

Latvia

# *Ethnicity in Latvia*

## *Group selection*

The **Latvians** are the politically dominant majority. The Slavic minorities, **Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians**, are powerless.

## *Power relations*

After independence from the USSR, Latvia gave citizenship only to ethnic Latvians, the other inhabitants from the USSR were naturalized after passing a Latvian language test. Non-naturalized Russian speakers are considered non-citizens. The non-citizens have the same social rights and a lifelong right of residence, but are disadvantaged in the economic sphere and politically discriminated, because they do not have the right to vote (<sup>2942</sup>). Non-citizens are similar to stateless persons, but at least they have “a non-citizen passport” and the mentioned rights in Latvia. The only way to receive political rights is through naturalization (<sup>2943</sup>). For naturalization, applicants must pass a Latvian language and history test, which makes it unattractive, as well as the fact that non-citizens can travel to the CIS countries much easier than Latvians (<sup>2944</sup>). In 2011, approximately 30 percent of the Russian speaking minorities were non-citizens. Therefore, because the majority of Russians have Latvian passports and the consequent rights for political participation, we code the Russians as powerless.

In 2011 Latvia held parliamentary elections during which the pro-Russian “Harmony Centre” won the majority of votes, increasing their seats from 2 to 31. Harmony Centre’s victory was the first for a pro-Russian party since Latvia’s independence; the party has ties to United Russia (<sup>2945</sup>). Despite winning most seats, Harmony Centre was unable to come to an agreement to form a coalition that would hold a majority in parliament immediately after the election (<sup>2946</sup>). In the 2014 elections Harmony Centre lost seven seats, but they remained the party with the largest vote share of 23.13% (24 of the 100 seats) (<sup>2947, 2948</sup>).

In the parliamentary elections of 2018 the opposition party Harmony, which represents ethnic Russians in Latvia, won 23 seats. However, as previously, Harmony was not included in the government coalition. Hence, Russians remain coded as powerless until 2020 (<sup>2949</sup>). No changes have been observed in power relations for Ukrainians and Byelorussians in this period either.

<sup>2942</sup> [Schmidt, 2010]

<sup>2943</sup> [Van Elsuwege, 2004]

<sup>2944</sup> [Galbreath, 2003]

<sup>2945</sup> [The Guardian, 2011]

<sup>2946</sup> [BBC, 2011]

<sup>2947</sup> [Bergmane, 2017]

<sup>2948</sup> [Deloy, 2014]

<sup>2949</sup> [Freedom House, 2019]

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*Political status of ethnic groups in Latvia*

*From 1991 until 2021*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Latvians	0.586	DOMINANT
Russians	0.288	POWERLESS
Byelorussians	0.039	POWERLESS
Ukrainians	0.026	POWERLESS



Figure 590: Political status of ethnic groups in Latvia during 1991-2021.

## Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Latvia

From 1991 until 2021

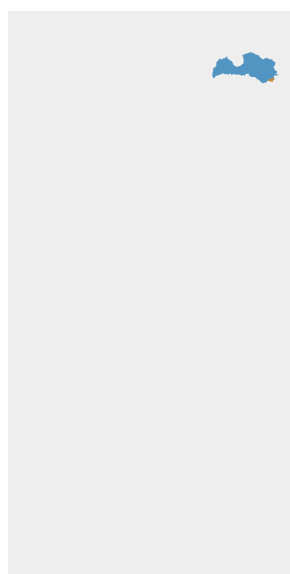


Figure 591: Map of ethnic groups in Latvia during 1991-2021.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
■ Latvians	63 320	Statewide
■ Byelorussians	825	Regionally based
■ Russians	0	Urban
■ Ukrainians	0	Urban

Table 216: List of ethnic groups in Latvia during 1991-2021.