the other structure consists of Russian-speaking organizations that engage in business and commercial activity, and they hire only Russians.[46]

Russians have created an economic niche in Latvia by utilizing former Soviet institutions, such as the Komsomol, and contacts with individuals associated with these institutions, as a basis for new economic activity.[47] According to the president of a local organization dedicated to preserving education in the Russian language in Latvia,

> Former Komsomol activists in Latvia had very good contacts with the Moscow Komsomol *nomenklatura*. To this day, they have good contacts with those former Moscow Komsomol members who now work in Moscow commercial banks and are influential in this sector.[48]

Many of Latvia's Russian businessmen and businesswomen are former members of the *nomenklatura*, and during the Soviet era, Latvia's *nomenklatura* had close contacts with Russia's *nomenklatura*. Nils Muiznieks points out that Russian managers in Latvia's industry and transport sectors had solid contacts with their counterparts in Russia during the Soviet era and were therefore better situated when the Soviet Union collapsed to engage in private business activity than Latvians, who dominated the agricultural and cultural spheres of Latvia's economy.[49] These ties remain intact, and today Russian entrepreneurs in Latvia employ these connections in private business activity.[50] While in Latvia, I was struck by how often Russians distinguished between the difficulty of landing a job in the public sector versus the ease of landing a job in the private Russian business sector. Consider the following accounts:

> I understand that I cannot work for the state if I am not a citizen. In the private sphere, however, there is no difference, in business I have no problems. For Russians, it is almost impossible to get a state job, so for the most part Russians engage in small business. *(28-year-old Riga male)*

> It is harder for Russians [than Latvians] to work for the state, without a doubt, because they hire only Latvians for state positions. Why? Because they hire their own, and because by law state positions can be filled only by citizens and few [Russians] have naturalized. But Russians do dominate business in Latvia. *(30-year-old Riga female)*

> There are certain positions which are difficult for Russians to get, for example, bureaucratic positions. It's difficult for a Russian to work in a ministry, even if he is a citizen and speaks Latvian well. But in private firms, there's no difference. In my experience, the employer does not look at nationality, only at professional skills. So Russians do not face oppression in the private sphere. *(31-year-old Riga male)*

> Financially, life's gotten a lot worse, especially if you compare incomes—

> my salary is one-third of what I made before the Soviet Union's collapse. There are some Russians who went into business, and they receive good salaries. . . . It is not necessarily more difficult for Russians to find good work [than Latvians] because Russian business in Latvia is very powerful. *(53-year-old Riga female)*

In sum, the existence of a private Russian business community in Latvia has produced a stable outcome, with two aspects. First, this community serves as a disincentive for Russians to emigrate from Latvia. As a result, the rate of post-Soviet Russian emigration from Latvia has been low, and Latvia has avoided a brain drain. Second, Latvia's Russian business community has created a Russian economic elite which balances the Latvian political elite. According to Aina Antane and Boris Tsilevich, this situation satisfies both groups: Russians have incentive to worry about politics only if and when politics affect business, and Latvians know that in the absence of this condition, Russians will leave politics to Latvians, thereby preserving the distinction between the country's political and economic elite.[51]

The Kyrgyz and Latvian cases illustrate the benefit of shifting our focus from process to outcome when we think about conflict. The case of the Russian minority in Kyrgyzstan shows that while a minority may not exhibit contentious behavior, it may react to adverse circumstances in a way that produces an unstable outcome. Conflict can exist in the absence of contentious struggle. In contrast, the case of the Russian minority in Latvia shows that whereas a minority may exhibit contentious behavior, it may react to adverse circumstances in a way that produces a stable outcome. Contentious struggle can exist without conflict. To better comprehend less traditional forms of conflict, which are prevalent throughout the former Soviet Union, we must shift our focus from process to outcome.

NOTES

1 Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 95.

2 Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*.

3 Kyrgyzstan's 1999 census identifies twelve different nationalities. In order of size from largest to smallest, they are Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Russians, Dungans, Ukrainians, Uigurs, Tatars, Kazakhs, Tadjiks, Turks, Germans, and Koreans. In 1989, Russians were Kyrgyzstan's largest minority, accounting for 21.5 percent of the population, and Uzbeks were the second largest minority, accounting for 12.9 percent of the population. By 1999, Russians had become Kyrgyzstan's second largest minority as a result of Russian emigration. *Osnovnye Itogi Pervoi Natsional'noi Perepisi Naseleniia Kyrgyskoi Respubliki* (Bishkek: National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan, 2000), 26.

4 This article is based on research conducted in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, from October 1999 to April 2000. Fifty likely permanent Russian residents of Bishkek (Russians who at the time of the interview had no intention of emigrating from Kyrgyzstan), and 110 Russian potential migrants (Russian residents of Bishkek who at the time of the interview were planning to migrate to Russia) were interviewed. In addition, research was conducted in Riga, Latvia, from September 2000 through December 2000. Forty likely permanent Russian residents of Riga and 65 Russian potential migrants were interviewed.

5 Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 92.

6 N. Kosmarskaia, "Khotiat li Russkie v Rossiiu?" in *V Dvizhenii Dobrovol'nom I Vynuzhdennom* ed. A. R. Viatkina, N. P. Kosmarskoi, and C.A. Panarina (Moscow: Natlis Press, 1999), 194.

7 I borrow the term "nationalizing" from Rogers Brubaker; see Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*.

8 Eleven percent claimed that life had not changed for Russians, and that life was a financial struggle for everyone in Kyrgyzstan.

9 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 103.

[10] Kyrgyz has been Kyrgyzstan's state language since 1989. *Zakon o Gosudarstvennom Iazyke Kirgizskoi SSR* (September 23, 1989).

[11] John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy?* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999), 67.

[12] Author's interview with Ostapchuk Vasilii Ivanovich, director of the Federal Migration Services of Russia in Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, January 26, 2000.

[13] L.V. Ostapenko, "Voprosy Trudovoi Zaniatosti," in *Russkie v Novom Zarubezh'e: Kirgiziia* ed. S. S. Savoskul, A. I. Ginzburg, M. N. Gulboglo, and V. A. Tishkov (Moscow: Mezhdistsiplinarnyi Akademicheskii Tsentr Sotsial'nykh Nauk, 1995), 92.

[14] *Osnovnye Itogi Pervoi Natsional'noi Perepisi Naseleniia Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki (Natsional'ny Statisticheskii Komitet Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki)* (Bishkek: National Statistical Committee, 2000), 52. When I requested data on the rate of unemployment according to nationality, a Russian woman working at Kyrgyzstan's National Statistics Committee responded, "Who would advertise that kind of information?"

[15] Robert J. Kaiser, "Nationalizing the Work Force: Ethnic Restratification in the Newly Independent States," *Post-Soviet Geography*, 36, no. 2, (1995): 105.

[16] Reliable statistics on emigration are difficult to find. This approximate figure is derived from 1989 and 1999 statistics regarding the national composition of Kyrgyzstan's population. See *Osnovnye Itogi Pervoi Natsional'noi Perepisi Naseleniia Kyrgyskoi Respubliki*, 26.

[17] The 1970–5 life expectancy at birth rate differs from the 1995–2000 life expectancy at birth rate by only four and a half years in Kyrgyzstan. See UN Development Program, *Human Development Report 2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 187.

[18] These statistics reflect reported cases of emigration. Actual figures may be higher because Kyrgyzstan does not have a mandatory exit procedure.

[19] Unless otherwise noted, statistics concerning Russian emigration rates are provided by the National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (Natsional'ny Statisticheskiii Komitet Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki), Bishkek, 2000.

[20] In 1989, Russians made up 22 percent of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic's population, while Kyrgyz made up 52 percent. *Osnovnye Itogi Pervoi Natsional'noi Perepisi Naseleniia Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki*, 26.

[21] Unfortunately, little has been written on the Osh events. See Gene Huskey, "Kyrgyzstan: the Politics of Demographic and Economic Frustration," in *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, ed. Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 398–418.

[22] *Kyrgyzstan: Obshchaia Otsenka Sostoianiia Strany* (Bishkek: Tsentr Sotsial'nykh i Ekonomicheskikh Issledovanii, 1999), 31.

[23] *Zakon o Gosudarstvennom Iazyke Kirgizskoi SSR*, September 23, 1989.

[24] V. V. Vishnevskii, "Migratsiia Naseleniia Kirgizii: Prichiny I Sledstviia", *Res Publica*, November 3–9, 1998, 3.

[25] The term "titular" refers to the nationality after which each union republic of the Soviet federation was named. Aleksandr Iurasov, "Etnorossiiane v Kyrgyzstane: Novye Tendentsii I Perspectivy v Razvitii, *Informatsionno-Analiticheskaia Gazeta*, March 1998, 3.

[26] V. I. Ostapchuk, "Migratsionnaia I Demograficheskaia Situatsiia v Kirgizstane," in *Vneshniaia Migratsiia Russkoiazychnogo Naseleniia Kyrgyzstana: Problemy I Posledstviia* (Bishkek: Ilim, 2000), 36, 41.

[27] Artem Petrov, "Russkie Uezzhaiut," *Delo No.*, January 19, 2000, 2.

[28] Artem Petrov, "Nuzhny li Bol'shoi Rossii Russkie iz Malen'kogo Kirgizstana?", *Delo No.,* November 10, 1999, 8.

[29] Russian emigration from Central Asia is not a new phenomenon, but the continuation of a trend that began in the late 1970s.

[30] Askar Akaev, "Brat'ia na vse Vremena," in *Rossiiane v Kyrgyzstane, 1999*, ed. A. I. Ivanov (Bishkek: Literaturnyi Kyrgyzstan, 1999), 10.

[31] K. Isaev and G. Gorborukova, "Migratsiia: Problemy i Perspectivy," *Ekho Nauki* 2–3, 1997, 125.

[32] G. V. Kumskov, "Vozdeistvie Migratsii Russkoiazychnogo Naseleniia na Sotsial'no-Ekonomicheskuiu Sferu Kyrgyzstana, in *Vneshniaia Migratsiia Russkoiazychnogo Naselenii Kyrgyzstana: Problemy I Posledstviia* (Bishkek: Ilim, 2000), 87.

[33] Vishnevskii, "Migratsiia Naseleniia Kirgizii," 3.

[34] Author's interview with V. V. Vishnevskii, Bishkek, December 21, 1999.

[35] The Federal Migration Services of Russia is a Russian government agency with branches in five former Soviet republics: Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Tadjikistan, and Turkmenistan. Author's interview with Ostapchuk Vasilii Ivanovich, Bishkek, January 26, 2000.

[36] In 1989, Russians made up 34 percent of the population (905,515), whereas in 2000 they accounted for 30 percent (703,243); *Results of the 2000 Population and Housing Census in Latvia* (Riga: Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2002), 121. Due to a fairly consistent life expectancy rate, this decrease can be attributed primarily to emigration. The 1970–5 life expectancy at birth rate differs from the 1995–2000 life expectancy at birth rate by less than two years. See UN Development Program, *Human Development Report 2000*, 187.

[37] The data for 1992–4 are from *Demographic Statistics in the Baltic Countries* (Tallin, Riga, and Vilnius: Statistical Office of Estonia, Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, and Lithuanian Department of Statistics, 1996), 57; the 1995–9 data are from *Demographic Yearbook of Latvia* (Riga: Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2000), 159.

[38] Although Yulya's office was in a large office complex, many Russian firms are located in apartments to avoid visits from language inspectors, who are prohibited from visiting apartments because they are considered private property. Author's interview with Maris Birzgalis, director of the State Language Center, Riga, November 22, 2000.

[39] Pal Kolsto, *Political Construction Sites: Nation-Building in Russia and the Post-Soviet States* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000), 120.

[40] Graham Smith, "When Nations Challenge and Nations Rule: Estonia and Latvia as Ethnic Democracies," *International Politics*, no. 33 (March 1996): 37.

[41] Rasma Karklins, *Ethnopolitics and Transition to Democracy: The Collapse of the USSR and Latvia* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1994), 132.

[42] Richard Rose, *New Baltic Barometer IV: A Survey Study*, Studies in Public Policy 338 (Glasgow: University of Strathcylde, 2000), 5.

[43] Igor Zevelev, *Russia and Its New Diasporas* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2002), 126.

[44] Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), xxviii.

[45] Author's interview with Alfred Rubiks, Riga, October 6, 2000.

[46] Author's interview with Boris Katkov, Riga, October 5, 2000.

[47] Neil Melvin, *Russians Beyond Russia: The Politics of National Identity* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995), 42.

[48] Author's interview with Igor Pimenov, Riga, October 18, 2000.

[49] Nils Muiznieks, *Latvia's Changing System of Ethnic Stratification*, paper published in Latvian, and presented at the conference "Democracy and Ethnopolitics," Riga, March 9–11, 1994.

[50] Aadne Aasland argues that we should expect many Slavs in Estonia and Latvia to have good connections with business milieus in Russia which would only increase their business opportunities. See Aadne Aasland, "Citizenship Status and Social Exclusion," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 61.

[51] Aina Antane and Boris Tsilevich, "Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration in Latvia," in *Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration in Post-Soviet Societies: An Investigation of Latvia and Kazakhstan*, ed. Pal Kosto (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999), 150.