

The Baltic States

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Elections of national assemblies in Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia in early 1990 offered similarities, since all three Baltic states continued to be under Soviet occupation. (For historical background see Misiunas and Taagepera, 1983 and 1989.) All three nations remembered the destruction of their independence in 1940. All three had taken part in the elections to the Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow, March 1989, and in contrast to many parts of the Soviet Union, in the Baltic countries these were reasonably free and fair multi-candidate elections (see White, 1990 and Taagepera, 1990a). Thus elections with choice no longer were a complete novelty when the three countries elected new Supreme Councils. (The term *soviet*, which means 'council' in Russian, was never borrowed into the Baltic languages, as it has been into English.) The assembly sizes were reduced, from 280 and 350 members down to 105 and 201, which is more in line with the cube root law of assembly sizes (see Taagepera and Shugart, 1989, pp. 173–83). In all three countries pro-independence forces carried more than two-thirds of the seats. Once elected, the Lithuanian Supreme Council promptly replaced the 'Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic' with the pre-occupation title 'Republic of Lithuania' (11 March 1990), and Estonia (30 March) and Latvia (4 May) followed suit, using a more cautious wording about transition from illegal Soviet occupation to full independence.

But there were also considerable differences. The Lithuanian elections used the traditional Soviet rules (absolute majority in one-seat districts), but with an early second round. In Estonia two separate general elections took place: first for an Estonian Congress based on the legal continuation of the pre-occupation Republic of Estonia, and then for the Supreme Council of the Estonian SSR. The multi-seat electoral rules used—Limited Vote for the Congress and Single Transferable Vote for the Supreme Council—diverged completely from the standard Soviet practice. The Latvian Supreme Council elections completely followed the slow Soviet procedure, with multiple rounds. At the same time, the elections to a Latvian Congress, on the Estonian pattern, also took place.

These different approaches reflected differences in the demographic mix and political circumstances. The Lithuanians formed an overwhelming majority in their country's population, while recent Russian colonization had reduced Estonians and Latvians to only slim majorities in their ancestral lands (see Table 1). The presence of Russian 'civilian garrisons' of varying sizes imposed different tactics on the three Baltic nations, electoral tactics included.

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TABLE 1. Overview of Baltic Supreme Council Elections in February-April 1990

	Lithuania	Latvia	Estonia
Population (million), 1/89 ^a	3.67	2.68	1.73
Titular nationality (%)	79.6	51.8	61.2
Russian (%)	9.4	33.8	30.2
Other (%)	11.0	14.5	8.6
Seats distribution by nationality ^b			
Titular nationality (%)	87.8	70.1	76.2
Russian (%)	3.8	21.3	20.8
Other (%)	8.3	8.6	3.8
Date of first round	24 Feb	18 Mar	18 Mar
Date of second round	4-10 Mar	25 Mar, 1 Apr	None
Date of new-candidate elections	8 Apr	29 Apr	None
Electoral rule	Majority	Majority	STV
Average district magnitude	1	1	2.3
Cube root of population	154	139	117
Number of Supreme Council seats	141	201	105
Number of candidates nominated	522	595	474
Number of candidates on ballot	471	395	392
Number of unopposed candidates	8	53	0
Number of women candidates	26	?	24
Turnout (million), first round	?	1.60	0.91
Turnout (%)	over 75	81.2	78.2
Seats decided at first round (%)	63.8	84.6	100
Number of incumbents re-elected	under 22	15	12
Number of women elected	12	11	7
Popular Front/Sajudis seat share (%)	74	56	41

a. Anderson and Silver (1989)

b. Estimates; in Lithuania and Latvia a few seats were still undecided, and the nationality of some winners is ambiguous.

In all three states the titular nationalities won a disproportionately large number of seats in their respective Supreme Councils, thanks to better organization, favourable geographical distribution and electoral rules, and probably higher turnout, plus support by an appreciable fraction of the non-Baltic immigrants. As a result, a pro-independence majority of two-thirds, needed for constitutional changes, was reached in all three Supreme Councils. Basic comparative data on these elections are given in Table 1. The following discussion will concentrate on Lithuania and Estonia, on which I have more district-level data.

Lithuania

The Supreme Council of the Lithuanian SSR abolished the constitutional monopoly of the Communist Party in December 1989, and hence the Supreme Council elections on 24 February 1990 became the first multi-party elections to be held inside the borders claimed by the USSR. The standard Soviet electoral rule was used: absolute majority in one-seat districts. To win, a candidate needed 50 per cent of all valid votes, including those cast in opposition to all the candidates, and the voter

turnout had to reach 50 per cent. Only 90 of the 141 seats were filled in the first round. Another 43 were filled in run-offs (4 to 10 March) between the two top candidates among the original three or more. The remaining 8 seats required elections with new candidates (8 April), either because the first round turnout was below 50 per cent (3 cases) or because the first round had only two candidates and neither received 50 per cent positive votes (5 cases).

Nomination and registration of candidates was quite easy; 250 signatures sufficed, and there were few challenges or protests. A petition with 300,000 signatures protested against electoral participation by the Soviet occupation forces and demanded a referendum on this issue. The atmosphere during campaigning was calm and nonchalant (*New York Times*, 23 February 1990), and it continued so during elections and vote-counting. No notable irregularities were reported or claimed, except that the Moscow Patriarchate transferred the Russian Orthodox Bishop Antonii of Vilnius to Siberia, against his wishes, thus leaving his pro-Moscow opponent without competition. The most frequent question posed by voters to candidates involved Communist Party membership. Those who had belonged to it (or still did) frequently had to justify it.

In Lithuania the main polarization was between the anti-independence Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), supported by many Russian colonists and some of the local Poles, and the pro-independence groupings. Within the latter, the main competition was between the Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) and the Sajudis (which means 'Movement'). As a broad popular front, Sajudis did not consider itself a 'party' and hence felt free to co-endorse candidates with political parties. Except for the LCP, all parties were brand new. A number of independents also ran.

The LCP did not officially endorse any candidates, because it would have backfired, but party membership was reported on the candidate lists. In some districts up to four candidates ran under the LCP label. Many of them were effectively independents who belonged to the Communist Party from the times that this was the only political organization allowed. In a few districts, the LCP could have done marginally better if only one LCP candidate had been fielded—but this would assume full votes transfer to the single LCP candidate, a somewhat dubious assumption.

While the total number of candidates in districts ranged from 1 to 7 (average: 3.3), no grouping over-extended itself: parallel candidates were endorsed only in districts where it did not matter, either because the given grouping was certain to win (so that elections became an intra-grouping primary) or certain to lose. In seven districts the Sajudis-endorsed candidate was the only one, and they all won with comfortable margins (70 to 96% positive votes). The aforementioned transfer of Bishop Antonii left a CPSU candidate unopposed; a low turnout of 35 per cent voided his victory (Girnius, 1990a,b).

In general, Sajudis endorsed candidates quite sparingly (147, in 130 districts), and 98 of them won. The non-Communist parties did very well when their candidates ran under the Sajudis umbrella, but failed badly (with one exception for the Lithuanian Democratic Party) when competing with Sajudis-supported candidates. Thus the small-party endorsements seemed to make little difference, and the real competition involved just three groups: Sajudis, LCP, and CPSU. Even such a triangular competition materialized in only 25 districts. In 26 others, the CPSU faced either Sajudis alone (17 districts) or LCP alone (3) or a joint LCP/Sajudis candidate. The majority of districts (72) saw only the relatively friendly competition between

Sajudis and the LCP. In 18 districts only one major grouping was present, apart from independents: Sajudis (12), Sajudis/LCP alliance (5) or CPSU(1). In total, the Sajudis entered the contest in 130 of the 141 districts, the LCP in 110, and the CPSU only in 52.

The 'advantage ratio' (A) is the ratio of per cent seats to per cent votes; it reflects the efficiency of converting votes into seats, with A=1 indicating that a party is just breaking even (cf. Taagepera and Shugart, 1989, p. 68). The use of one-seat districts always tends to favour the largest party, and this was the case here: the Sajudis-endorsed candidates won 49 per cent of the first-round votes but ended up with 74 per cent of the seats, corresponding to an unusually large advantage ratio of 1.6. The CPSU, completely isolated, had a low advantage ratio of 0.5. It is noteworthy that the LCP did hardly better (A=0.6), except where it collaborated with Sajudis. The earlier observation that many LCP candidates were effectively independents does not explain this phenomenon, since open independents did slightly better (A=0.8) than the LCP members. It is ironical that the preservation of the Soviet-imposed highly majoritarian electoral rules helped to turn Communist defeat into *débâcle*.

The appreciable negative vote (7 per cent) opposed to all candidates is surprising. It occurred with similar strength in districts with full and limited ranges of choices, and hence it cannot be construed as a hidden vote for a grouping which failed to run candidates in the given district. Deviation from proportionality between seat and vote shares is 25 per cent (when all Sajudis-endorsed candidates are considered as a single bloc). Omitting the negative votes, the deviation becomes 21 per cent. Both figures are close to the average for countries using one-seat districts (Taagepera and Shugart, 1989, pp. 106–10).

Non-Lithuanian candidates were fielded chiefly by the CPSU. It claimed to speak for all minorities (20 per cent of the population) but received only 13 per cent of the vote. Apart from the dispersed Russian newcomers (9 per cent), Lithuania has an age-old Polish minority of 7 per cent, concentrated around Vilnius. The 16 non-Lithuanians who won seats in the first and second rounds included only 5 Russians but 8 Poles, plus a Jew and a Latvian.

Estonia

The elections for the Estonian Supreme Council took place on 18 March 1990, using the Single Transferable Vote (STV) rule in one- to five-seat districts. As in Ireland, Malta and Australia, the voters ranked the candidates, and transfers minimized the 'wasted votes'.

The number of seats was reduced from the previous 284 to 105. Each rural district, republic-level city and city district in Tallinn received 2 seats to begin with (48 in all); a further 53 seats was allocated to districts and cities on the basis of their population, using simple quota and largest remainders. The remaining 4 seats were filled by the Soviet army units stationed in Estonia and estimated at more than 100,000. Allocating those units special seats prevented the possibility of the soldiers' votes being thrown in at will, in selected districts, to tilt the outcome in favour of anti-independence candidates. (This had happened a year earlier, in the elections for the Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow.) It also highlighted the incongruity of an electoral participation by what most Estonians considered foreign military occupation forces.

The electoral rules resulted from an uneasy compromise. The Joint Council of

Work Collectives (JCWC) of the anti-independence wing of the Russian colonists wanted to keep the standard Soviet one-seat districts—more by habit than accurate perception of self-interest, since one-seat districts tend to penalize minorities. The Popular Front proposed simple quota and largest remainders, with about 3 seats per district. This implied the use of party or group lists, and the Communist leaders refused, because they knew they would do better individually than under the despised CPE label. They proposed Single Non-transferable Vote (as in Japan). The PFE electoral rules specialist, Peet Kask, strongly objected, because the SNTV can randomly distort the relationship between seats and votes, and the risks are especially high in a new democracy where the relative strengths of various groupings are unknown. As a compromise, Peet Kask then proposed the STV, which is effectively a non-list Proportional Representation (PR) system. The STV underwent a dress rehearsal in local elections in December 1989, and by March 1990 this relatively complex method presented no difficulties for the public or the vote counters.

However, the district magnitude, that crucial factor in determining the PR-ness, was left up to the district authorities to decide, and choices ranged from 1 to 5. The Russian-dominated north-east largely picked one-seat districts (and so did the military), reducing the STV to the Australian Alternative Vote. Elsewhere, 3-seat districts predominated. The CPE also pushed through an extremely restrictive local residence requirement for candidates, so as to block many nationally-known candidates living in Tallinn and boost the district CPE leaders with their high local name recognition. Candidates had to be at least 21, with at least 10 years residence in Estonia.

Nominations procedure was simple, and 536 were nominated, many by local citizens' initiative. (A minimum participation of 150 was required at the nomination meeting.) Only 474 candidates were registered, because of voluntary withdrawals, which continued and left 392 on the ballot (an average of 3.7 per seat contested). ENIP was prohibited from officially endorsing candidates, but could have nominated candidates through citizens' initiative; they desisted. No endorsements by any groupings appeared on the ballot, because the CPE continued the tactics used in the elections of 1989: hide the Communist Party membership of candidates during the campaign, and boast later about many winners being formally CP members. The total campaign donations per candidate were limited to 5,000 roubles.

The groupings were extremely fluid, with many CPE members on the verge of resigning, the CPE itself split into pro-Kremlin and pro-independence factions, the Popular Front on the point of spawning several parties (such as Social Democrats and Liberals), and many public figures nominated by several semi-competing groups—or only by citizens' initiative. Campaigning was, accordingly, rather tame, especially as compared with the current American mud-slinging tactics. *Rabva Hääli*, the main daily, regularly published candidates' statements without any apparent ideological selection. (It published the electoral law on 23 November 1989, the candidate list and group endorsements on 21 February 1990, and the list of winners on 23 March 1990.)

All permanent residents of Estonia, 18 and over, could vote. Separate ballots were available in Estonian (Latin characters) and Russian (Cyrillic). The balloting and vote counting went without any appreciable snags or protests, although it took five days, because of the STV procedure, before results could be published. The largest grouping (PFE) probably would have garnered a larger share of seats, had one-seat

districts been used. However, their advantage would not have been as dramatic as that of Sajudis in Lithuania. The political landscape in Estonia was inherently more fluid.

Counting multiply endorsed candidates at half weight, the CPE and its locals formally endorsed only 10.5 candidates—and 3.5 won. 'Free Estonia', a hastily organized cover group for liberal Communists, endorsed 33, and 6.5 won. The corresponding figures were 61 and 28 for the PFE, 35.5 and 8.5 for the slightly more radical Estonian Union of Work Collectives, and 15 and 3 for the Greens. The anti-independence JCWC of the Russian colonists endorsed 27 candidates, out of whom 12 won. The 5 candidates of the competing Democratic Party of the moderate Russians all lost, despite promising pre-election opinion polls. The Lithuanian declaration on independence, coming a week before the Estonian (and Latvian) elections, may have scared many hesitant colonists into the arms of the reactionaries. Independent candidates and minor Estonian groupings accounted for so many candidates (and winners) that counting by formal endorsements is of limited value.¹

The main cleavage line ran between the overwhelmingly pro-independence Estonians (61 per cent of the population) and the partly anti-independence Russian colonists (30 per cent). Of the Supreme Council candidates, 346 (73 per cent) were Estonian, and among the winners, about 80 (76 per cent) were. The over-representation of the native population resulted from several factors: a slight rural advantage in seats apportionment; the Estonians' greater interest in the political fate of the country (reflected in a larger number of candidates and probably also a higher turnout); the geographical dispersal of the Russians; and the support for Estonian candidates by many non-Estonians. In the Kohtla-Järve mining town, two seats in the 5-seat district went to Estonians (one of them a member of the Estonian Congress and another a Popular Front supporter), although the town is 80 per cent non-Estonian. (In public opinion polls, the non-Estonian support for independence went up from 20 per cent in early 1990 to 35 per cent by May.)

As the independents chose sides, the following blocks emerged in the Supreme Council. The PFE could count on 41 to 45 deputies; the Communist 'Free Estonia' and its rural allies had 25 to 29, and the anti-independence JCWC and its military allies had 26 or 27 (Kannik, 1990; Kionka, 1990b). This left a floating remainder of some 10 deputies, some of them more radical than PFE.

Thus the Popular Front fell short of the majority, but its leader Edgar Savisaar became Prime Minister and formed a cabinet that included members of various groupings. The crucial declaration on resumption of Estonian independence (30 March 1990) was passed with 73 votes for, 8 opposed, 3 neutral, and 29 (mainly Russians) absent (Laulik, 1990). This result indicated co-operation between the Popular Front and the 'Free Estonia' Communists, analogous to that of Sajudis and the LCP in Lithuania.

Co-operation with the Estonian Congress was helped by the fact that at least 72 Congress members also ran for the Supreme Council, and 44 won. Of the 11-person leadership of the Congress, three had seats in the Supreme Council, including Prime Minister Savisaar. The PFE had underestimated the importance of the Estonian Congress and ran too few candidates. ENIP and EHS had done the same regarding the Supreme Council, expecting it to fade away. As a result, ENIP and EHS dominated in the Congress and PFE in the Supreme Council. In this unintentional two-chamber setup the Congress looked, in June 1990, like a Chamber of Lords.

Latvia

The first round of the Latvian Supreme Council elections took place simultaneously with the Estonian, on 18 March 1990. However, the standard Soviet rules were used: majority in one-seat districts. Thus only 170 seats (out of 201) were filled in the first round. A second round (25 March or 1 April) between two front-runners filled a further 14. In 17 remaining cases, either the turnout was below 50 per cent or there were only one or two candidates to begin with and no one reached 50 per cent (because of negative votes). In those cases completely new candidates had to be found for new elections on 29 April. Thus the Supreme Council could meet only on 3 May, a month after its Estonian counterpart.

About 250 of the 395 candidates on the ballot were Communist Party members (*Awakening/Atmoda*, 27 March 1990, p. 4). In contrast to Estonia, where all withdrawals seemed to be voluntary, in Latvia several refusals to register candidates ended up in courts. Because of irregularities, four seats lacked clearance up to 10 May, and one still remained vacant in late May. The number of unopposed candidates (53) was markedly larger than in Lithuania (8), none in Estonia.

The pro-independence groupings won a clear victory. Analysis of a district-level list of winners and self-declared affiliations (*News*, American Latvian Association, 7 June 1990) yields the following picture. Candidates claiming membership in the Popular Front of Latvia won 111 seats, and close allies brought the total to 131 (out of 200 seats filled). In this bloc, 55 listed or co-listed a Communist Party affiliation; 19 listed or co-listed the Latvian National Independence Movement, 18 the Agrarian Union, 6 the Green Party and/or the Environmental Protection Club, and 5 the Social Democratic Workers Party.

In contrast to ENIP in Estonia, its Latvian counterpart, the Latvian National Independence Movement, did participate in the Supreme Council elections, and most often its winning candidates co-listed the Popular Front. The relations between the radical and the pragmatic pro-independence groupings were more harmonious in Latvia (and Lithuania) than in Estonia.

Only 13 winners in the Latvian elections listed the pro-Moscow International Front, but allies running under CPSU or other labels added up to an anti-independence bloc of some 55, all but one members of CPSU. That left about 15 uncommitted members. Apart from the Communists, the Agrarian Union was the only organization split between the two blocs; 18 went with the pro-independence bloc, while 4 remained outside. In the crucial votes on independence a two-thirds majority (134 votes) was needed—and was achieved.

The use of the Soviet electoral rule (rather than some PR rule) must have helped the pro-independence candidates. However, since post-occupation immigration has reduced the Latvian majority to a slim 52 per cent of the country's population, the success of the Popular Front and its allies could not be explained simply by the majority-building nature of the Soviet electoral rule. They visibly had succeeded in building bridges to the non-Balts to a much larger extent than was the case in Estonia or Lithuania. Of the 197 seats settled by early May, 138 went to Latvians, 42 to Russians, and 8 to Ukrainians; there were also 3 Jews (including Mavriks Vulfsons, a top Popular Front leader), 2 Belorussians, and one Pole, Liv, Greek and German (*Cina*, 8 May 1990). However, the ethnic and political lines did not coincide to the extent they did in Lithuania and Estonia. Quite a few pro-independence representatives had Slavic names, and close to 10 anti-independence representatives had Latvian names.

Conclusions

The Baltic elections in early 1990 represented a clean break with the previous choiceless elections. These were fair elections. As in Central East Europe (and in contrast to Romania and Bulgaria) Communists lost badly, despite their valiant and quite credible efforts to jump on the reform bandwagon. The tensions between the Balts and the recent Russian colonists supplied fertile grounds for violence and charges of election rigging, yet none materialized; both sides avoided going over the brink and showed some respect for democratic procedure. Like most of Central East Europe, Latvia and Lithuania maintained the Soviet-type election rules, with their slowness and deadlock potential (due to negative votes), while Estonia adopted STV rules patterned on Ireland and Australia. Supreme Council sizes were reduced in all three countries.

In Estonia and Latvia, two separate representative bodies arose: a Supreme Council elected by all permanent residents, and a Congress elected by citizens of the pre-occupation republics. Lacking administrative power, the Congresses were reduced in practice to an advisory role. Few women were among the candidates and hence among the winners (although the average success rate tended to be slightly higher for women candidates). Women's share was lowest in the Latvian Supreme Council (5.5%) and highest in the Estonian Congress (9.3%).

The party system in all three countries remained in a flux. The Communists (under old or new labels) were fading, and the new popular fronts that dominated the show considered themselves temporary movements. The traditional party labels (such as Social Democrats) and new ones (such as Greens) attracted few voters. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were highly likely to restore their full independence, and the next elections will probably present a new landscape of parties and (especially in Latvia and Lithuania) new electoral rules.

Note

1. This analysis is based on official lists of candidates and winners in *Rabva Hääli*, 21 February and 23 March 1990. The list shows the winners in each district in the order of seat allocation (on the basis of first-preference votes and later re-allocations), but no vote figures. Per cent figures for all candidates could be located only for the eight districts in Tallinn (a total of 25 seats), in *Obtuleht*, 21 March 1990. Assuming equal numbers of voters per seat, the following per cent votes and seats emerge:

Popular Front of Estonia	31.4	34
Estonian Union of Work Collectives	5.8	10
Greens	0.8	4
'Free Estonia' Communists	12.2	6
Communist Party of Estonia	4.8	6
Other Estonian candidates	6.4	0
Democratic Party (Russian liberals)	1.6	0
JWC (anti-independence)	30.3	40
Other non-Estonians	7.1	0

Obviously, personalities counted more heavily in voters' minds than formal endorsements, at least in the case of minor groupings. The deviation from proportionality is 21 per cent, which is very high compared with other countries that use STV; its main cause is many independents trying their luck and failing. Since the city population is about 50 per cent non-Estonian, clearly about one-fifth of them must have voted for Estonian candidates, or

else the abstention rate was much higher for non-Estonians. Low turnout may be the main factor, since the few Russian candidates endorsed by the PFE, Free Estonia and the Estonian Union of Work Collectives did very poorly (2.4 per cent of all votes), and so did the Democratic Party of liberal Russians.

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