

Latvia

Ethnicity in Latvia

Power relations

The Latvians are the politically dominant majority. The Russian speaking minorities, Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians, are powerless. 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 so called 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 (¹⁷⁷¹). 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 (¹⁷⁷²). 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 (¹⁷⁷³). In 2011, approximately 30 percent of the Russian speaking minorities were non-citizens.

¹⁷⁷¹ [Schmidt, 2010]

¹⁷⁷² [Van Elsuwege, 2004]

¹⁷⁷³ [Galbreath, 2003]

Update 2010-2013 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’ (¹⁷⁷⁴). 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 (¹⁷⁷⁵).

¹⁷⁷⁴ [The Guardian, 2011]

¹⁷⁷⁵ [BBC, 2011]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Latvia

From 1991 until 2013

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



Figure 431: Political status of ethnic groups in Latvia during 1991-2013.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Latvia

From 1991 until 2013

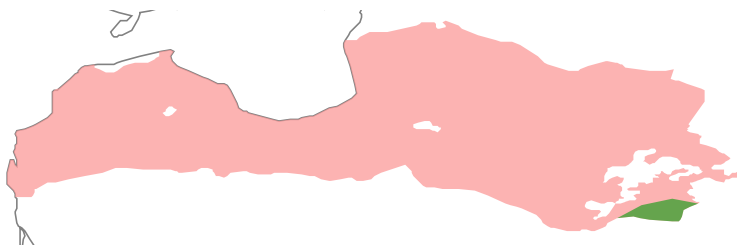


Figure 432: Map of ethnic groups in Latvia during 1991-2013.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■ Latvians	61 124	Regional & urban
■ Byelorussians	821	Regionally based
Russians		Urban
Ukrainians		Urban

Table 130: List of ethnic groups in Latvia during 1991-2013.