



Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the New Abroad (The Wilder House Series in Politics, History and Culture)

By David D. Laitin

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Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, nationality groups have claimed sovereignty in the new republics bearing their names. With the ascendance of these titular nationality groups, Russian speakers living in the post-Soviet republics face a radical crisis of identity. That crisis is at the heart of David D. Laitin's book.

Laitin portrays these Russian speakers as a "beached diaspora" since the populations did not cross international borders; the borders themselves receded. He asks what will become of these populations. Will they learn the languages of the republics in which they live and prepare their children for assimilation? Will they return to a homeland many have never seen? Or will they become loyal citizens of the new republics while maintaining a Russian identity? Through questions such as these and on the basis of ethnographic field research, discourse analysis, and mass surveys, Laitin analyzes trends in four post-Soviet republics: Estonia, Latvia, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine.

Laitin concludes that the "Russian-speaking population" is a new category of identity in the post-Soviet world. This conglomerate identity of those who share a language is analogous, Laitin suggests, to such designations as "Palestinian" in the Middle East and "Hispanic" in the United States. The development of this new identity has implications both for the success of the national projects in these states and for interethnic peace.

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Editorial Review

Review

"David Laitin's book is replete with relevant statistics and theoretical interpretations of an aspect of post-Soviet reality likely to affect politics in the region for decades to come."?Choice

"A remarkable synthesis of data and history, converted into powerful theoretical insight, this book is social science at its best. David Laitin . . . takes the reader deeper into the portentous, complex issue of Russians in the 'near abroad' than anyone has before. . . . He constructs a rich but uncluttered account of Russian speakers living in foreign lands. . . . The theory is spare, accessible, and genuinely powerful, illuminating the subject in highly original ways and suggesting outcomes, including disturbing ones, missed by more impressionistic studies."?Foreign Affairs

"This wonderful book . . . integrates disparate types of analysis that are rarely found together: broad gauged theoretical development, 'thick' ethnographic case studies, and advanced statistical techniques. Laitin's work, moreover, makes creative use of both rational choice and historical institutionalist models, despite their generally competing nature. In short, the book makes an important contribution to political science that should be of interest to a wide range of comparativists."?Cal Clark, Auburn University, Perspectives on Political Science. Fall, 1999.

"David Laitin has been responsible for some of the most innovative studies of the role of language in structuring ethnic identities and the conditions under which communities can 'shift' language use. . . . This is a fruit of detailed fieldwork. . . . From a rich empirical base, Laitin draws a number of interesting and provocative conclusions. . . . Identity in Formation offers important new contributions to the debate about post-Soviet states, nations, and identity formation."?International Affairs

"This very important book offers evidence on this topic and much else. It is a pathbreaking analysis of nationalism and identity, a masterpiece by a major scholar at the height of his powers."?John Hall, Canadian Journal of Political Science

"A book of remarkable theoretical scope and empirical richness, one which stands as a model of how social scientific inquiry ought to be conducted. . . . A landmark in scholarship on nationalism and on the former Soviet Union more specifically. The boldness of its assertions, its dazzling design and execution, and the wealth of stimulating ideas found within it make it a truly outstanding achievement."?Mark R. Beissinger, University of Wisconsin, American Journal of Sociology. July 1999.

"Laitin combines a career's worth of theoretical insight with the results of extensive, multiple-method research in four successor states of the USSR. The book will be at once stimulating, provocative, and 'must reading' both for students of nation-building and for students of post-Communism."?George Breslauer, University of California at Berkeley

"David Laitin sets a new standard for the comparative study of the post-Soviet states. The book employs a unique blend of methods?anthropological digging, survey research, and formal modeling?to reach clear and unsettling conclusions about national identity after Communism."?Timothy J. Colton, Director, Davis Center for Russian Studies, Harvard University

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