

December 16, 1989

USSR: Nationalists Gain in Latvian Elections

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Summary:

An analysis of Popular Front success in Latvian elections.

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Preliminary reports indicate that, as expected, Popular Front candidates won at least 60 percent of the nearly 13,000 city and district races decided in Latvia last Sunday. Most victorious front candidates, many of whom are reform-minded Communist Party members, apparently defeated rivals backed by the Communist Party apparatus. Only 153 officials from the party apparatus ran; 90 reportedly won seats. Runoffs will be held this weekend in more than 300 districts. Results of similar elections in Estonia last Sunday, in which nationalist candidates are also expected to fare well, are due this weekend. In both republics, the fronts represent a broad coalition favoring gradual but determined pursuit of independence.

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Comment: The Latvian front appears poised to do at least as well in republic legislative elections next March, putting it in a powerful position to push the nationalist agenda. The party apparatus apparently chose to run only officials it thought had a chance of winning, hoping to avoid an embarrassing rout. The poor performance of apparatus-backed candidates presages reduced status and power for party members whose first loyalty is to Moscow. Those who won council seats with front support are likely to support the nationalist agenda over the party's interests.

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