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0521806704 - Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State

Mark R. Beissinger

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Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State

This study examines the process by which the seemingly impossible in 1987 – the disintegration of the Soviet Union – became the seemingly inevitable by 1991, providing an original interpretation not only of the Soviet collapse, but also of the phenomenon of nationalism more generally. Probing the role of nationalist action as both cause and effect, Beissinger utilizes extensive event data and detailed case studies from across the USSR during its final years to elicit the shifting relationship between pre-existing structural conditions, institutional constraints, and event-generated influences in the massive nationalist explosions that brought about the collapse of the Soviet Union. As Beissinger demonstrates, the “tidal” context of nationalism – that is, the transnational influence of one nationalism upon another – is critical to an explanation of the success and failure of particular nationalisms, the ability of governments to repress nationalist challenges, why some nationalisms turn violent, and how a mounting crescendo of events can potentially overwhelm states, periodically evoking large-scale structural change in the character of the state system.

Mark R. Beissinger is Professor of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison and former director of its Center for Russia, East Europe, and Central Asia. He is author of the book *Scientific Management, Socialist Discipline, and Soviet Power* (1988) and numerous articles and book chapters, as well as co-editor of the books *The Nationalities Factor in Soviet Politics and Society* (1990) and *Beyond State Crisis? Postcolonial Africa and Post-Soviet Eurasia Compared* (2002).

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For Jonathan and Rebecca

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*Nationalist Mobilization and
the Collapse of the Soviet State*

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University of Wisconsin, Madison



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Acknowledgments

This project began in 1988 as the Soviet Union was first enveloped by large-scale protest; it concluded thirteen years later in a world largely unimagined at its inception. Indeed, in the course of this investigation what began as a comparative study of protest among multiple nationalities within a single country ended up as a cross-national study of nationalist mobilization within fifteen countries (or more, depending on who does the counting). Not only did the object of research transform, but my approach to the subject necessarily altered as well. I learned a tremendous amount throughout this project – not only from the object of my study, but also from the many colleagues who graciously shared their ideas and expertise with me. I have no excuse for the prolonged production other than the empirical and theoretical aspirations contained herein.

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