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Introduction

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Is Russia a democracy? Will Russia be a democracy in ten years? Was Russia ever a democracy? This book seeks to give comprehensive and nuanced answers to these difficult, controversial questions. They are difficult to answer because Russia's political system is neither a full-blown dictatorship nor a consolidated democracy, but something in between. They are controversial because the answers have implications for both theorists and policymakers in Russia as well as in the United States.

Our method is not to present tedious, long semantic debates about the adjectives that should modify either democracy or dictatorship when describing the Russian regime.¹ Instead, in place of a simplistic label we offer an entire book devoted to describing the contours of the political regime in Russia. Moreover, we focus on the trajectory of the political system since 1991 and not only on a snapshot of the regime as it appears today. Our aim is to describe the formal institutions of the democratic regime that appeared in Russia just before the collapse of the Soviet Union and then to explain their evolution (or lack thereof). Our story is about negative trends, beginning in the mid-1990s, but accelerating during the Putin era. The chapters attempt to explain the factors that have pushed Russia's democracy in the wrong direction.

Identifying an erosion of democratic practices implies that some form of democracy existed in Russia in the first place. To varying degrees all the

chapters make this assumption. In other words, in answer to the question of whether Russia ever had a democracy, we respond in the affirmative. We fully agree with those who have added qualifiers to the word democracy when describing Russia's regime at any time during its post-communist existence and argue that Russia is not and never has been a liberal democracy. Yet in contrast to many critics of the current regime, a basic hypothesis of this book is that Russia underwent a transition from communist rule to some form of democratic rule in the 1990s.² Democratization did occur. Electoral democracy did emerge. Even though the trajectory has continued in an antidemocratic direction for several years, especially lately, we also posit that the political system still retains some democratic features. Whether these democratic traits are significant enough to label Russia a democracy is debatable. The three principal authors of this book have competing answers, but all agree with two observations: first, Russia is not a dictatorship; and second, Russia is moving in an autocratic direction.

Defining Democracy and Dictatorship

Following Joseph Schumpeter, we define democracy as “the institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle.”³ We also concur with Adam Przeworski's refinement of Schumpeter by adding that this process of electing leaders must occur under certain or fixed rules, but with uncertain outcomes that cannot be reversed.

The crucial moment in any passage from authoritarianism to democratic rule is the crossing of the threshold beyond which no one can intervene to reverse the outcomes of the formal political process. Democratization is an act of subjecting all the interests to competition, of institutionalizing uncertainty. The decisive step toward democracy is the devolution of power from a group of people to a set of rules.⁴

Following Larry Diamond, we consider political regimes that meet this minimal definition to be electoral democracies.⁵

Elections are a necessary but insufficient condition for democracy. Terry Karl and others have warned rightly about the “fallacy of electoralism”: an overemphasis on elections with an accompanying neglect of other institu-

tions that make democracies work.⁶ While deploying this minimal definition of democracy we nonetheless have higher standards in mind when evaluating the democratic quotient of Russia's polity. Implicit in our comparative analysis of the rule of law, civil society, and the party system in Russia is a higher model or ideal type of liberal democracy rather than a minimal standard of *electoral democracy*.⁷ Liberal democracy is harder to define than electoral democracy because scholars disagree about the components. Larry Diamond has gone the furthest in articulating the attributes of liberal democracy. Because his criteria constitute the implicit standard by which we judge Russia throughout the book, the complete list of liberal democratic features as stated by Diamond is worth restating:

1. Control of the state and its key decisions and allocations lies, in fact as well as in constitutional theory, with elected officials (and not democratically unaccountable actors or foreign powers); in particular, the military is subordinate to the authority of elected civilian officials.
2. Executive power is constrained, constitutionally and in fact, by the autonomous power of other government institutions (such as an independent judiciary, parliament, and other mechanisms of horizontal accountability).
3. Not only are electoral outcomes uncertain, with a significant opposition vote and the presumption of party alteration in government, but no group that adheres to constitutional principles is denied the right to form a party and contest elections (even if electoral thresholds and other rules exclude small parties from winning representations in parliament).
4. Cultural, ethnic, religious, and other minority groups (as well as historically disadvantaged majorities) are not prohibited (legally or in practice) from expressing their interests in the political process or from speaking their language or practicing their culture.
5. Beyond parties and elections, citizens have multiple, ongoing channels for expression and representation of their interests and values, including diverse, independent associations and movements, which they have the freedom to form and join.
6. There are alternative sources of information (including independent media) to which citizens have politically unfettered access.

7. Individuals also have substantial freedom of belief, opinion, discussion, speech, publication, assembly, demonstration, and petition.
8. Citizens are politically equal under the law (even though they are invariably unequal in their political resources).
9. Individual and group liberties are effectively protected by an independent, nondiscriminatory judiciary, whose decisions are enforced and respected by other centers of power.
10. The rule of law protects citizens from unjustified detention, exile, terror, torture, and undue interference in their personal lives not only by the state but also by organized non-state or anti-state forces.⁸

Some of these components of liberal democracy do exist in the Russian polity. Even though nonelected officials from the Federal Security Service (FSB, formerly the KGB) have assumed an increasingly large role in the federal government in recent years, elected officials do still control the highest levels of the Russian state (Diamond's first condition).⁹ Russia also meets Diamond's third condition of a liberal democracy in that individuals and political parties that adhere to the constitution are allowed to participate in elections, but as discussed in chapter 2, some parties were not allowed to participate in the 1993 parliamentary elections, one group was denied access to the ballot in the 1999 parliamentary vote, and others have been scratched from the ballot in regional contests. Those Chechen groups labeled as terrorists, which included the group to which the last elected president of Chechnya belonged, also do not have this right. The Russian regime does a better job of meeting Diamond's fourth condition in that most religious, ethnic, and cultural groups can express their views openly and organize to promote their interests, but again the one exception is Chechnya. Likewise, most citizens are equal under the law (Diamond's eighth criterion), and most individuals can express their beliefs, assemble, demonstrate, and petition (Diamond's seventh criterion). Note that every attribute of liberal democracy in Russia listed here contains some qualifying language. Thus while most Russians enjoy the rights and freedoms associated with liberal democracy, not all do. If all do not enjoy these rights, then the regime is not liberal.

Other components of liberal democracy simply do not exist in Russia. The regime does not exhibit Diamond's second criterion in that executive

power is only weakly constrained. Some electoral outcomes, such as contests for executive power at the national and regional levels, are becoming less and less uncertain, a violation of Diamond's third criterion. The Russian polity also fails to meet Diamond's fifth, sixth, ninth, and tenth conditions in that citizens do not have multiple channels for representation of their interests, primarily because pluralist institutions of interest intermediation are weak and mass-based interest groups are marginal; alternative sources of information are dwindling; individual and group liberties are only weakly protected; and citizens, especially in Chechnya, are unjustly detained, exiled, and tortured.¹⁰ As chapters 4 through 10 show, the institutions and practices that make liberal democracies work are either weak or absent. In addition, as discussed in chapter 11, a deeper attribute of democratic stability—a normative commitment to the democratic process by both the elite and society—is present but not strong in Russia. Even though all major political actors recognize elections as “the only game in town” and behave accordingly, antidemocratic attitudes still linger in elite circles and in society as a whole. In sum, Russia's post-communist regime has never been a liberal democracy, and in recent years the regime has become less liberal.

By embracing this model of an ideal type of liberal democracy, analysis usually focuses on how Russia's regime falls short.¹¹ Some might call the use of this standard ethnocentric or American-centric. We disagree. We see the deployment of lesser criteria as analytically circumspect and politically self-defeating for those in Russia and the West seriously committed to further democratization in Russia.

If Russia's regime has not consolidated into a liberal democracy, is it nonetheless an electoral democracy? Was it ever an electoral democracy? Chapter 2 answers this question. This chapter and others take as the starting point of analysis that Soviet and then post-communist leaders rejected authoritarianism in the late 1980s and early 1990s and took steps toward building an electoral democracy. In the 1990s, the Russian regime had the basic features of an electoral democracy in that elections took place under a universally recognized set of rules, their results were not entirely certain beforehand, and no authority intervened after election day to reverse the outcome of the vote. As chapter 2 discusses in detail, however, the playing field for competitors was never equal and has become increasingly less so over time. Nonetheless, competitive elections determined Russia's rulers. The regime that emerged in the 1990s was qualitatively different from the communist and tsarist dictatorships.

After making this first claim about the collapse of dictatorship and the emergence of electoral democracy in Russia in the 1990s, the second step in our analysis is to describe and explain the weakening of democratic practices in the latter part of the 1990s, and especially during the Putin era. This erosion has mostly occurred within those institutions typically associated with liberal democracy, which were weak to begin with, but have recently become even weaker. Yet, as chapter 2 explores in detail, democratic erosion is also apparent at the core of electoral democracy. Particularly disturbing was the 1999–2000 national electoral cycle, in which the state played a prominent role in determining the results. If this trend continues, then the playing field will become so lopsided as to make the results of votes obvious beforehand. Without competition, elections become meaningless. As Przeworski has eloquently stated, “Democracy is a system in which parties lose elections.”¹² If those in power never lose, then Russia will no longer be an electoral democracy.

In tracing the antidemocratic trajectory of Russia’s political system our analysis stops short of labeling the current regime a dictatorship. If Russia were a dictatorship, then oligarchs, governors, and government officials would have not invested the time and energy that they did in the last electoral cycle. As several chapters in this book will echo, Vladimir Putin’s victory in 2000 and the process that produced that victory were not positive steps for democratic consolidation in Russia. Yet generalizing about the long-term future of Russian democracy from this one election and the policies that have followed from it would be premature. Even in established liberal democracies, the same party can stay in power for decades. Only time will tell if Putin’s first election victory was the beginning of the creation of a one-party state or just an accidental consequence of a popular war against Chechnya, hopes for the future, and a weak opposition.¹³ Moreover, as discussed in chapter 11, the Russian people at this period in history actually want a tough leader who promises to build a stronger state. Such desires are common after years of revolutionary turmoil.¹⁴ Those who claim that Putin’s election was undemocratic must demonstrate that the people were prevented from voting someone more desirable for the majority into office. The demand for some other kind of candidate does not appear to have been robust, and most certainly was not expressed by a majority of Russian voters in 2000 and 2004.

Yet, some uncertainty remains about who will replace him in 2008. The absence of greater competition in the 2000 and 2004 campaigns was wor-

risome, but speculation that Putin might stay on past 2008 is even more worrisome. All these concerns, however, pertain to possible future transgressions of the basic rules of the game in an electoral democracy. In sharing these worries, we still are not ready to call Russia an autocratic regime.¹⁵ The trend, however, is clearly in the autocratic direction.¹⁶

Quality of Democracy Versus Stability of the Regime

Analysts of democratization frequently conflate two different properties: the quality of democracy and the stability of democracy. The phrase “democratic consolidation” implies that quality and stability are two sides of the same coin. They are not, at least not in new democracies. It is true that the most democratic regimes in the world are also the most stable. Once a country obtains a 1, 1 rating from Freedom House—the highest score on political institutions and civil liberties on a scale from 1 to 7—the regime rarely backslides to 2, 2, let alone all the way back to full-blown dictatorship (7,7).¹⁷ A “democracy is significantly more likely to become consolidated if it is liberal.”¹⁸ Consequently, factors or developments that enhance the quality of democracy also promote its stability. However, the road to democratic nirvana is not clearly delineated, nor is it certain that every country will eventually reach the promised land.

Much of the recent literature on democratization implicitly suggests a linear progression of different phases: liberalization, followed by democratic transition, followed by democratic consolidation. In the 1990s, however, many new democracies did not follow this sequence and a number of transitions from authoritarian rule did not produce democratic regimes. In the wake of authoritarian collapse, some states managed to meet the minimum criteria of electoral democracy but failed to consolidate the institutions of liberal democracy. The momentum for regime change can stop long before the outlines of liberal democracy emerge.¹⁹ Diamond referred to this condition of many new electoral democracies as the “twilight zone between persistence without legitimization and institutionalization.”²⁰ Even though liberal democracy is the most stable type of regime, many less perfect regime forms have shown remarkable persistence. They might be moving toward consolidation, even if the regime type is not liberal democracy. Liberal democracies rarely collapse, but illiberal democracies or partial democracies are not necessarily prone to collapse either. A political system can be stable

without being liberal.²¹ Likewise, an electoral democracy can be stable without being a liberal democracy.²²

Russia is one of those regimes in the twilight zone. The absence of democracy-supporting institutions means that the regime is more fragile than a liberal democracy. At the same time, the regime has shown remarkable stability since 1993, even if it has not made progress in strengthening liberal democratic institutions. Stephen Hanson has defined consolidation as a condition in which “the enforcers of democratic institutions themselves can be counted on with very high probability to behave in ways compatible with, and oriented toward the perpetuation of *formal* institutional rules.”²³ If the word *formal* is emphasized, then Russia meets this definition of consolidation, even if the regime type is not a liberal democracy. The crises challenging this political system—including two wars in Chechnya, the August 1998 financial crisis, and the retirement of Russia’s first post-communist leader—have been enormous.²⁴ Yet the constitution has survived and elections have remained the only means for coming to power. Above all, no major actor, including Putin and his FSB entourage, has an interest in overturning the formal rules of the game of the Russian polity.²⁵ While different actors want to change the specific form of the constitution and the specific rules governing elections, all major actors have demonstrated an interest in preserving the constitution and elections.²⁶ Since 1993, Russian leaders have certainly violated these rules on occasion, but violations alone are not evidence of institutional failure. A system is under siege only when a major actor or set of actors champions an alternative institutional design.²⁷ To date, such a threat has not emerged to the political system that has consolidated in Russia since 1993.

While the formal institutions of electoral democracy seem to be stable, the democratic content of these institutions has eroded. Russia’s constitution allows for the preservation of the formal, meta-rules of the political system at the same time that the informal, smaller rules of the polity are changing. As Duma Deputy Vladimir Ryzhkov explained in discussing the democratic reversals under Putin:

The lesson of the last three years is that Russia’s federal foundation can be undermined without trampling too rudely on the Constitution. Budget revenues were centralized and federal districts created without violating the constitution. The Federal Council was reformed and defanged, and a new law on regional government passed that allows

Moscow to dismiss elected regional leaders and dissolve regional legislatures—all without violating the Constitution. Planned reform of relations between the federal center and local governments could well become the next step in the ongoing building of the executive change of command. Thus a Constitution containing the most liberal of principles and freedoms was used to establish a regime controlled by an elected president wielding practically unchecked power... The Constitution is like a play that allows plenty of room for the director's interpretation. On the basis of a single document, Russia's political elite can create a hymn to freedom and a stirring tale of "order" lost and found.²⁸

Putin's advisers have a term for this transformation of democratic practices without altering formal democratic rules: "managed democracy." As described in detail in this book, the campaign to impose managed democracy has had serious negative consequences for the quality of democracy. The destabilizing consequences of this campaign, however, are less apparent. Above all, society is not demanding a more liberal democratic order.²⁹ Whereas some pockets of civil society have tried to resist authoritarian creep, the vast majority of Russian society has demonstrated little interest or capacity to withstand Putin's antiliberal reforms.

Compared with What?

When assessing Russian democracy and its prospects, the real question is: "compared with what?" Compared with American democracy today, Russian democracy has a long way to go. Compared with Poland's democracy today, Russian democracy is way behind. Compared with the U.S. polity a decade after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Russia's current political system does not seem so far behind. Compared with its own past, be it Soviet communism or tsarist absolutism, the current system is vastly more democratic. In prerevolutionary Russia, peasants did not vote, did not read independent newspapers, and did not travel freely. Nor did Soviet citizens. Princes were not removed from power by the ballot box like the hundreds of Duma deputies in the December 1999 election. Only one-third (157 out of 450) of those who served in the Duma in 1995–1999 returned to serve again in 2000, a giant turnover rate compared with the U.S., where over 90

percent of incumbents are re-elected every two years.³⁰ The next time you hear in the House of Representatives someone argue that elections in Russia do not matter—that they are just like the charades of Soviet times—ask one of these electoral losers if they agree. Moreover, remember that two-thirds of an extremely educated population opted to participate in these parliamentary and presidential elections. If the elections were meaningless, then why did these people bother to show up?

Compared with other states that emerged from the Soviet Union, Russia appears to have made progress in building a democratic political order. The degree of freedom of speech in Russia towers above that in Uzbekistan; the consequences of elections in Russia are much greater than in Kazakhstan.³¹ At the same time, Russia's regime today lags far behind the progress made toward consolidating liberal democracies in east Central Europe and the Baltic states. By the standards of the post-Soviet world, Russian democracy is performing rather well. By the standards of post-communist Europe, however, Russia is in the middle of the pack but is gradually slowing its pace. The observation that Russia is somewhere near the median in its neighborhood and among transitions from communist rule suggests that factors not specific to Russia may be at work in determining regime type in this region.

Is Democratization Even the Right Lens?

The phenomenon of change in the former Soviet Union and Russia is big enough and complex enough to attract a whole range of theories and comparisons. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, those interested in models of democratization were the first to join the mission of explaining post-communist change. Philippe Schmitter and Terry Karl pronounced, "Political scientists with expertise in other parts of the world tend to look upon these events in Eastern Europe with 'imperial intent,' i.e., as an opportunity to incorporate (at long last) the study of these countries into the general corpus of comparative analysis."³² Because Schmitter and Karl and many others believed that change in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union was analogous to the kind of regime change occurring elsewhere, these theorists tried to explain these new transitions using narratives and analytical frameworks developed from studies of Latin America and southern Europe.³³

Like the process of regime change, intellectual trajectories are also path dependent.³⁴ In American political science in the 1980s, "transitology" had

eclipsed other traditions, theories, and models of regime change. The four-volume study of transitions from authoritarian rule in southern Europe and Latin America edited by O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead was published in 1986.³⁵ It received high acclaim and has become one of the most cited works in comparative politics. When communist regimes in Eastern Europe began to tumble just a few years later, it was only natural that these scholars of democratization and their analytical frameworks would move into the theoretical vacuum of Sovietology.³⁶ The rhetoric of Russia's revolutionaries encouraged the comparison. Because Boris Yeltsin and his anticommunist supporters had declared their commitment to democracy upon assuming power, many assumed that Russia was part of the so-called third wave of democratization that began (allegedly) on April 25, 1974, with the fall of Portugal's dictatorship.³⁷ Russian political reform would therefore follow a path to democracy similar to transitions in Latin America and southern Europe.

"Transitology" has offered many heuristic devices, approximate analogues, and analytical road maps useful for describing and explaining transitions in formerly communist countries. Russell Bova, for instance, argued, "However unique these developments [in Eastern Europe] have been on one level, the transition from communism may, nevertheless, be usefully viewed as a sub-category of a more generic phenomenon of transition from authoritarian rule."³⁸ If Russia's revolutionaries aspired to consolidate a democratic polity, the new Russian regime may deliberately and consciously repeat processes of democratization observed in other countries, adding yet another reason for comparing Russia with other democratic transitions.

Nevertheless, the democratization metaphor has several shortcomings when used as a tool to describe and explain Soviet and post-Soviet change in the last two decades. Political change has been only one component of the grand transformation in Russia at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries. In parallel, economic transformation and decolonization have also been under way.³⁹ Analogies of democratization from Latin American or southern Europe do not capture the scale of change taking place in post-communist Russia. On the contrary, one of the conditions for successful democratization in Latin America and southern Europe was that economic transformation (usually framed in these countries as the transition from capitalism to socialism) was not allowed to occur simultaneously.⁴⁰ State institutions in noncommunist authoritarian regimes also supported a market economy based on private property rights. As such, noncommunist societies were organized according to the logic of a capitalist,

market system. In some transitions to democracy economic reform has accompanied, as well as precipitated, transitions to democracy in capitalist economies. In none of the recent transitions to democracy in Latin America, Africa, southern Europe, or Asia has full-scale transformation of a command economy been an agenda item.

The democratization lens has another problem, already alluded to. The end point of transition is assumed to be democratization. In reality, the experience of the post-communist world is that the transition from autocracy can lead to democracy as well as to new forms of autocracy.⁴¹ It is regime change, but not necessarily democratic regime change.

Revolution is a more apt description of the phenomenon that first began in Russia nearly two decades ago and is still under way. During this period, the Russian state and the surrounding states of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have undergone monumental political, economic, and social change rivaled only by the French Revolution or the Bolshevik Revolution in scope or consequence. The old Soviet polity, consisting of a state subordinated to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was destroyed. In the vacuum, new political institutions are emerging, including elected parliaments and executives, separation of powers between the legislative and executive branches, and several political parties. While the final end point of this political transformation is still uncertain, thus far a qualitatively new kind of regime has replaced the Soviet dictatorship. Likewise, the old Soviet command economy, in which the party-state controlled virtually all production and distribution, has also collapsed. It is being replaced by a system based on private property, free prices, and market forces. In short, a developing Russian capitalism is replacing Soviet communism. Moreover, these transformations have advanced by confrontational means, at times even violent confrontational means.⁴² They have not resulted from cooperative arrangements. Rapid, simultaneous, and conflictual transformation of both the polity and economy is the definition of a revolution, but remember that most social revolutions ended in dictatorship, not democracy.⁴³ The application of theories of revolution to the Russian case, a seemingly rich research agenda, has only recently begun.⁴⁴ American political scientists have tended to shy away from this grandiose (and difficult to explain) label for examining the collapse of communism in Europe and Asia.⁴⁵ Russian scholars, and even some politicians, have been much more willing to deploy the discourse of revolution to events and processes under way in their country over the last two decades.⁴⁶

Decolonization is another useful framework.⁴⁷ In the post-communist world, three multi-ethnic states—the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia—had to collapse before democratic or autocratic regimes could consolidate. Twenty-two of the twenty-seven states in the post-communist world did not exist before communism's collapse. Rather than an extension of the third wave of democratization, this explosion of new states is more analogous to the wave of decolonization and regime emergence that followed World War II throughout the British, French, and Portuguese empires, and like this earlier wave of state emergence, the delineation of borders may have been a necessary condition, but certainly was not a sufficient condition, for democratization. Most of the new postcolonial states that formed after World War II claimed to be making a transition to democracy, but only a few succeeded in consolidating democratic systems. Similarly, in the post-communist world the consolidation of liberal democracy has been the exception, not the rule.

Though sympathetic to these other frameworks, we have written a book about Russian regime change and not a book about Russia's second revolution or decolonization. The focus is on political change, because this is the dimension of Russia's triple transformation that remains most unsettled and least complete. The Soviet empire has collapsed and will never be reconstituted. Belarus may join Russia again, and Russia's internal borders in the Caucasus are still hotly contested, but the coercive subjugation of states and people adjacent to Russia's borders appears unlikely. Even though thousands of lives have been lost as a result of this empire's dissolution, Russian decolonization has been relatively peaceful when compared with the collapse of other empires.⁴⁸ The Soviet command economy is also extinct. Today Russia has a market economy.⁴⁹ This market system is severely flawed, but the key practices and institutions of the Russian economy today look more like those of other capitalist economies and less like the practices and institutions of the Soviet era.⁵⁰ Even the Communist Party of the Russian Federation now endorses the basic tenets of capitalism.

The final settling point of political transformation, however, is still uncertain. The autocratic institutions of the Soviet regime have collapsed, but what set of institutions will replace this old system has not been fully determined. Our book aims to shed light on possible trajectories. One possible outcome is the creation of a new kind of autocratic regime, different from Soviet dictatorship, but dictatorship nonetheless. Such a return to the past does not seem likely when discussing either the Russian economy or Russia's

relations with its former colonies. Therefore paying greater attention to the future of Russia's political system, while giving less attention to the future of Russia's borders or Russian capitalism, seems appropriate.

Explaining Regime Type and Its Trajectory

In this book we deliberately did not superimpose an equation of independent and dependent variables from American political science onto our analysis of Russia's polity. The Russian authors involved in this project resisted this form of American hegemony. Nonetheless, several common factors that influence the formation of Russia's political system do emerge.

A Nondemocratic Inheritance

The actors and institutions that make democracy work were far less developed in Russia at the time of transition from communist rule than in other transitions to democracy in Latin American, southern Europe, and even post-communist East Central Europe. Many cases in these other regions were actually instances of redemocratization as countries resurrected democratic constitutions, political parties, and civil society.⁵¹ Russia, however, had no such democratic institutions, parties, or civil society to rekindle.⁵² The lack of democratic social capital was particularly glaring. No political system has ever been more hostile to civil society than the communist totalitarian regime Stalin erected. Although pre-Soviet Russia also accorded the state pride of place and limited the arenas of autonomous society, even the tsars permitted important nongovernmental organizations to exist, especially after 1861. The Soviet Union did not. Because Marxist theory predicted an end to all political and social conflict after the proletarian revolution, organization for the sake of any particularistic interest had no place in a communist society. Divergent group interests were to be transcended; the interests of all became the interests of one, embodied in the state. In keeping with ideological dictates, the Soviet state's most salient characteristic became destruction of the space between the individual and the state, the space that in noncommunist states is occupied by civil society organizations, such as trade unions, social networks, private business associations, public associations, clubs, and religious groups. These institutions were either rooted out altogether or absorbed into the sprawling

state and the Communist Party, so that all social exchange was carried out under the guise of the party-state. This system atrophied slowly and consistently after Stalin's death. Nonetheless, we should not be surprised that the shadow of seventy years of communist rule still remains a decade later.

Similarly, Russian democrats could not dust off democratic constitutions of previous eras or breathe new life into old political parties of a democratic orientation.⁵³ Instead, Russia inherited social capital and institutional legacies from the Soviet era (and before) that impeded democratic consolidation.⁵⁴ Russia was not even starting with a blank slate, but with a cluttered political landscape that had to be cleared before the construction of democracy could begin. The process still has not ended. Lingering antidemocratic legacies feature prominently in many of the chapters.

The Process of Transition

In addition to an antidemocratic inheritance, Russia made the transition from communist rule by a process that did not facilitate the emergence of democratic institutions. The mode of transition affects the kind of regime that emerges.⁵⁵ The nature of Russia's transition from communist rule—protracted, conflictual, and imposed by the winners of the contests rather than negotiated—has impeded the consolidation of liberal democratic institutions and liberal democratic values. In other words, a causal relationship exists between the kind of transition and the kind of democracy that emerges.

The democratization literature has identified pacted transitions as those most likely to produce liberal democracy. Pacted transitions occur when the balance of power between the ancien regime and democratic challengers is relatively equal. In summing up the results of their multivolume study, O'Donnell and Schmitter asserted that “political democracy is produced by stalemate and dissensus rather than by prior unity and consensus.”⁵⁶ Philip Roeder has made the same claim in his analysis of post-communist transitions: “The more heterogeneous in objectives and the more evenly balanced in relative leverage are the participants in the bargaining process of constitutional design, the more likely is the outcome to be a democratic constitution.”⁵⁷ When both sides realize that they cannot prevail through the use of their own unilateral power, they agree to seek mutually beneficial solutions. Democratization requires a stalemate, “a prolonged and inconclusive struggle.”⁵⁸ As Daniel Levine formulated, “[D]emocracies emerge out of

mutual fear among opponents rather than as the deliberate outcome of concerted commitments to make democratic political arrangements work.”⁵⁹ Moderate, evolutionary processes are considered by transitologists as good for democratic emergence; radical revolutionary processes are considered bad. Cooperative bargains produce democratic institutions; noncooperative processes do not.⁶⁰ As Przeworski concludes, “Democracy cannot be dictated; it emerges from bargaining.”⁶¹

Such processes work best when they are protracted, slow, and deliberate. Drawing on earlier experiences of democratization, Harry Eckstein asserted that post-communist “democratization should proceed gradually, incrementally, and by the use of syncretic devices . . . Social transformation is only likely to be accomplished, and to be accomplished without destructive disorders, if it spaced out over a good deal of time, if it is approached incrementally (i.e., sequentially), and if it builds syncretically upon the existing order rather than trying to eradicate it.”⁶² Advocates of this theoretical approach assert that “conservative transitions are more durable” than radical transformations.⁶³

Russia’s regime, however, did not emerge from bargaining over a long period. It emerged abruptly from conflict in a short period.⁶⁴ The transition from communist rule first began when Mikhail Gorbachev initiated a series of liberalization measures, including greater freedom of speech, elections, and a new relationship between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Soviet state. As the head of a totalitarian regime, Gorbachev imposed these reforms from above, but eventually these measures gave rise to new and independent political actors with more radical agendas for change.⁶⁵ Although Gorbachev and other reformers within the old Soviet regime periodically attempted to negotiate with moderates in Russia’s democratic movement, they did not succeed in reaching a transition agreement. Instead, regime hardliners tried to roll back reform by decreeing emergency rule in August 1991, an action that Russia’s democratic forces succeeded in defeating.

The failed August 1991 coup created another propitious moment for an attempt at democratic transition. Led by Yeltsin, Russia’s democratic forces had a unique window of opportunity to design democratic institutions by negotiating a new set of political rules with their communist opponents. The holding of new elections and the adoption of a revised constitution might have helped to legitimate a democratic order, but Yeltsin decided not to take this course. Indeed, Yeltsin devoted little time to designing new political institutions, focusing instead on dismantling the Soviet Union and initiat-

ing economic reform. Opposition to Yeltsin's policies, particularly his economic policies, grew over time. In the murky institutional context of the first Russian republic, the conflict between Yeltsin and his opponents eventually became a constitutional crisis between the Russian president and the Russian Congress, which ended tragically in the fall of 1993 after another military confrontation between groups with conflicting visions of Russia's political system. Yeltsin once again prevailed in this standoff, but at a much higher price than in 1991: dozens of Russian civilians were killed.⁶⁶

Unlike in 1991, Yeltsin used his temporary political advantage in the fall of 1993 to institute a new political order. In November of that year he issued a new constitution and announced that a referendum on it would take place in December 1993. Viktor Sheinis, one of the authors of this constitution, discusses the basic features of this document in chapter 3. At the same time, voters were asked to elect representatives to a new bicameral parliament. Yeltsin and his side dictated the new rules. The opposition had only two options: accept the new rules dictated by Yeltsin or return to the barricades. Their acquiescence was a positive step for democracy. That these rules were not negotiated, however, had negative consequences for Russian democracy. Most important, as detailed in chapter 4, the 1993 constitution gave the president extraordinary powers. The executive branch not only faced few checks on its power, but the president also acquired the resources to maintain his or his successor's position of power.⁶⁷

Concentrated power in the hands of the president did not result from a Russian cultural or historical proclivity for strong leaders.⁶⁸ The office of the presidency and then the considerable powers assigned to this presidential office emerged directly from the transition process.⁶⁹ A different kind of transition might have produced a different balance of power between the man in the Kremlin and everyone else.

The Political Economy of Post-Communism

Another barrier to democratic development in Russia is the structure of organized interests in the economy that has emerged in response to Russia's particular transition from communism to capitalism. The kinds of economic reforms pursued have influenced the type of political system that has emerged. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the people and organizations that had benefited from the Soviet economy did not cease to exist. On the contrary, these groups organized to defend their interests. The directors

of state enterprises, in cooperation with trade unions organized during the Soviet era, moved aggressively to defend their property rights at the enterprise level. This coalition proved to be an effective interest group during the first years of the post-Soviet era.⁷⁰ Later in the decade a new group of economic actors—the oligarchs—emerged as a result of insider privatizations allowed by the government.⁷¹

These “red directors” control over mammoth Soviet era enterprises and the avarice of the oligarchs squeezed the middle class as an economic force, a highly deleterious development for Russian democracy. If Barrington Moore’s dictum “no bourgeoisie, no democracy” still holds, then Russia cannot be a democracy.⁷² Nor has the Russian labor movement organized to press for democratization.⁷³ As discussed in chapter 6, this structure of ownership and socioeconomic organization has impeded the emergence of civil society, because the middle class often provides the bulk of funding and participation for nongovernmental organizations in developed democracies. Because the oligarchs are highly dependent on the state, they have remained loyal to those in the state, using their resources to help incumbents when necessary. When some of the oligarchs have attempted to play a role in politics autonomous from the state, the state has moved quickly to check their political activities and erode their economic fortunes. Russia’s per capita gross national product has not reached the levels generally thought to be conducive to democratic stability.⁷⁴ On the contrary, the Russian economy endured a severe depression for most of the 1990s, making resources for nonessential activities scarce for most of the population. People have had neither the time nor the money to support participatory democracy.

The Reemergence of the State

Another factor that features prominently in many of the chapters is the reemergence of the state as a major player in Russian politics. The latent power of the Russian state in political affairs was always apparent, but it has only recently been deployed in ways that have negative consequences for democratic development.

Many considered the Soviet Union to be one of the strongest states in the world. Unconstrained by societal demands, Soviet leaders had the power to distribute resources as they saw fit. They also faced few external constraints in relation to decision making, as the USSR was a military superpower anchoring a bloc of states relatively insulated from the international capi-

talist system. Accompanying this autonomy was genuine state capacity. While inefficient and corrupt, the state still dominated every aspect of life within the Soviet Union and had the ability to project power internationally. If someone wanted something done within the Soviet Union, the state was the only means available.

In the early years after the Soviet Union's collapse, the new Russian state appeared weak and broken. Decisions made in Moscow seemed to have little consequence outside the "garden ring," the inner boulevard of the Russian capital. Basic services traditionally provided by the state, such as a single currency, a common market, security, welfare, and education, were no longer public goods. State employees had to negotiate and strike just to be paid for work already completed. Contractual arrangements had to be self-enforcing to succeed. Mafias, security firms, and private armies assumed major responsibilities for providing security, in essence challenging the state's monopoly on the use of force. For a time, many transactions were conducted using barter or U.S. dollars, thereby marginalizing the role of the national currency. Finally, after the August 1998 financial meltdown, individual regions imposed trade barriers and export quotas, defying the notion of a national economy. Many cited this state weakness as an impediment to democratization and liberal practices.⁷⁵

The institutional coherence of the Russian state was also weak and ill-defined. Fractures emerged both between different levels of government and between different branches of the central government, dramatically undermining the state's autonomy as an independent actor.⁷⁶ With no constitutional delineation of rights and responsibilities between central and local authorities, regional governments seized the moment of Soviet collapse to assume greater political and economic autonomy. In March 1992, two autonomous republics, Tatarstan and Chechnya, declared their independence from the Russian Federation. Others soon followed. The Russian central state, only just constituted months before, had little capacity to counter these assertions of subnational authority. The stalemate between different branches of the central government precipitated an even greater state crisis. Soon after economic reform began in January 1992, the Russian Supreme Soviet and the Russian Congress of People's Deputies began a campaign to reassert their authority as the "highest state organ."⁷⁷ With no formal, or even informal, institutions to structure relations between the president and the Congress, the state virtually ceased to function. The polarization between branches of government occurred because of the deep ideological

divide between opposing camps. Polarization, in turn, produced state incapacity.

In many spheres the state remains weak, divided, and ineffective. The general trajectory since 1993, however, has been toward consolidating the state internally and lessening political divisions among those running it. The 1993 constitution outlined the basic institutional division of power within the national government and between central and regional powers. This clarity, in turn, has facilitated greater coherence in the policy-making process, especially because the executive branch of government has such clearly articulated advantages in relation to other branches. Equally important, the ideological divides that polarized the national government in the early 1990s no longer exist. Beginning in 1999, economic growth has also given the state a new flow of income that officials in power earlier in the decade did not enjoy.

In parallel, however, old state structures that never reformed or disappeared have regained some of their power from the Soviet era. Most dramatic has been the rise of the FSB. One of its own now runs the Kremlin and nearly a hundred more have crossed into civilian service to assume senior positions in the government.⁷⁸ The Ministry of Defense is one of the least reformed bureaucracies left over from the Soviet days. While Russia's armed forces have demonstrated a limited capacity to project force in Chechnya, the military's influence on political decisions has grown significantly in recent years. The Ministry of Internal Affairs is another unreformed branch of government whose capacity to influence political outcomes has grown with time.

This rising state has not been accompanied by a commensurate strengthening of society, and most certainly not of political society. The balance of power between the state and civil society is heavily skewed in favor of the former. Especially in recent years, the state has begun to creep back into arenas considered privatized earlier in the decade. As discussed throughout the book, the state under Putin has played a direct role in influencing electoral outcomes, creating parties, organizing civil society, and obtaining control of national media outlets.

Putin's move to strengthen the state is not surprising. Like all revolutions in their later stages, the consolidation of regime change requires greater state power, more order, and even a return of some old practices, that is, a Thermidorean reaction.⁷⁹ The rise of state capacity need not be directly and

negatively correlated with democracy. Democracies need capacious states to defend individual liberties. The state's re-penetration into realms society has only recently reclaimed, however, is not the kind of state capacity needed for democratic development. On the contrary, the reconstitution of a coherent and powerful state, albeit only in certain spheres, has eroded democratic development, not enhanced it.⁸⁰

Individual Actions, Policies, and Choices About Institutions

After recognizing the negative consequences for democratic development of the Soviet inheritance, the nature of Russia's transition, and the rise of the state, many chapters add another important factor: individuals and the policies they pursued. In addition to structural factors, individuals can play an instrumental role in crafting the political institutions of a regime in transition. In stable institutional settings in which individuals select from the same menu of choices over multiple iterations, the role of particular individuals is minimal. In stable settings the preferences and power of social groups are also relatively fixed, thereby constraining the leaders who represent these groups. In uncertain institutional settings, however, the causal role assigned to unique individuals is greater.⁸¹

Yeltsin's leadership style, his norms, and his policy preferences had huge consequences for the trajectory of Russian democracy in the 1990s.⁸² Not all democratic failures and shortcomings in post-communist Russia can be blamed on the long shadows of Ivan Grozny or Joseph Stalin. Yeltsin made his contributions too, as did his close allies and his ardent enemies. Yeltsin also made positive contributions to democratic development that might not have occurred with another leader. Democracies do not just emerge organically as a result of modernization. People make them.

People can also undo them. The impact of a single leader on regime trajectory has become even more apparent during the Putin era, because Putin has good health, youth, energy, and popularity. While these attributes have given him the capacity to have a fundamental impact on the evolution of Russia's political system, they did not determine his course of action.⁸³ On the contrary, another individual in the Kremlin with these same attributes might have pushed Russia in a more democratic direction. As several chapters highlight, Putin's role and policies cannot be underemphasized.

That Putin's rise to power has had such a major impact on the regime suggests that the current political system is not consolidated. This condition gives some cause for hope. As will become clear, the trajectory of democracy in Russia today is in a negative direction, yet this regime has not consolidated into a full-blown dictatorship.⁸⁴ Whether Putin wants to move toward creating such a regime still remains in question. Whether he could is also not certain.