

## Woodrow Wilson Foundation Award

For the best book published in the United States during 2002 on government, politics, or international affairs.

**Award Committee:** Kathleen Thelen, Northwestern University, chair; Jean C. Oi, Stanford University; and John F. Padgett, University of Chicago.

**Recipient:** Mark R. Beissinger, University of Wisconsin, Madison

**Book:** Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State (Cambridge University Press)

**Citation:** The committee has selected Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, to receive the Woodrow Wilson Foundation award for 2002. This book provides a compelling explanation -- and a gripping account -- of one of the most important political events of our time. The question motivating the research is genuinely puzzling: how was it possible that a mighty superpower, the Soviet Union, could simply vanish from the historical stage within the space of a few years? This book examines the structural preconditions but also, more importantly, the process through which, as Beissinger puts it, "the seemingly impossible in 1987 . . . became the seemingly inevitable by 1991."

Beissinger provides a convincing alternative to teleological, deterministic accounts of nationalism that attribute the success or failure of nationalist movements to enduring traits of particular groups (nationalist "predispositions"), explanations in which deep structural characteristics make nationalist action either futile or inevitable. Beissinger's alternative explanation of the rise of successful nationalism emphasizes the independent impact of events and nationalist strategies, and shows how structure and agency interacted in an unfolding tide of nationalist mobilization. Structural features help account for how and where the first nationalist movements began to emerge in the 1980s, but as Beissinger convincingly demonstrates, constraints played a diminishing role as a tide of nationalism gathered strength in the region. The impact of events and processes in temporally and spatially connected nationalisms produced a dynamic that explains how nationalism in countries lacking the structural prerequisites ("improbable nationalisms" as Beissinger calls them) could nonetheless succeed as a result of linkages to other unfolding nationalisms and the ability of politicians to "ride nationalism's tidal force."

The importance of the question, the scope of coverage, the quality and depth of the research, the integrated use of quantitative and qualitative methods, and the clear and compelling writing—all of these factors make this a model for books in comparative politics and political science in general. Beissinger masterfully weaves detailed historical knowledge of a series of events to show their connectedness and interaction in a convincingly argued dynamic analytical framework that sheds a penetrating new light on the process and consequences of nationalist mobilization.