

BOOK REVIEWS

**The Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics: Secession, Integration, and the Homeland**, by Anna Batta, Routledge, 2022, 234 pp., \$128 (hardback), ISBN 9781032070957.

This is an ambitious book. It develops a theory of why the same ethnic minority is treated better in some countries than others. It analyzes 11 cases of countries that seceded while especially going in depth in five of them: Ukraine, Georgia, Estonia, Latvia, and Kazakhstan. The book utilizes information from over 100 interviews with government officials, editors of newspapers, academics, and party officials of Russian ethnic parties conducted by the author from 2013–19. The main contribution that this book brings to the literature is its key conceptual finding – that discrimination against the minority group is more likely if it is perceived that the given minority represents a *moderate* threat to the state.

The first two chapters introduce the authors' framework for this book. Batta opens it with a puzzle focusing on the surprising Russian reaction regarding the treatment of Russophones in Ukraine and Kazakhstan: even though the Russian-speakers were relatively more integrated in Ukraine, Russia intervened. Meanwhile, even though discrimination against the Russian-speakers has increased in Kazakhstan over time, there has been no Russian intervention. This timely and vivid example helps Batta to set the scene for her main argument later on – that the effect of threat on ethnic discrimination and marginalization is not linear – and that discrimination against ethnic minorities is the greatest when they pose a moderate threat to the state and when the kin state is moderately threatening (7). The author argues that in extreme situations when different domestic and international threats are at their highest, governments are likely to be more accommodating to their minorities. More broadly, this book seeks to assess how states treat minority populations after secession and why we see significant differences in how such minorities are treated across countries and time periods (7).

In the second chapter, the book develops an interesting conceptual framework that can be used to analyze treatment of minorities by the government after a secession. It is grounded in social science literature and should be applicable to contexts outside of the post-Soviet sphere as well: for example, when analyzing developments in areas with secessionist movements such as Kashmir or Kurdistan (17). The author identifies several domestic and international variables that aim to explain how a state would treat its minorities. Essential in this framework is the perception of the level of threat that the government sees the given minority (as well as its external kin state) as representing. The perception of threat is measured through many different factors including several different variables linked to the perceived threat of secessionism and the kin state's (in this case, Russia's) willingness to intervene (57–58). These factors include perceived level of domestic threat that the minority represents, threat of further succession, and international threats. Hypotheses are stated under each of these factors, and they later receive mixed support through the qualitative case studies in the empirical part of the book. The author touches on the role of the external actors (such as the European Union) in influencing decision-making a minority treatment, yet the book does not articulate a hypothesis regarding the role of such external actors. The empirical chapters that follow (3–5) are structured around the factors identified in the theoretical part. While they are rich in substance, at times they could offer just a little bit more analysis as opposed to descriptive material.

Overall, there is much to like about this book. It utilizes a cross-regional approach, which is underutilized when studying the developments in the post-Soviet space. It articulates a clear research framework and a new theoretical/conceptual insight (discrimination is more likely if


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the given minority is seen as representing a moderate threat) that will likely be cited widely in scholarly works for years to come. The five in-depth case studies are thorough and interesting.

At the same time, this book also raises some questions. Why is the role of external actors brought up in the theoretical chapter yet no hypotheses derived about it? Later in the case studies of Estonia and Latvia, the role of external actors such as the European Union is an important factor that has influenced the countries' decision-making towards their Russian minorities. Furthermore, could it be that the key variable influencing governmental decision-making towards their Russian minorities is not so much the perceived threat that such minorities may represent but more so the perceived likelihood that harsher measures towards the Russophones could lead to a Russian intervention? The way it is conceptualized and operationalized, the very concept of "threat perception" includes numerous variables – and it is not clear how much weight each of them holds. As a result, in the qualitative empirical part of the study it can sometimes be questioned whether the perceived threat level could be assigned differently. For example, after assessing the numerous variables that fall under threat perception, the author states that Russian minorities have historically represented only a moderate threat to Latvia and Estonia. However, as in both of these countries there has been a significant concentration of Russian speakers in the Eastern regions, why is this threat assessed just as moderate? The threat perception section as a whole could benefit from engaging more with additional literatures on threat perception in international relations. Finally, while it is impressive to learn that this book draws on interviews with more than 100 individuals, it would be helpful to see more information about these interviews – for example, are these interviews roughly equally distributed over all 11 countries?

Overall, this book is a welcome addition to the scholarship on minority integration, ethnic politics and the politics of the Former Soviet Republics. Those with interest in Ukraine, Georgia, Estonia, Latvia and Kazakhstan will likely be interested in reading the detailed cases studies on these countries. The theoretical and conceptual insights regarding the dynamics of minority integration and exclusion will be of interest to keen observers of conflict situations and secessionist movements in other regions.

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**Language and Nationality: Social Inferences, Cultural Differences, and Linguistic Misconceptions**, by Pietro Bortone, London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022, 272 pp., \$130 (hardback), ISBN 9781350071636, \$40 (paperback), ISBN 9781350071643.

This informative and well-written book has a somewhat misleading title as it in fact covers a much broader topic than the link between language and nationality, one that could be more appropriately described as the relationship between language and group identity. Coming from a linguist, the examination prioritizes the language part, namely linguistic features and processes rather than social factors and institutional mechanisms. Phenomenally erudite and fluent in many languages, the author entertains the readers with little-known facts about similarities and dissimilarities of various languages from different parts of the globe, their historical evolution, and widespread perceptions thereof among scholars and the general public. In the process, he vividly demonstrates how the language people use is almost always perceived as a marker of their belonging to certain social categories and thus they are responded to in accordance with their interlocutors' views of those categories. Nationality is but one of these categories; others include gender, age, class, occupation, place of origin, and ethnic group.