

Reaching Across the Border: Internationalizing Citizenship as Domestic Strategy

Hadas Aron and Emily Holland

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Illiberal populist regimes in the post-Soviet region are increasingly popular because they provide an exclusive welfare system while limiting liberal rights, repressing opposition and contributing to clientelism. How do these leaders manage to maintain popular support? We argue they use a variety of nationalist strategies, including distributing passports to citizens of kin states, which shores up support for their regimes while marginalizing a fledgling liberal opposition. Using the cases of Russia and Hungary, we find that these strategies are intended to achieve a domestic rather than international goal. Moreover, analyzing the strategic choices of leaders, we find that in periods of crisis, they select more aggressive nationalist policies.

I. Introduction

In August 2008, as President George Bush and Vladimir Putin attended the Beijing Olympics together, news of cross-border violence between Georgia and Russia emerged. Russia sent troops and tanks to drive out Georgian forces that had made incursions into the Russian backed breakaway region of South Ossetia. During the five days of fighting Russian forces temporarily occupied Georgian territory beyond the disputed region and left nearly 200,000 people displaced. In the world press, the war contributed to Putin's portrayal as a warmonger seeking to increase Russia's sphere of influence and return the country to its former Soviet glory. While the causes of the war are still debatable, we suggest that Russia's long-standing policy of distributing Russian passports to Georgian citizens contributed greatly to the eruption of the conflict.

We argue that nationalist policies such as passport distribution to citizens of kin states are aimed at framing the regime as the protector of the nation while marginalizing liberal opposition. Viewing the War in Georgia as an expansionist war instigated by an aspirational empire overlooks the variety of policies pursued by Putin to frame his regime to a domestic audience since the early 2000s. The war therefore, should be viewed as an outcome of a nationalist passport distribution policy rather than a bellicose grand strategy. In the post-Soviet sphere, Putin is not alone in pursuing nationalist policies. Many populist leaders seek to define their domestic regime through nationalism, and to do so they use of variety of policies, some more aggressive than others. One such policy is distributing passports to co-ethnics of former citizens in kin states¹ a policy used by a variety of states in the former Soviet Union, including Hungary, Romania and of course Russia.

The attempt to define a nationalist master frame characterizes a growing number of regimes in the region. These regimes often feature strong leaders, a populist set of economic

policies, cooperation with like regimes on a variety of issues, and nationalist ideology. Like Russia, these states are often viewed as a regional aggressor, power seeking at best and expansionist at worst. We argue that the source of this aggression is the outcome of policies intended to legitimize this type of regime. To justify the curtailing of liberal rights and a high level of corruption, non-liberal populist leaders use a variety of nationalist policies including passport issuing. Our paper contributes to the literature on the aggressive tendencies of non-liberal regimes and the mechanisms that sustain them.² Unlike during the Soviet period, these regimes rely more on popular support than on coercion to stay in power. At least part of this popular support results from the strategies we discuss and evaluate here. In addition, we touch upon citizenship issues that are becoming increasingly crucial in a time of growing anxiety over migration and citizenship in Europe.³ The policy we describe threatens to increase tensions around borders and ethnic conflict. This paper will introduce passport issuing and position it within a larger context of framing the national ethos. We then explore the costs and benefits of using this strategy vis-à-vis alternative nationalist strategies. We evaluate our theory against alternative explanations and present two contemporary cases where the passport-issuing strategy was employed: Russia and Hungary. The advantage of choosing these cases results from their obvious differences⁴: while Russia is a major power that contributes to the creation of the international environment, Hungary is a small state that is entirely subject to this environment. Further, Hungary is a democracy and a member of the European Union and thus is restricted in its strategic choices. Russia is a multiethnic federation where citizenship is not directly based on ethnicity. Hungary on the other hand is ethnically homogenous, although of course the political borders do not match the boundaries of the nation, as many ethnic Hungarians reside outside of Hungary. Despite

these differences, both countries selected passport distribution policies and other similar nationalist strategies.

II. Passport Issuing Policies

Passport issuing is a policy whereby a state issues passports to citizens of another sovereign state, based on their ethnicity or their former national citizenship. This is distinct from the common policy of issuing national passports on an individual basis to co-ethnics and their descendants as is common in states like Germany and Ireland.⁵ This policy is issued over a territory rather than individually. This is often perceived by kin states as an aggressive violation of sovereignty, as the expanding state interferes with and mobilizes an entire population of another country.

A passport issuing policy can range from the naturalization of an entire population to the facilitation of passport issuing to populations who were previously not considered citizens of the issuing homeland. An example for the first variation is Russia's issuance of passports to Georgian Abkhazians. On the other end of the spectrum, a state can change its citizenship laws such that co-ethnic residents of a specific region in a neighboring country can now apply for homeland national passports. This was the case in Hungary, which changed its citizenship laws in 2010 to include co-ethnics in the regions of pre-1920 Hungary including regions Romania, Slovakia, Serbia and Ukraine. The law did not conclude with passport issuing, but also extended voting rights to co-ethnics Hungarian elections.⁶

III. Theory

Why do states employ potentially volatile nationalist strategies such as passport issuing? We argue that political elites use these strategies to define the national discourse in

terms of ethnic nationalism and create a master frame that constrains other ideas and movements in society. In this context, liberal oppositions struggle to offer an alternative that would be both legitimate and popular because liberal ideas are marginalized or even removed from the master frame. Passport issuing is one of many policies achieve these goals. We find that the policy is intended for domestic audiences, rather than for populations in kin states or the international community. Second, this is a part of a variety of policies taken by leaders to shore up their regimes, these policies form their sustaining logic. Our other two findings address the choice of specific nationalist policies. At times of challenge to the regime leaders prefer more aggressive nationalist policies that often include violence or the potential for violence. During “normal” politics, leaders choose softer policies that do not directly include violence, but still unite the community around the nationalist ethos. The softest of these nationalist policies are symbolic and include national monuments, school curriculum changes and so on, as will be discussed in the following sections.

Not all incumbents can successfully use a passport issuing strategy. Some incumbents are more likely to be identified with a chauvinist nationalist narrative because it aligns with their world-view and politics. Historically, the European right wing is identified more strongly with nationalist symbols like the flag and national anthem.⁷ In many former Soviet states, liberal narratives failed to take root during short periods of independence. In the interwar years most countries in the region were only briefly democratic before transitioning to either militant autocracies or communist regimes. This left a legacy of conservative tendencies or general suspicion towards left-wing ideas.⁸ Not only is the right more commonly identified with national symbols, but oftentimes the left can be portrayed as serving international interests or foreign to the nation. This is connected to particular historical circumstances in both eastern and western Europe. In the East, the post-Soviet left

is linked to the former communist regime. In many cases, the transition to democracy did not bring a full purge of both the rank and file bureaucracy and the political leadership.⁹ This link is often used in derogatory terms by right wing actors. Post-1989, application of liberal economic policies resulted in mixed outcomes and a commitment to liberal ideas was never fully embraced.¹⁰

Contrary to Western Europe, the left in Eastern Europe is generally associated with the European project and thus is often blamed for dissatisfaction with processes of globalization.¹¹ As the left is portrayed as cosmopolitan, right wing parties often construct a narrative in which the left has abandoned the national population in favor of international interests such as bankers, international organizations and foreign superpowers.¹² In the region, these cosmopolitan narratives have long anti-Semitic roots, and are still today connected to “The Jewish Question.”¹³ These narratives can easily lead to accusations of treason and treachery. Right wing economic conservatives certainly align with international forces as well, however, in many countries the right is economically international but emphasizes national exclusion in the social sphere, whereas the left is identified with global social values such as human rights, environmental causes and so on. In addition, the far right is not necessarily positioned on the right economically, but is rather protectionist and opposes European integration.¹⁴

In many cases, liberal elites are less likely to engage with the larger population on a grassroots level, making that population more vulnerable to the nationalist appeal. Russian liberals are often associated with the communist regime, linked to the failed liberal project of the 1990s and their influence travels little beyond the urban elite of Moscow and St. Petersburg.¹⁵ Similarly, the Hungarian liberal elite is associated with communist regime, linked to the cosmopolitan European project and its influence travels little beyond

Budapest.¹⁶ Where these associations are already present, the right will be more likely to use a nationalist strategy that reinforces these existing identities. Leaders who have already used this strategy will be tempted to adopt it again when threatened.

The presence of an active nationalist leadership within the community aligned with the homeland is an important pre-condition for a successful passport-issuing policy. However, the purpose of the policy is to target a domestic liberal opposition within the homeland and to define the identity of the incumbent vis-à-vis their opposition. The use of this discourse positions the incumbent as the central representative of the nation, and forces the opposition to operate within this framework.

Naturally, not every territorial dispute, even one framed in a national context, leads to a passport issuing policy. A key factor is the receptivity of the policy by citizens across the border. While nationalism is a strong tool of mobilization, citizens of the kin state may be considering different interests than the homeland. One example of this is ethnic Russians in Estonia, a full member state of the European Union. Russian Estonians have far more to lose by aligning with Mother Russia than do Russian Ukrainians. Estonia is a far stronger state than Ukraine, and the economic conditions of the Russian population in Estonia do not justify a radical detachment from the state.¹⁷ If the co-ethnic population has strong competing interests it will not encourage or respond to imperialist policies issued by the homeland. At first glance, it may seem as if the homeland acts independently of the co-ethnics, however, the homeland does want its policies to be conceived as legitimate, at least domestically. The domestic population may be influenced by the perceptions of the policies by their co-ethnics across the border. Further, because the homeland is already facing the possibility of resistance from the kin state and international community, it does not want to risk further resistance from the co-ethnic population. Hungarian ethnics in Transylvania,

Romania are considered by homeland Hungarians as a nationalist population seeking autonomy from Romania. However, Rogers Brubaker shows that most Hungarian Transylvanians are indifferent to the national cause.¹⁸ They are perceived as nationalist due to the presence of an active leadership promoting the nationalist cause on their behalf within Hungary, Romania and other diaspora.

Several other theories could be used to explain the choice of nationalist policies in general and passport issuing in particular. Popular media and international relations scholars focus on the imperialist aspect, arguing that states seize the opportunity to expand based on international conditions.¹⁹ When states sense that they will not face a large international or regional backlash by fomenting international conflict, we are more likely to observe the imperialist strategy. Without major international resistance, it is in the state's interest to maximize its power by seizing every opportunity to expand. This is especially true in the context of a larger power struggle, for example an east-west divide.²⁰ Not only is the opportunity available for the taking, but also the potential gains are greater. Major powers can increase their relative power vis-à-vis other rival states, while smaller states can benefit by playing off the larger power struggle to extract benefits from both sides.²¹ This manifested itself during the annexation of Crimea in 2014, where Russia seized an opportunity to expropriate territory populated by ethnic Russians while both the European Union and United States seemed to be taking a hands-off approach to the Ukrainian crisis.²²

While international conditions are a major consideration for states employing the imperialist strategy, they do not explain the timing of these events or the distinct conditions under which they emerge. The nature of international relationships tends to persist for distinct periods (The Cold War; the Reagan administration), spread out over decades or administrations. The cases we discuss below demonstrate that imperialist strategies do not

explain the timing of passport issuing policies or the choice of that specific policy over other nationalist strategies.

Another often cited explanation focuses on ethnic tensions in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, attributing nationalist policies to ethnic diversity within states and across borders and the long-simmering ethnic tensions. While our theory does address the role of long-standing ethnic identities, we side with prominent social science literature that argues that ethnic conflict is better understood in terms of interest.²³ Rally around the flag theory claims that a focus on international conflict ignites national fervor in the homeland that can serve as a distraction for domestic problems at home²⁴, namely economic problems. According to this logic, leaders facing dissatisfaction from the public over their policy outcomes will choose to focus the agenda on an alternative issue. Nationalism is a convenient option because it mobilizes the public around the state, and thus around the incumbent rather than the opposition. Further, in contrast to economic reform, which is a long and costly process, nationalism can provide tangible immediate results without changing the regime's privilege structure.²⁵

These insights are important for understanding why states choose nationalist policies, however, they are not comprehensive in that they do not specify the conditions under which states will use them or why states would specifically choose a passport issuing policy. The policies that we describe in this paper redefine the discursive rules of the game within the domestic political system, thus they go beyond distracting from unpleasant issues and instead define the acceptable and unacceptable tools of mobilization within the polity. Our theory attempts to delve deeper into the specific conditions under which states can employ this strategy to legitimize and shore up their rule. In fact, we demonstrate that

nationalist policies are used in times of economic growth as well as crisis, however the choice does vary according to economic conditions and other challenges to the regime.

Spectrum of Nationalist Policies

The use of nationalist policies is the grand domestic strategy of populist illiberal regimes. They routinely employ a variety of these policies, and not just in response to crisis. In this section we conceptualize the spectrum of these policies and theorize on the strategic payoff of choosing one policy over another. First, we argue that in times of challenge leaders are more likely to choose more aggressive nationalist policies whereas during stable periods leaders choose ongoing “softer” policies (See Table 1 below). Aggressive policies serve as an immediate distraction from economic performance, corruption or other scandals with which the regime is faced. They have the benefit of taking over the public discourse swiftly and completely. Facing severe economic crisis in 2014, Russia’s action in Ukraine monopolized domestic and international headlines and became the only topic of debate. During this sort of national crisis, liberals who oppose the regime on any grounds immediately appear as traitors, all criticism is categorized as treason. Similarly, in response to mass street protests against government policies in 2014 in Hungary, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban chose to take strong, controversial actions against migrants passing through Hungary’s borders including inciting hatred.

The difference between Russian and Hungarian actions when facing a challenge leads us to our next point. We distinguish between the strategic choices of major powers and small states: where major powers have in their arsenal the most extreme nationalist policies including the instigation of war, small states would usually limit themselves to non-violent strategies.²⁶ While Hungary’s anti-migrant policies were severe and provoked broad

international criticism, they did not go as far as annexation of another country's territory. Consequently, Russia faced sanctions and isolation whereas Hungary was merely criticized. As a democracy and member of the European Union, Hungary's strategic choices are restricted. Domestically it can and has employed most of the Non-Violent nationalist policies we describe below, however when it comes to actually reaching beyond its borders, it is limited in its ability to interfere with the sovereignty of other states, in particular other EU members, as most of its neighbors are. Russia on the other hand, has no such restrictions, but must face the costs associated with its actions.

Table 1: Spectrum of Nationalist Policies

TYPE	NAME	COST	BENEFIT
Violent	Armed Conflict	Destruction, economic chaos, international sanctions	Very effective, might stimulate the national economy
Jingoist Foreign Policy	Friend vs. Foe	International criticism (more for smaller states), material costs, potential loss of allies, destabilization of international system for powerful states	Effective
	Joining International Campaigns	Large loss of solidarity between groups in society, potential secessionist conflicts, destabilization of the international order	Potential solidarity within groups in society and with groups in neighboring states
Non-Violent	Intimidation Campaign	Can lead to sub-state violence, leaders can lose control over the discourse, damages solidarity, international	Effective, potential political gains for the ruling group

		criticism	
	Citizenship Laws	Potential loss of workforce and skills to economic market, could damage national unity and coherence, loss of solidarity, international criticism	Potential solidarity within an ethnic group, effective, economically and politically beneficial to the ruling group in society
	Passport Policy	Border dispute, Costs of citizen intake, Potential loss of allies, international criticism	Effective, can national cohesion, can add new voters to support the ruling group, potential creation of allies in neighboring states
	Language Policy	Potential loss of workforce and skills to economic market, could damage national unity and coherence, loss of solidarity, international criticism	Potential solidarity within an ethnic group, effective, economically and politically beneficial to the ruling group in society
	Border Policy	Domestically controversial, high visibility, high material costs international criticism	Effective, can increase national cohesion, protects from costs of additional citizens
Symbolic Acts	Days of remembrance, Parades, Changes in Curriculum, Monuments	Potential loss of solidarity, alienation of groups in society	Reinforces leaders intentions

Table 1 summarizes the costs and benefits of each nationalist policy. As noted above, violent policies have the benefit of entirely monopolizing the political discourse. This takeover may last beyond the duration of the conflict itself and can dominate the political

discourse for years to come. Serbia is a notable example of this phenomenon, even years after the conflict in the Balkans, the political frame remains centered around an ethnic discourse leaving little space for liberal voices.²⁷ While effective, of course this is also the most costly nationalist strategy with repercussions ranging from high death tolls, destruction of infrastructure, devastation to the national economy and lasting damage to international relations including isolation and sanctions.

Jingoist foreign policy implies increased militarization, aggressive displays on the border including military exercises and the stationing of missiles. To qualify as nationalist, these moves must be accompanied by discourse that frames the policies as part of protection of the nation against its enemies abroad and at home. In Russia there are many examples of such behavior, including military flights over Scandinavian airspace and deploying submarines and helicopters to chase after research vessels in international waters.²⁸ Jingoist foreign policy also includes support for international causes that align with the national interest such as the official recognition of breakaway regions. As we note above, jingoist foreign policy does not automatically result in armed conflict however, this policy can have high costs. One potential cost is increased spending on defense that can divert funds from other budgetary purposes. Moreover, a jingoist foreign policy leads to international criticism and a potential loss of allies. For small countries such as Hungary that heavily depend on EU funds and economic relations with other countries, damaged relations and potential sanctions could have devastating consequences for the economy. For powerful states like Russia, this strategy can destabilize the entire international system.

Intimidation campaigns are directed toward a minority group while uniting the majority group around a shared cause. They risk the collapse of social solidarity. In many Central European countries the discourse against the Roma population has been increasingly

derogatory and divisive. This has helped parties gain votes at the polls but has also contributed to increased violence and friction between populations, especially in the countryside.²⁹ Another policy that targets domestic minorities is language policy. Defining one language as official and requiring minorities to adjust accordingly can exclude large minority populations from participation in the workforce, culture and other social arenas. In some countries, language is also tied to citizenship,³⁰ another way to control membership in society.

In a way, passport-issuing policy is a subset of citizenship law that is outwardly directed. Its outcomes however, are similar to the strategy of increased monitoring of state borders. One example of employing strict border policy is closing the border to migrants and refugees. Both border policy and passport issuing define the boundaries of the national community and thus mobilize politics around national identity. Passport issuing has bureaucratic costs, as well as the potential costs of taking on new citizens. This policy also risks alienating allies, border disputes and international criticism. Border restricting policies are materially costly due to an increased presence of military and police forces. Restricting the borders is a highly visible action that risks immediate negative attention from media and humanitarian groups.

Passport issuing should be evaluated vis-à-vis other non-violent policies with moderate costs. Passport issuing may add a new population to the polity and carries large material costs ranging from increased bureaucracy to the transfer of funds to populations across the border. This was the case in Hungary, which began in 2001 granting material benefits to co-ethnic populations in kin states for infrastructure, welfare and other purposes.³¹ However, passport issuing is a “positive” strategy in the sense that it introduces new populations into the national community whereas border control is “negative”, because

it restricts population from joining the national group. Therefore the criticism over border control tends to be higher, it also has the potential to become internationalized whereas the criticism over passport issuing policy tends to remain local or regional. These consequences make passport issuing a more viable choice for leaders attempting to shore up their regime, at least in peaceful times.

Symbolic acts are the softest available nationalist policy. In recent years, states have allocated resources toward actual nationalist narrative construction in the form of changes to school curriculum and the establishment of museums that represent the regime's narrative such as the controversial House of Terror Museum in Budapest, which focuses on the crimes of the Communist regime.³² These policies are related to education, and thus have a long-term effect on national identity. Symbolic acts are usually domestically controversial, but this controversy may actually benefit the regime. It detracts attention from other regime actions such as corruption or economic policies and aligns supporters in favor of the government and against the liberal intelligentsia.

IV. Russia and Passport Issuing

Russia began issuing passports shortly after Putin came to power in 2000 as part of his nation building strategy for a nascent, independent Russian identity. While the Five Day War in Georgia is often viewed as a strategic policy it is actually in part an outcome of Putin's earlier passport distribution policy. Passport issuing in Russia has different implications from the use of this policy in smaller states such as Hungary and Romania. First, it is an act that is perceived as far more aggressive and carries greater consequences for the international community and the kin state. Second and relatedly, while passport distribution is aimed at a domestic population, large states may be actively trying to define

international conditions in a way that serves their domestic framing. In this section we will review the Russian case of passport distribution in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as part of the broader logic of Putin's nationalist framing. We will then evaluate alternative explanations vis-à-vis our theory and will use case study process tracing to assess the validity of our theory.

Russia began issuing passports to citizens in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia as early as 2002. The process was simple: people sent their identity documents, generally old Soviet passports, to a special Russian consulate in Sochi. When returned, the Ossetians and Abkhazians were now bearers of Russian passports and citizens of Russia, even though they were living on Georgian territory. Interestingly, because Abkhazian law allows dual citizenship with Russia but not with Georgia, accepting an Abkhazian passport meant officially renouncing Georgian citizenship. At the time, Georgia denounced the process as “creeping annexation”. By the time of the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, almost 90 percent of the populations of Abkhazia and South Ossetia held Russian passports.³³

One commonly held explanation was that Russia's activities in Georgia were part of a larger attempt to regain a central position in the international system. In this view, passport issuing in Georgia accompanied economic policies, diplomatic efforts and investment in the military as part of an aggressive strategy. However, Putin's passport issuing policy began as early as 2002, when Russia was still pursuing a conciliatory approach towards the West, as demonstrated by its support of the United States post-9/11.³⁴ During the first Bush administration relations between Moscow and Washington were warm, with President Bush professing his admiration for Putin in his oft quoted phrase, “I looked the man in the eye....He's a man deeply committed to his country and the best interests of his country and I appreciate very much the frank dialogue and that's the beginning of a very constructive

relationship”.³⁵

Others believe passport distribution is part of a long standing ethnic struggle in kin states and has more to do with the relationship of the co-ethnics across the border and their formal sovereign state than the domestic issues of the home state. This however does not explain the timing of the passport distribution. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, tensions along ethnic lines did erupt resulting in a separatist struggle between the Abkhaz and the Georgians in 1991. Although Russia supported the Abkhazian independence movement, it did not seek to nationalize the Abkhaz population. Instead, passport distribution in the North Caucasus coincided with Russia’s overall nationalist policy at home after Putin took power.

While we agree that leaders use nationalism as diversion from the economy, we believe that economic performance informs the choice between nationalist policies but not the initial strategy of using nationalism. Russia’s economy was in recovery from the turbulent period of the 1990s and experienced growth when Moscow chose to nationalize its co-ethnics in kin states. For example, the Five Day War, often cited as a prominent example of Russia’s aggressive foreign policy strategy actually coincided with the peak of Russia’s economic success when oil prices rose to \$105/barrel.³⁶ We therefore believe the war is better explained as a consequence of its passport policy rather than a choice of an aggressive nationalist strategy. On the other hand, the war in Crimea in which Russia actually was the aggressor came during a period of serious financial and economic crisis. This demonstrates that during a period of economic growth Russia chose softer nationalist policies (see Table 1) while during a period of economic downturn Moscow turned to a far more belligerent strategy.

Creating a Master Frame of Russian Nationalism Under Putin

The use of passportization as a widespread policy did not begin until Putin's presidency. In both the early 2000s and in the early 2010s, while there was not exactly a struggle for legitimacy, there was political upheaval that required the framing of nationalism and the right in a new way. Further, following the collapse of the Soviet Union Russia suffered a crisis of identity,

“Russians have lacked a national idea of unity and justice as well as the state capacity to enforce unified rules across the nation... as the state has failed to articulate a new national idea, many Russians have gravitated to traditional Christian ideals.”³⁷ Putin himself noted that his first challenge was “creating the country's unity [and the] establishment of sovereignty of the Russian people.”³⁸

One of his first policies as president was the call on Russia's Central Bank to issue 500 silver coins bearing Stalin's portrait, and shortly thereafter inaugurating a plaque honoring his “heroic leadership during the war.”³⁹ Throughout this period Putin continued to pay tribute to Stalin, calling him an “effective manager” who acted “rationally” in his quest to consolidate the Soviet state and transform Russia into a modern industrial power. He later explained that he was not justifying Stalin's actions but rather presenting a balanced view that fit into a larger framework of national pride.⁴⁰

The most prominent frame to which Putin turned, was shaping his persona in the image of Tsar Nicholas I, a famous reformer in the history of the Russian empire. Similarly to Nicholas, Putin's concept of nationalism rejected pluralism and elevated the people but also rested upon a leader that embodies national unity. These concepts were illustrated most clearly in Putin's speech on the annexation of Crimea on March 18, 2014:

Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptized. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in

Crimea. This is also Sevastopol – a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet. Crimea is Balaklava and Kerch, Malakhov Kurgan and Sapun Ridge. Each one of these places is dear to our hearts, symbolizing Russian military glory and outstanding valor. Crimea is a unique blend of different peoples’ cultures and traditions. This makes it similar to Russia as a whole, where not a single ethnic group has been lost over the centuries. Russians and Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars and people of other ethnic groups have lived side by side in Crimea, retaining their own identity, traditions, languages and faith.⁴¹

During his speech, Putin made a point of noting that Crimea was the place from which Russia took its Christianity, which was similarly part of Nicholas’ motivation to fight the British and the French on a sacred mission to defend Russia’s interest in the Crimea. Likewise, “Putin defines Russia’s interests in terms of the defense of Russians living in Ukraine. The reason he sees the break-up of the Soviet Union as a catastrophe is because it left so many Russians orphaned from their motherland.”⁴² The same logic applies to the passport issuing policy in Abkhazia: it was a way to rectify the tragedy of Soviets stranded in a foreign homeland, and to reinforce the image of Putin as a nationalist leader seeking to reunite his peoples from across a wide territory.

Not only did this narrative serve to emphasize national unity, but it also helped Putin frame the fledgling liberal elite as a class of Western serving “traitors” who had abandoned Russia’s interests to the West. Part of Putin’s strategy was emphasizing the differences between East and West, where the East was based on traditional Christian values and principles of nationalism whereas the West is morally and economically bankrupt. One notable example of this strategy was the restriction and denunciation of the LGBT community in Russia. This enabled Putin to define the protestors who took to the streets in 2011 as Western traitors, as opposed to patriots concerned for the future of their country. Despite the scale of the protests, by positioning himself as the leader of the nationalist project and protector of Russian national interests both at home and abroad in the historical

homeland, Putin framed the liberal opposition as anathema to the Russian nation.⁴³ As we will discuss later, this created a template for other populist leaders like Hungary's Orbán who used the exact same language and policies against protestors and the LGBT community in Hungary in 2014.

It is important to note that Russian citizenship is not tied to ethnicity. Russians view areas and populations as belonging to the nation based on imperial Soviet legacies. Therefore citizens of Chechnya and Tatarstan, which seek independence are still considered a part of Russia and areas such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia are also regarded this way.⁴⁴ One of the conditions that helped successfully execute the passport issuing policy in Abkhazia was a kinship between Moscow and Abkhazian leadership based on a shared Soviet identity. Although there was already secessionist sentiment amongst a large portion of the Abkhazian population, a pro-Russian leadership was essential to the success of the passport policy. From the outset of the conflict, the Kremlin had openly backed Raul Khajimba, an ethnic Abkhaz who had graduated from the KGB academy in Minsk and had been a KGB cadre working in Abkhazia throughout the 1980s.⁴⁵ Khajimba actively fought against Georgian forces in the Abkhaz civil war and quickly rose to the highest rank of the separatist regime, where he used anti-Georgian rhetoric to promote the Abkhaz cause. Calling for the expulsion of ethnic Georgians from Abkhazian territory and accusing moderate leadership of illegally granting "Abkhaz citizenship" to ethnic Georgians, Khajimba became president of Abkhazia in 2014, and immediately used this sentiment to strike thousands of Georgians from voter registration lists, claiming that they had been illegally granted "Abkhaz passports". Although Khajimba is vehemently anti-Georgian, his ties to the Kremlin have remained strong since his days as a member of the KGB. Immediately following his election, Khajimba flew to Moscow and met with Putin to sign a new "friendship and cooperation"

treaty “which will raise to a new level the integration process between the two sovereign states”.⁴⁶

IV. Hungarian Passport Issuing

For a small country like Hungary, a passport issuing policy is less destabilizing to the international system, but still has a significant regional effect as we will explore below. Unlike Russia, Hungary has been a stable democracy for the past 25 years but has recently experienced a decline in liberal values and democratic indicators. As part of this trend, Hungary has sought increased ties with Russia in both the economic and political spheres. Orban aligned himself with Putin, using similar discourse and methods. Orban has been framing his regime as protector of the Hungarian nation and traditional values emulating similar processes in Russia under Putin.

On May 26th 2010 the Hungarian parliament voted in favor of a new citizenship law making ethnic Hungarians of ‘Greater Hungary’ eligible for Hungarian citizenship. ‘Greater Hungary’, a political term given to the territory of pre-1920 Hungary, includes territories that now belong to the neighboring countries Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, and Ukraine. The new law replaced a previous one that required a year of residency in current Hungary as a condition for eligibility to citizenship. The passing of the law was received with varying levels of discontent in neighboring countries, and the EU more broadly. In Slovakia, for instance, the law was considered a belligerent step, intended to mobilize the Slovak Hungarian minority. In response, Slovakia amended its own citizenship law and revoked the Slovak citizenship of individuals who were granted Hungarian passports.⁴⁷ A part of the controversy over the law was that the newly naturalized citizens were granted voting rights shortly after the passing of the law.⁴⁸

While we compare the two cases, clearly Hungary does not have the same influence as Russia in the international sphere. However, due to long standing tensions in the region between Hungarian minorities and ethnic majorities in different states, the citizenship law made a strong statement. This section explores Hungary's decision to change its citizenship law amidst regional criticism, and the timing of the decision, over twenty years after the 1989 transition.

While it is easy to interpret Russia's policy as an attempt to gain power in the international system, the Hungarian case does not lend itself to such an explanation. However it is possible to make the argument that by passing the citizenship law, Hungary was attempting to court Russian favor and play on the East-West divide that was becoming prominent in the international sphere. The timing of the law does not quite fit the theory. While the East West divide had already become common discourse in 2010, it was not yet the defining cleavage of the international system. Following the Five Day War, relations between Moscow and the West had been in decline on many fronts, but in 2009 the Obama administration attempted a "reset".⁴⁹ While this was not viewed as a successful step, it was not until tensions erupted around the Syrian civil war and Crimea that the new East-West cleavage was solidified at least in popular discourse. We therefore find the domestic arguments presented below far more compelling.

Like in the Russian case, ethnic tensions are often brought up as a cause for Hungarian behavior. Indeed, Hungarian ethnic minorities have been living under foreign rule and have often experienced hardship for nearly a century. However, this did not lead Hungary to embrace its co-ethnics following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Instead, policy changes toward the co-ethnics were instated only from 2001, and only under right wing governments.

In 2006, Hungary suffered a severe economic crisis followed by a crisis of leadership for the left-liberal government. The economic downturn persisted and was still prominent in 2010, and thus the citizenship law can be viewed as a nationalist diversion from the difficulty of the government to deliver a positive turn in the economy. We agree that a part of the purpose of the law, and of the Fidesz government nationalist discourse more broadly, was to steer the public agenda away from the economy. However, the state of the economy alone cannot provide a sufficient explanation for the choice of a nationalist passport policy. Between 2006 and 2010 the social democratic government did not consider passing a citizenship law despite increasing dissatisfaction with economic performance. Only when Fidesz came to power did the law change.⁵⁰ Thus, while the economy played a part in the use of a nationalist strategy, other factors should be taken into consideration to explain the initiative and timing of the new passport policy.

Creating a Master Frame of Hungarian Nationalism

The current Hungarian ruling party, Fidesz, did not always position itself as a nationalist right wing opposition to the socialist and liberal parties. In the early years following the democratic transition, Fidesz was a young liberal party trying to appeal to the middle class.⁵¹ During that time Fidesz attempted to break the traditional political blocs of Hungarian politics, separating the urban elites and middle class, and the Hungarian countryside working and middle classes. However, after the death of center right leader Jozsef Antall in 1993 and the following decline of his party, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), Fidesz repositioned itself as a party on the political right, at least in terms of its nationalist stance and views on social conservatism.⁵² Accordingly, the party, led by Orban, began to frame its identity aggressively against the liberal-left alliance. This and the

corresponding hostile liberal-socialist political framing of the right wing reinforced the bipolar nature of the Hungarian political discourse.⁵³

Both the right and left in Hungary positioned themselves on a liberal-national spectrum rather than an economic one. The left defined the right as dangerous and even fascist, a name often thrown around even in the early days of the Antall government. The right wing appropriated nationalist symbols and presented itself as the protector of the nation, and the left as cosmopolitan, subservient to international powers as it was during communism, and foreign to the nation.⁵⁴ The portrayal of the left as a continuation of the communist regime made sense as many in the socialist party were a part of the old communist ranks. However, when the question of the communist secret police files was on the agenda, both left and right wing parties opposed opening the files, concerned to reveal skeletons in their own closets.⁵⁵

The 2002 election campaign serves as an example for the right wing appropriation of national symbols. At the time in government, Fidesz used the Hungarian national cockade as an election symbol. The cockade was a common symbol of March 15, the national day commemorating 1848 and celebrating the aspiration for liberty and independence in Hungary. Fidesz encouraged supporters to wear their cockade with pride before and after the national day to signify their love of homeland and their support for the party, which they wished to portray as inseparable.⁵⁶

After winning more than two thirds of the seats in parliament, Fidesz continued to shape its discourse around national symbols. However its new position of power and following described actions did more than polarize the political system. Fidesz now had the capacity to reframe national discourse to utterly marginalize liberal ideas and their bearers. The 2010 citizenship law should be viewed in this context. The first legislation on co-ethnic

Hungarians was the “Status Law” passed in 2001 under Fidesz government. The law granted special benefits and subsidies to co-ethnics in neighboring Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Croatia and Ukraine by distributing Hungarian certificates.⁵⁷ However Fidesz wanted to go beyond the controversial status law and reform the Hungarian citizenship law.⁵⁸ At the time, the party failed to secure a majority to pass the law, and the bill was shelved during the socialist-liberal government that followed. In 2004 a referendum was held in Hungary on the citizenship question. The left wing government was concerned about negative responses to an amendment of the law from neighboring countries as well as the European Union, and encouraged Hungarians to refrain from voting in the referendum.⁵⁹ The campaign against the referendum was focused on welfare; they claimed that foreign ethnic Hungarians might abuse the domestic welfare state and take jobs from hard working Hungarians. The referendum indeed did not pass due to low turnout,⁶⁰ but the left wing campaign contributed to the prevailing narrative that portrayed it as favoring international interests (neighboring countries and EU) over Hungarian national ones (ethnic Hungarians).

After the win in 2010, the Fidesz government took several measures to ensure that its own political narrative was Hungary’s national narrative. Several examples include changes in the national school curriculum, erections of national monuments and museums focusing on right wing oriented historical leaders, and the construction of a terror museum dedicated to crimes of the communist regime. These steps were taken openly to change the historical narrative in Hungary, with the government arguing that previous, left wing school books, monuments, and so on reflected a communist narrative promoted by the left even after the transition.⁶¹

Alongside the amendment to the citizenship law, the government also introduced a national remembrance day.

“4 June is a day of mourning and remembrance, and a historical lesson at the same time. It is a day of mourning, because the Treaty of Trianon was the nation’s greatest tragedy following the division of historical Hungary in 1920... We should be proud of Hungarian heroes, who, living outside the borders of Hungary, have remained true Hungarians under all circumstances”.⁶²

Fidesz government never failed to remind Hungarians of the 2004 socialist opposition to the citizenship law, until eventually in 2013 Socialist party president Attila Mesterházy speaking in Cluj, Transylvania, apologized for not supporting the 2004 referendum.⁶³

The framing of the left-liberals as foreign to the nation, and even traitors, was not always successful for Fidesz. In 2002 the party lost the election using the nationalist ticket. However, when the left experienced a crisis of leadership from 2006 onwards, it was very easy for Fidesz to portray the left as failing to speak for the Hungarian nation. The right wing narrative first became compelling, and later nearly the only narrative available in the country.⁶⁴

To ensure that this policy was successful, the Hungarian government used its ties with Hungarian parties representing the ethnic minority in kin states. There is some variation within these parties, but they broadly support the national Hungarian cause. Transylvanian Hungarian party, UDMR (Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania) for example, promotes the use of Hungarian language, a Hungarian schooling system, and a local autonomy for Hungarian ethnics. Though not all Hungarians support these causes, they do vote for UDMR,⁶⁵ as Slovakian Hungarians vote for minority Hungarian parties in Slovakia. The cooperation of this leadership with the homeland in the Hungarian case is crucial for more than just appearance sake. As the 2010 citizenship law includes voting rights for non-residents, on the ground organization of the ethnic minority is electorally important for the homeland political leadership. Indeed, approximately a hundred thousand Transylvanian

Hungarians voted in the 2014 parliamentary elections in Hungary, a sweeping majority of them cast their votes for ruling party, Fidesz.⁶⁶

V. Conclusions

This paper demonstrates that passport issuing policy targets domestic audiences, rather than kin populations in neighboring states or the international community. This is one of many policies leaders use as part of their statist projects to legitimize their rule and undercut the liberal opposition. Put together, these policies are the sustaining logic of non-liberal populist regimes. Passport issuing is related to the most essential definition of national identity. Thus changes in the citizenship regime should be viewed as a direct attempt to capture the national ethos. Because the passport issuing policy itself deals with cross-border populations and at times international conflict, it is tempting to regard it as a component of international power politics or imperial strategies. However, we argue that the underlying explanation for the employment of this strategy lies in domestic politics. Passport issuing to co-ethnics across the border legitimizes the regime as the protector of the nation and nationalist project and at the same time undercuts a liberal opposition.

This policy is particularly salient in cases where separate national and liberal elites have a historically contentious relationship. This might be the case where repressive regimes marginalized previous ruling elites as was common across Eastern Europe. Most states in the region did not have a substantial democratic experience prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Czech Republic a notable exception. Regimes in the region did not allow opposition and crackdown on free press, dissidents and intellectuals was a common practice. The Horthy regime in Hungary established its control through mass arrest of leftist liberals and of course in Russia, the communist regime did not even allow a whiff of internal dissent.

In these cases, there was no history of consensual and inclusive politics and the common method of operation was to portray the opposition as illegitimate and even violently repress it. Current day leaders who choose nationalist strategy build upon these traditions to consolidate their rule.

We also elucidate the conditions under which each nationalist policy is employed. During periods of economic crisis, mass protest or the rise of salient opposition forces, ruling elites tend to select more aggressive nationalist policies. Such policies may entail a direct use of violence or at least a high potential for the eruption of violence. In this sense our paper contributes to the literature on the causes of war and highlights the domestic roots of aggressive acts such as Russia's annexation of Crimea. At the time, oil prices plummeted leading to a vulnerable Russian economy based entirely on commodity exports. To fend off potential opposition, Putin escalated his use of nationalism and utilized the budding conflict in neighboring Ukraine to take over the national discourse in Russia.

In more stable times for the regime, certain leaders still choose nationalist policies but these do not directly include violence. Even non-violent policies may lead to violence as the Five Day War demonstrates. Although risking violence to a lesser extent, softer policies continue to unite the community around the nationalist ethos. In Hungary, Orban has employed many soft nationalist policies including the introduction of fascist authors into the school curriculum, the replacement of statues of liberals with those of controversial Horthy regime heroes, and the erection of a controversial WWII memorial.

Though passportization is most commonly associated with Russia and is a salient political issue in Hungary, this strategy could be employed in many areas with border disputes where former empires have been reduced to a rump state. Romania's symbolic claim on Moldova is another recent example. These conditions generally leave a co-ethnic

population outside the borders of the homeland political unit, at times separating families or historical national territories. Existing mythologies allow leaders to capitalize on popular sentiment and define their rule.

While leaders use this policy against the liberals in their homeland, the leader's relationship with the kin population across the border may vary. It is not always the case that co-ethnics share the nationalist sentiment. In Hungary, although the co-ethnics may share Hungarian identity, a large part of their attachment to homeland Hungary is based on a clientelist relationship. The Hungarian government provides funds for infrastructure and projects in Transylvania and in exchange Transylvanian Hungarians cast their vote for the ruling government. Although Abkhazians do not share a Russian identity, they align with homeland Russia through a Soviet identity. Primarily, this identity is supported through a clientelist relationship, where Russia financially supports the region and Abkhazians denounce their political unit in Georgia.

Two issues are at stake when discussing the policy. First, passport issuing across the border can intensify border disputes and even spread beyond the limited territory and elicit international conflict. One interesting finding is that war can be the outcome of much milder nationalist policies rather than aggressive ones. Medium range policies like passport distribution can aggravate the leadership of the kin state as well as its majority population. What begins as an attempt to rally around national sentiment in the homeland creates a domino effect of extremist nationalist mobilization across the border that can escalate a conflict between the two states. This was the case in Georgia where the young Georgian leadership sought to establish its own rule by portraying Russia's passport distribution as a violation of Georgian sovereignty. While this is one prominent example, the policy itself and

the conditions under which it takes place should be further studied using a broad set of cases.

Second, passport issuing is a part of a broader agenda of certain leaders to legitimize their rule and undermine a liberal opposition. These strategies seem to reinforce certain types of leaders, populist, jingoist and dominant. Two unfortunate consequences of the strengthening of these regimes are increased occurrences of conflict and democratic decay. While we demonstrate above that war can be an inadvertent outcome of nationalist policies, we also show that this can be an intentional policy utilized in challenging periods. This implies that populist non-liberal regimes are more bellicose, an assertion that should be examined through further study. Many states in Central Eastern Europe have been experiencing a sharp decline in democratic indicators, including the curtailing of freedom of speech and press, increased corruption, reduced transparency and subversion of constitutional rights in general. This is a worrying trend and thus the study of mechanisms that sustain these regimes should be a top priority.

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