

# Rationality, Structure, and Agency in Post-Soviet Russian Democratization

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Georgi M. Derluguian, *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World-System Biography*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Henry E. Hale, *Why Not Parties in Russia?: Democracy, Federalism, and the State*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Andrew Konitzer, *Voting for Russia's Governors: Regional Elections and Accountability Under Yeltsin and Putin*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

Bryon Moraski, *Elections by Design: Parties and Patronage in Russia's Regions*. (De Kalb: Northern Illinois Press, 2006).

Regina Smyth, *Candidate Strategies and Electoral Competition in the Russian Federation: Democracy Without Foundation*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, *Resisting the State: Reform and Retrenchment in Post-Soviet Russia*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

## Introduction

Why, more than 15 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and after repeated elections at both the regional and national levels, has post-Soviet Russia slid back into authoritarianism? Given the increasingly tense relations between the Kremlin and the West, this is a question of growing geopolitical importance. Analyzing it also turns out to be immensely fruitful for sharpening our theoretical understanding of the sources of democracy and autocracy more generally. While the decade and a half since the Soviet collapse has been a time of massive upheaval and hardship for the hundreds of millions of people liv-

ing in the region, it has also been something of a golden era for the study of comparative politics—as anyone who reads the works reviewed here will readily attest.

Together, these six books tackle one of the most important unresolved problems in social science: explaining where new political institutions come from. As Kathleen Thelen has pointed out, mainstream comparative theory, which has generally focused on the wealthy, established democratic states of North America and Europe, has tended to bracket this problem in order to focus on how institutions shape political outcomes.<sup>1</sup> The sudden and unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, followed by an extended period of political uncertainty in the core state of the USSR, Russia, provides as close to an ideal laboratory for exploring the origins of institutions as one might find. The authors bring to bear on the subject an impressive array of quantitative and qualitative methods, including cutting-edge statistical techniques, public opinion polling, historical process tracing, and extensive interviews with key decision makers. Moreover, despite some inevitable differences of interpretation, there is genuine consensus among them on several key findings. Overall, these books allow us to reach a counterintuitive conclusion: Russian democracy did not fail because of the “irrationality” of its political culture but precisely because Russian citizens and elites alike have made short-term political choices that, however problematic for democratic consolidation, were entirely rational in the social environment

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bequeathed by the failure of the Soviet experiment at the local, national, and even international levels. This review will examine each of these levels of analysis in turn.

### Elections and Power in Russia's Regions

To assert the rationality of post-Soviet Russian voters and politicians at the subnational level goes against some deeply ingrained stereotypes—both in the West and in Russia itself—which paint provincial Russia as hopelessly unenlightened, economically stagnant, and politically reactionary. As Andrew Konitzer points out in his wonderful study of the dynamics of Russian gubernatorial elections in the post-Soviet period, such stereotypes played an important role in justifying Vladimir Putin's 2004 decision to adopt a system of central appointment of governors, in effect ending the country's decade-long experiment in constitutional federalism.<sup>2</sup> Democracy in Russia's regions, Putin and his supporters now assert, generated a corrupt, semifeudal rule by local oligarchs that ultimately threatened the country with total disintegration; restoration of the "vertical of power" from the local level to the Kremlin will thus allow Russia to rebuild an effective modern state.

Konitzer demonstrates conclusively in *Voting for Russia's Governors* that this analysis is misguided: Russia's regional voters, when given the opportunity, have actually had a pretty consistent record of throwing out ineffective governors at the ballot box. In fact, the overall rates of incumbent reelection success per annum in Russian gubernatorial elections from 1995 until 2001 ranged from 40% to 77%—rates far lower than the typical rate of incumbent success for United States governors, for example.<sup>3</sup> Of course, such aggregate data do not by themselves prove that Russian voters based their electoral decisions on the criterion of gubernatorial performance in office. They might instead have been inspired to reject incumbents as a general protest against the central authorities. Perhaps they were manipulated to vote even against good governors by biased media sources, or simply confused by various electoral "dirty tricks." Konitzer acknowledges these alternative explanations, and proceeds to debunk them through painstaking empirical research and analysis.

To begin with, while "referendum voting" against all incumbent governors did make some sense in the first cycle of regional elections from 1996 to 1997, when most of these incumbents were still the appointees of a deeply unpopular President Boris Yeltsin, by the second round of gubernatorial elections Russian voters were in almost all cases forced to assess candidates they themselves had previously elected. And they did so, Konitzer shows, on the basis of rather sophisticated economic criteria. His logarithmic regression analysis of individual-level poll data gathered a few months before the 2000 gubernatorial election in Ul'ianovsk region,

for example, shows that support for the incumbent governor Goriachev—who had positioned himself as a defender of the poor against Yeltsin's marketization policies—was significantly correlated with positive voter assessments of the overall direction of Ul'ianovsk's economy *and* with positive judgments about how Ul'ianovsk had performed in comparison with other Russian regions. By contrast, individual pocketbook assessments of one's own economic situation—presumably not something under the governor's direct control—played no significant role in the outcome, while exposure to biased partisan print media had only a minimal influence (although those who watched the regional pro-regime television station were statistically a bit more likely to vote for Goriachev than for his opponent). Goriachev's defeat in 2000, in short, reflected the rational judgment by a clear majority of the Ul'ianovsk electorate that his so-called Ul'ianovsk model of economic protectionism was a failure.<sup>4</sup>

Konitzer then moves on to an examination of aggregate data covering Russian gubernatorial elections from 1996 to 2001, utilizing an original comprehensive database containing more than a hundred variables compiled from government and Internet sources. Here, he finds that one administrative technique in particular did play an important role in protecting even poorly performing incumbents from electoral defeat: raising the effective number of candidates on the ballot, which divided the opposition vote and allowed sitting governors to remain in office even with low pluralities. Still, after controlling for the effective number of candidates in regional elections, Russian voters were significantly more likely to reelect their governors where they assessed recent changes in regional economic performance as positive relative to other Russian regions.

To the extent that they were afforded the opportunity to do so, then, the Russian regional electorate did tend to reward effective governors and to punish ineffective ones. In a decentralized polity where governors in fact possessed a high degree of policy influence, such voting patterns demonstrate that Russian democracy actually allowed ordinary people at least some role in determining their political futures. By contrast, Konitzer shows, the system of centralized gubernatorial appointments in neighboring Ukraine during the same time period appeared to reward incumbents who delivered high regional vote totals to the ruling coalition, regardless of their regional economic performance. This is the unfortunate result that the author predicts, based on his findings, for the newly centralized Russian polity as well. If Putin's aim is to attack corrupt regional machines, the abolition of gubernatorial elections may well be a treatment that only exacerbates the underlying disease.

Since Russia's local voters and politicians appear to have reacted quite rationally to the institutional incentives they have faced, the sources of erosion of Russian regional democracy must logically also be found at the institutional level. Why, then, were Russia's regional electoral institutions

originally designed as they were? And why, exactly, did Putin change the rules so comprehensively after his election as president in 2000? This is the subject of Bryon Moraski's tightly-argued book *Elections by Design*. Moraski's study is one of the first to tackle head-on the "endogeneity problem" in research on electoral institutions—that is, the possibility that electoral rules, rather than shaping the expression of social interests, may instead be their effect. Here, the author takes advantage of the fact that in the early post-Soviet era, when central guidance over regional politics was still unconsolidated, the 89 "subjects" of the Russian Federation adopted a range of different electoral formulas, district sizes, and assembly sizes. This natural experiment in subnational rule-making, along with the assumption that Russian regional politicians can be understood as power-maximizers, allows Moraski to investigate the potential causes of variation through statistical analysis. He constructs ingenious measures to test many of the key factors that political scientists hypothesize as influencing institutional choices—including whether rule designers were "insiders" or "outsiders" in the old Soviet power structure; levels of support for Yeltsin's government both among regional executives and among regional populations; the timing of the introduction of new electoral rules; the administrative status of the region (with ethnic republics having greater autonomy compared to ordinary Russian oblasts); the strength of regional political parties; and the degree of regional ethnic heterogeneity. Moraski's overall expectation is that one should find more permissive electoral rules as measured by district magnitude and assembly size where regional political competition is highest; where old bosses face little or no opposition, they should adopt simple single-member district SMD plurality rules that tend to inhibit future political challenges.

It must be noted that there is one major confounding element for Moraski's "natural experiment": Shortly after his dissolution of the old Congress of People's Deputies in October 1993, President Yeltsin decreed that regions should adopt SMD plurality electoral rules for regional parliaments, and as Moraski's data show, a clear majority of Russia's regions—though by no means all of them—followed these instructions.<sup>5</sup> This makes it difficult to interpret whether the adoption of SMD plurality by any given Russian region demonstrates the desire of powerful political insiders to shut out potential competitors or, on the contrary, the "reformist" impulse of local executives trying to support Yeltsin's program. Indeed, Moraski's statistical analysis demonstrates that the number of months that elapsed after Yeltsin's dismissal of the Congress is the strongest and most significant predictor of district magnitudes for regional assembly elections, confirming Grigorii Golosov's argument that "the adoption of electoral systems employing party-list proportional representation (PR) probably resulted from regional actors imitating the federal government" after the Duma elections of December 1993.<sup>6</sup> Still, Moraski's data provide suggestive quantitative evi-

dence that much of the remaining variation in regional political rules can be explained by efforts by local elites to cement their political power. This hypothesis is further borne out in his careful qualitative comparison of the process by which legislative electoral rules were designed and implemented in the Russian regions of Novosibirsk and Saratov and the ethnic republics of Buriatia and Udmurtia.

Moraski's analysis thus makes it clear that the endogeneity problem is hardly just a theoretical one. Russian regional politicians in the early post-Soviet period understood reasonably well what sorts of electoral rules would best serve their interests, and they acted on this information as best they could. A more robust system of regionally competitive political parties might have led to electoral systems with higher district magnitudes and greater assembly sizes—as in Saratov, where Moraski argues that a relatively high degree of initial regional political competition led to negotiations to adopt a mixed SMD/PR system.<sup>7</sup> In most places, however, despite variations reflecting the unique features of particular regional political environments, the resulting legislative electoral rules worked to maintain the power of local elite networks inherited from the Soviet past, rather than to open up the political space to newcomers. Putin's recent decision to mandate the use of a uniform mixed SMD/PR system for all future regional legislative elections, Moraski concludes, probably comes too late to have much effect on regional patronage networks, since regional actors have by now "acquired experience manipulating electoral outcomes."<sup>8</sup>

Konitzer and Moraski disagree about the extent to which continued Russian subnational elections might ultimately have displaced entrenched elites over time, with the former emphasizing the ability of rational voters to oust ineffective governors despite institutional obstacles, and the latter stressing the ability of regional political machines to fend off challenges to their dominance. To some extent this may reflect the difference between Konitzer's focus on gubernatorial elections, where individual turnover in the 1990s was reasonably high, and Moraski's focus on regional legislatures, where control by local political networks was comparatively harder to challenge. On a deeper level, however, the two arguments can be seen as logically consistent: Elections in Russia's regions did give Russian voters some opportunity to "throw the bums out"—but as even Konitzer admits, that opportunity could be short-circuited where powerful regional elites could shape institutional rules and electoral processes so as to divide and conquer their weak political oppositions.

What was clearly missing in the regional democratization process of the Yeltsin and early Putin eras, Konitzer and Moraski agree, was the sort of national party system that might have welded together local political opposition forces for coordinated collective action in order to channel economic discontent among voters and to push for fairer, more strictly enforced electoral rules. Thus, the

puzzle of Russia's failed regional democratization leads us to examine a higher-order puzzle: the failure of Russian political parties to consolidate. And yet this failure, too, appears to have entirely rational causes, as Henry Hale's and Regina Smyth's pathbreaking studies show.

### **Elections and Russia's Party System**

Hale's *Why Not Parties in Russia?* presents what may be the most careful study to date of a nascent party system in formation. As Hale shows through a meticulous empirical analysis of survey and electoral data covering the decade from the adoption of the new Russian constitution in 1993 until Putin's reelection to a second term in March 2004, the story of the Russian party system is more complex than either optimists or pessimists have generally realized. Over the course of the first post-Soviet decade, the main Russian parties were able to establish links with quite distinct sectors of the Russian electorate, and they have played a crucial role in supporting campaigns at the national level for the Russian Duma for the half of the seats allocated by party-list PR. Even more strikingly, since the 1995 election, party affiliation has generally had a statistically significant impact on the success of candidates for the Duma's SMD seats as well, even controlling for the personal resources they brought to the campaign.<sup>9</sup> On the negative side, however, only a handful of parties have managed to survive from the first Duma election of 1993 until the present day, and only two of these—the Communist Party of the Russian Federation led by Gennadii Ziuganov, and the farcical nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia led by Vladimir Zhirinovskii—remain in the current parliament. Most regional governors have avoided making serious commitments to party organizations, too, frequently switching parties or even declaring their allegiance to multiple parties when expedient. Crucially, both President Yeltsin and President Putin chose to remain “above parties”—sending a strong signal to ambitious politicians throughout Russia.

What explains this mixed pattern? Most analyses of comparative party systems, Hale argues, have focused on the sources of “demand” for parties, whether to represent social cleavages or to solve collective-action problems among ambitious politicians. The problem in Russia, Hale points out, lies instead on the “supply” side of the electoral “market.” Building effective national parties requires sufficient administrative and/or ideational capital—both of which were quite scarce in the post-Soviet milieu.<sup>10</sup> Ambitious Russian politicians discovered over time that “party substitutes,” ranging from politicized “financial-industrial groups” (PFIGs) to the machines of provincial Russian politicians, could often provide more effective electoral services during campaigns than parties themselves. Hale demonstrates statistically that candidate support from PFIGs or governors has tended to be inversely correlated

with support from Russian parties—showing that parties and party substitutes are truly competing in the electoral market. Furthermore, he shows that the backing of party substitutes, as well as of parties, has been a significant factor boosting the electoral prospects of candidates, at the national as well as the regional level.<sup>11</sup>

In sum, Hale shows that even after repeated elections, political parties do not always close out the electoral market. Whether or not they do so will depend instead on the specific authoritarian institutional legacies shaping political competition in various new democracies. The failure of most national parties in Russia, he argues, reflects the legacy of what Herbert Kitschelt has termed the “patrimonial” form of communism inherited from the Soviet Union, which concentrated political and economic power in the hands of state elites in ways that have made it extremely difficult to organize any truly independent political opposition.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, Hale argues, in the end the most effective “party substitute” in post-Soviet Russia has been the state itself. This became clear during the pivotal 1999 Duma campaign, when the early organizational success of the Fatherland-All Russia party made it appear for the first time that the various political machines of powerful Russian governors and local oligarchs might combine to wrest power from the established central elite. Paralleling the pattern in nineteenth-century Europe, when the threat of social democracy spurred the formation of European conservative parties, the Fatherland-All Russia threat finally galvanized the Kremlin to build its own strong pro-state party, Unity.<sup>13</sup> After Unity's remarkable performance in the 1999 elections, President Putin continued to invest significant state resources in turning its successor “United Russia” into a truly hegemonic “party of power.” By 2004, United Russia controlled over two-thirds of the seats in the State Duma and was making significant progress in dominating regional elections as well. Yet while United Russia had become the clearly dominant state party, Putin himself still refused to join it. How powerful regional elites might react to any perceived uncertainty about the party's backing in the Kremlin—especially after the 2008 Russian presidential elections, when Putin is scheduled to step down from office—remained an open question. Thus, Hale concludes, it is too soon to conclude that Russia's “electoral market” has been shut down for good.

Smyth's *Candidate Strategies and Electoral Competition in the Russian Federation* explores many of the same issues covered in Hale's book, but from a very different theoretical and empirical perspective that focuses on the factors influencing the political strategies of candidates themselves. Most political scientists, Smyth notes, have simply assumed that repeated, reasonably free and fair elections will suffice to generate incentives for candidates to adopt policy positions that appeal to local constituents, that are consistent enough over time to generate stable electoral



reputations, that facilitate their organization into national parties with reasonably clear ideologies, and that eventually allow voters to use candidates' party affiliations as an "informational shortcut" at the ballot box. Under the conditions of high political uncertainty and low information typical of new democracies, however, each step in this process turns out to be both complex and contingent. In other words, she argues, we need to study the "microfoundations of democratic responsiveness": Under what circumstances do the individual choices of politicians in new democracies empirically generate "feedback loops" that reinforce the stability of democratic institutions?<sup>14</sup>

To begin with, Smyth finds that international context matters a great deal. Postcommunist democracies that were candidates to join the European Union, and that adopted parliamentary systems of the Western European type, enjoyed relatively predictable institutional environments within which candidates for election had enough information to shape successful platforms with strong links to national party programs and local constituencies, generating relatively consolidated democracies over time. Throughout the non-Baltic former Soviet Union, in contrast, political uncertainty has tended to undercut the process of democratic institution building.<sup>15</sup>

The Russian case provides a revealing empirical case study of this dynamic. On the basis of Smyth's original surveys of candidates for the Russian parliament in 1995 and 1999, she is able to show systematically why no "virtuous circle" propelling individual Russian candidates rationally to contribute to the consolidation of democratic institutions could develop. To begin with, Russian candidates who declared that their primary ambition was to have a political career frequently chose to rely on their personal resources to run as independents for SMD seats, rather than join parties that might disappear by the next election. Even among those candidates who explicitly stated their desire to support party building, pervasive political uncertainty made it impossible to engage in strategic coordination. With 43 parties on the ballot in 1995, for example, no one could know with certainty whether one's favored party would surpass the 5% barrier for PR representation; one knew only that the chances of gaining party representation in the future could go down—making it irrational for backers of any particular party to drop out. In such a chaotic electoral environment, too, candidates often lacked sufficient information to figure out precisely in which districts to run (despite the lack of any residency requirement in Russian Duma campaigns); this situation was exacerbated by the fact that the boundaries of electoral districts themselves have changed in every parliamentary election.<sup>16</sup> Finally, given the unpredictable mix of partisan and nonpartisan candidates running in each election, there could be no effective coordination of candidates' campaign messages. Candidates decided whether to emphasize personal appeals, issue appeals, or partisan appeals in

their parliamentary campaigns, based largely on their individual assessments of their local electoral resources—leaving voters with no reliable way to assess the confusing cacophony of campaign information. The result was a vicious cycle in which electoral uncertainty begat future electoral uncertainty, undermining, rather than reinforcing, the infrastructure of democratic responsiveness. Smyth's brilliant book thus demonstrates both theoretically and empirically just why ordinary Russian voters might initially have done their best to support parties and candidates truly representing their views and interests—and yet, by the end of the Yeltsin era, still have concluded that elections were essentially a waste of time.

Indeed, the four books examined so far, taken together, provide a comprehensive tour of how rational choices at every level can lead to democratic failure in new and uncertain democracies. Rational Russian voters tossed out ineffective governors where they could—but without strong parties to coordinate political opposition, this only provided even greater incentives for rational local elites to bend the rules and mobilize "administrative resources" in order to subvert the electoral process. Rational Russian candidates refused to commit themselves to inchoate and often ephemeral party organizations, creating an electoral environment in which the resources of local bosses and post-Soviet regional political machines became effective party substitutes. But when these local bosses began successfully to unite against the center under the banner of the Fatherland-All Russia Party in 1999, rational actors in the Kremlin moved to build an effective "party of power," United Russia, to counteract this threat. Once United Russia was successfully established, it became rational for Russian citizens and politicians alike to pledge at least formal allegiance to this party. Finally, as Mancur Olson would predict, rational Russians had no individual incentive to contribute to collective action in order to protest growing Kremlin power.<sup>17</sup> The end result of these individually rational Russian decisions, however, is an increasingly authoritarian one-party system in which the scope for effective political opposition has nearly been eliminated.

The recognition that Russian democracy has failed as the result of rational action, rather than of supposed deficiencies in Russia's "political culture," raises profound questions for comparative politics. Put simply: What is it, exactly, about the post-Soviet Russian context that has generated such a vicious cycle of electoral uncertainty that has ultimately encouraged an authoritarian "solution"? Is Russia unique, or is such a pattern likely to be repeated in other uncertain new democracies during the twenty-first century? These questions, however, necessarily require us to turn from a focus on individual choices to the analysis of political structure. To be sure, both Smyth and Hale also emphasize the importance of Leninist legacies for understanding the challenges of post-Soviet Russian democratic state building. The final two books

reviewed here, however, shift our analytic attention away from the strategies of individual politicians directly to the structural factors that shape these strategies—and in particular, the organization of political power in the Soviet system itself.

### State Decay in the Soviet Semiperiphery

In her important contribution *Resisting the State*, Kathryn Stoner-Weiss convincingly pinpoints one key source of the dysfunctionality of Russia's democratic institutions to date: the remarkable weakness of the post-Soviet Russian state. Successful democratic capitalism, as Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan have emphasized, requires some sort of effective state authority over the territory it claims as its jurisdiction—a point often overlooked in studies that focus primarily on the impact of variations in formal constitutional and electoral institutions.<sup>18</sup> If both local and regional electoral politics in Russia have been undermined by interference by regional patron–client relationships and constant changes in the rules of the game, this surely reflects the deleterious institutional legacies of the Soviet past.

The Soviet Union is typically thought of as a very strong state indeed. Stoner-Weiss, adopting the terminology of Michael Mann, argues that while Soviet state power was highly “despotic”—that is, the Kremlin was able to compel obedience to the commands of the central party-state—its “infrastructural” power, or ability to penetrate and coordinate civil society, was surprisingly weak.<sup>19</sup> Concentrating as it did both political and economic control in a single hierarchy under the direction of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), from Moscow down to the smallest villages, the Leninist system provided few avenues for horizontal communication among social actors from below. Thus, when Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* loosened CPSU oversight over regional elite decision making, the result was not so much the “rebirth of civil society” as a simple devolution of power to regional party-state elites—who were then forced to scramble to protect their wealth and power by consolidating control over local bureaucracies, state enterprises, and raw materials. In Stoner-Weiss's evocative phrase, Soviet *apparatchiki* were transformed into *entrepreneur-chiki*.<sup>20</sup> Reversing the historical process of state building in Western Europe, in which state officials attained resources by developing the capacity to tax independent economic actors, post-Soviet state officials have enriched themselves by rationally grabbing economic assets that had previously been concentrated in the state itself.<sup>21</sup>

Such a perspective on the sources of post-Soviet regional politics suggests that an analytic focus on non-Russian ethnicity as the primary cause of resistance to the Russian state is misplaced. Outside Chechnya—which clearly deserves an entirely separate treatment—the main source of post-Soviet Russian regionalism lies instead in the desire

of local elites to maintain control of key economic assets. Stoner-Weiss tests this hypothesis against an original comprehensive database of media reports of regional noncompliance with Russian federal law from January 1994, when the new Yeltsin constitution came into force, through December 1999, when Yeltsin stepped down as Russian president. The overall pattern is one of consistent central weakness, with 846 such violations reported over this six-year period—the majority dealing with quite basic economic and administrative jurisdictional issues.<sup>22</sup> Russian ethnic republics, she finds, were certainly more likely than ordinary nonethnic Russian regions to resist federal directives, both in the economic sphere and on issues pertaining to their legal status vis-à-vis the center. However, multivariate regression analysis shows that the percentage of non-Russians living in Russian republics had little independent effect on noncompliance, as one would expect if conflicts over ethnic identity per se were driving the results. Instead, the most important factors promoting regional assertiveness in ethnic republics and in Russian oblasts alike were economic ones: the presence of important industrial enterprises on a region's territory, regional economic wealth, and the presence of easily exportable raw materials.

Stoner-Weiss then supplements this statistical analysis with a survey of 824 public officials in 72 of Russia's 89 regions carried out in the fall of 1999 (with a remarkable overall response rate of approximately 90%). Her findings again present clear evidence of the erosion of Russian central state capacity during the first post-Soviet decade. Federal officials in Russian regions and non-Russian republics alike, for example, report that regional executives have influenced their activities as much as the federal authorities themselves—despite the lack of any constitutional role for the former officials in regulating purely federal funds.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, officials appointed by regional executives, who are formally supposed to be “jointly subordinated” to regional and federal agencies, report that in practice, the local governor has clearly been the most important figure influencing their work.<sup>24</sup> As for regional executives themselves, when asked with which groups and organizations they worked most effectively, the most popular response was “local/regional business circles,” mentioned by 26.7%, compared to just 18.2% mentioning “federal organs”; only a handful mentioned civil society organizations, political parties, or the church.<sup>25</sup> A final regression analysis suggests that the regions and republics whose executives reported the greatest influence of local business elites were statistically more likely to resist the federal government.<sup>26</sup> Overall, then, Stoner-Weiss's survey provides strong evidence that entrenched local bureaucrats and industrial elites were indeed the main obstacle to post-Soviet Russian state building—and makes it quite understandable that the Putin administration has proclaimed the goal of “rebuilding the Russian state” as its central mission.

Stoner-Weiss's analysis, however, also suggests that Russia's "weak state syndrome," given its deep structural roots, is likely to persist for some time to come.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Putin's efforts to restore central authority primarily by reestablishing a Soviet-style coercive hierarchy emanating from the Kremlin, she argues, can only reproduce the Soviet pattern of strong despotic power without accompanying infrastructural power. Such a combination is institutionally vulnerable to international, economic, and social shocks—as the collapse of the Soviet Union itself clearly shows.

Analyzing the failure of Russian democratization thus ultimately leads us back to a fundamental question: Just what sort of state was the Soviet Union, in comparative historical perspective? After all, post-Soviet Russia is not the sort of postcolonial, agrarian society in which one might expect the formal state administration to mask informal rule by local "strongmen";<sup>28</sup> it is the heir to a superpower that only a few decades ago challenged the United States for global supremacy. If Russian democracy has failed due to the cumulative effects of individual rational action in the context of weak and uncertain political institutions, this result could hardly have been predicted simply by extrapolating from the Soviet past. Despite the undeniably brutal tyranny imposed by the CPSU over its subjects during the Lenin and Stalin eras, by the post-Stalin period the Soviet Union had clearly achieved a high degree of social stability. And by the middle of the Gorbachev era, many Western analysts were quite optimistic about the prospects for democratic change in the USSR—precisely because of that regime's relatively strong record of industrialization, urbanization, and education.<sup>29</sup> What went wrong?

Georgi Derluguian's extraordinary study, *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus*, may be the single best book yet written on this subject. Indeed, with its magisterial analysis of the entire course of Soviet and post-Soviet history and intertwining of sociological and anthropological evidence to show precisely how the "world system" actually shapes the identities and actions of particular individuals, it is one of the most important contributions to social theory written in the postcommunist period. Derluguian persuasively argues that the primary source of the failure of democratic "transitions" in the former Soviet Union in general, and of the tragic outbreak of interethnic violence in the Caucasus in particular, lies in the late-twentieth-century breakdown of the "developmental state"—a regime type of which the Soviet Union itself was the most globally influential exemplar.

The episode that gives Derluguian his title refers to the author's encounter with Musa Shanib—or Yuri Shanibov, as he was known in the Soviet era—during his field research in the North Caucasus. Derluguian wished to understand Shanib's motivations in founding the "Assembly of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus," one of hundreds of

similar informal organizations designed to mobilize non-Russians to assert their cultural and political autonomy that were formed in the years before the collapse of the USSR. After casually remarking during their interview that he had been greatly influenced by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, Derluguian was taken aback to discover that Shanib, too, was a great fan of Bourdieu's work—even declaring that the Russian translation of Bourdieu's *Choses Dites* was "the second most important book in my life after the holy Quran!"<sup>30</sup> Upon Shanib's request, Derluguian later contacted Bourdieu to let the great sociologist know of his influence among Caucasus intellectuals, sending along a photo of Shanib and his colleagues at the Kabardino-Balkarian State University. Derluguian received a nice letter from Bourdieu in reply, in which he mentioned that he had put the photo of Shanib on his office desk—where it remained until his death.

Contained within this anecdote are several complex layers of reflexivity that force us to discard typical stereotypes about the Soviet Union, ethnic politics, and the process of scholarly research itself. Shanib, an important "ethnic entrepreneur" mobilizing a form of Islamic resistance to Russian rule in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet periods, is also a cosmopolitan intellectual, well aware of the cutting-edge Western social theories that might be used to analyze his behavior. Indeed, Shanib is embedded in the same global scholarly networks as Derluguian—who was himself born and raised in nearby Krasnodar—and Bourdieu himself, and, for that matter, everyone reading this review. It is hard to imagine a clearer and more thought-provoking example of how the Soviet Union, despite its formal institutional separation from the West during the Cold War, was part and parcel of the modern world system. At the same time, the contemporary Caucasus is clearly not Paris or Chicago. Shanib and other marginalized intellectuals within the post-Soviet milieu have been forced to shape their identities and to pursue their life goals in an environment of comprehensive social upheaval and, far too frequently, interethnic violence. How has this transformation taken place?

Derluguian's answer builds on a combination of insights from world-systems theorists such as Immanuel Wallerstein, comparative historical analysts such as Charles Tilly and Theda Skocpol, and Bourdieu's own structural theory of cultural capital. The Soviet model, Derluguian explains, was built upon the notion that the party-state could make seemingly "Utopian" Marxist-Leninist developmental goals a practical reality by, in effect, transforming Russia's feudal social structure as rapidly as possible into a "proletarian" one—thus catapulting the Soviet Union from the semiperiphery of global capitalism to a position of equality with its leading powers. The realization of this project generated a unique social structure built around just three classes: a small nomenklatura elite, a massive proletariat including both white-collar professionals and blue-collar

manual laborers (whose life circumstances were in many respects leveled out by their common subordination to the nomenklatura system), and a less fully integrated “subproletariat” of criminals, derelicts, and black marketeers. And despite the brutal violence of Stalinism, for most of the Soviet proletariat—that is, the vast majority of the Soviet population—the Soviet model largely delivered on its promises. Children born in the Stalin era, like Musa Shanib, saw their life circumstances improve rapidly, their educational opportunities expand, and their country ascend to a powerful status within the international system. The system even succeeded relatively well at “affirmative action” for non-Russian ethnic minorities, as Shanib(ov)’s own attainment of a decent academic position at a provincial university attests.<sup>31</sup> In sum, the Soviet developmental state gave the mass of Soviet citizens a respectable place in the world system—at the price of subordination to the ruling nomenklatura—for a period of several decades.

When the Soviet Union began to stagnate during the Brezhnev era, however, its sources of institutional and social reproduction gradually atrophied. Thanks to Leonid Brezhnev’s “trust in cadres” policy, the nomenklatura grew old in their positions of power, blocking further advancement from below by ambitious Soviet proletarians. Brezhnev’s reimposition of strict censorship in the wake of Nikita Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization campaign, too, drove even mildly original intellectuals underground—including Shanib, whose dissertation on “student self-governance as a learning process of socialist democracy” was now seen as ideologically unorthodox.<sup>32</sup> When, by the 1980s, the Soviet system was simultaneously buffeted by the Afghanistan crisis, the rise of Polish Solidarity, and the newly assertive leaderships of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, even the CPSU elite began to admit the need for serious reform. But Gorbachev, chosen by the party to carry out such changes from the top, could never fully escape the “habitus” of the nomenklatura.<sup>33</sup> He assumed that efforts to attack the Soviet “bureaucracy” and to encourage greater participation by Soviet citizens from below would somehow automatically be compatible with continued Communist Party rule. Instead, the effect of *glasnost*’ and *perestroika* was to give regional representatives of the nomenklatura elite the opportunity to grab state assets for themselves; to allow disgruntled members of the white-collar proletariat (such as the newly renamed Musa Shanib) to voice open support for ideologically unorthodox nationalism and/or liberalism; and—in places where the Soviet institutional order began to break down entirely—to allow increasing space for “violent entrepreneurship” by members of the subproletariat.<sup>34</sup>

By the time Gorbachev elected to use state force to try to counteract these multiple fissiparous tendencies in places like Tbilisi in April 1989, he soon discovered that the resulting bloodshed served only to redouble the resistance of incipient anti-Soviet movements. The need to

organize resistance against state violence, too, drastically increased the social importance of the subproletariat, which provided personnel already trained in, and culturally comfortable with, the day-to-day exercise of even brutal violence against “enemies.” Thus, by the end of the Soviet era, new alliances could be formed between once thoroughly Sovietized intellectuals like Shanib and the “bandits” of the Caucasus highlands, who together forged new “heroic” movements for ethnic self-assertion against an increasingly ineffectual Soviet center. Meanwhile, as Gorbachev watched power slip inexorably to the Soviet republics, the nomenklatura elite finished up the job of “stealing the state.”<sup>35</sup>

The consequences of the specific dynamics of Soviet collapse in hindering later efforts at post-Soviet state building, Derluguian shows, were profound. For one thing, this process ensured that the most lucrative assets of the old Soviet system would wind up in the hands of well-connected members of the old nomenklatura elite, while the mass of the Soviet proletariat—both white collar and blue collar—would experience a catastrophic loss of income and personal status. For another, the suddenness and totality of the Soviet collapse decisively undercut all efforts to reassert the importance of the state for successful economic recovery in the post-Soviet republics. Thus, it appeared to the vast majority of Soviet citizens as if the conspicuous, often obscene enrichment of former nomenklatura elites and black marketeers was, in fact, the essence of the new “Western-style” liberal capitalism trumpeted by both Yeltsin and his economic advisors. Meanwhile, in places like Nagorno-Karabakh and Chechnya—the most peripheral zones of what had once again become the periphery of the capitalist world system—clashes involving the ineffective militaries of weak post-Soviet states and rival networks of radicalized post-Soviet intellectuals and subproletarians descended into frightening levels of brutality.

Understanding this historical context puts us in a much better position to explain why formal democratic institutions in post-Soviet Russia did not end up generating the sorts of political behavior conducive to the consolidation of liberal democracy. Democracy, Derluguian concludes, depends upon the allegiance of ordinary citizens who see opportunities for advancement, in both material and status terms, within the context of legal and electoral institutions. Where such opportunities are perceived to be stable and reliable, elites and voters alike will tend to defend the long-run integrity of democratic institutions when they are threatened, rather than opt to subvert them to gain short-term payoffs. The collapse of the peculiar Soviet model of the developmental state generated a situation in which Russia found itself at the margins of global politics in an era of triumphant ideological neoliberalism; thus, no alternative proposal for building socially inclusive institutions was able to gain traction. The result has been an extended period during which Russian political life has



generally conformed to the rules of textbook rational choice theory under conditions of high uncertainty—that is, a world of perpetual individual defection from projects designed to promote the public good. It is hardly surprising, then, that Russians today are deeply cynical about Western democratic ideals.

If Derluguian's analysis is correct, however, many of the key dynamics of postcommunist Russian politics may well be replayed in many other parts of the world in the twenty-first century. To the extent that not only Marxist-Leninist developmentalism but also the idea of the developmental state in general have perished along with the Soviet Union, formally democratic institutions in the rest of the global periphery and semiperiphery may be undermined by similar kinds of social uncertainty and ethnic violence. Indeed, neoliberal triumphalism in the wake of the Soviet collapse may have blinded us, in the short run at least, to the crucial importance of strong states capable of providing basic social welfare for the success of democracy in the modern era—at least everywhere that democracy has thus far succeeded.

## Conclusion

In light of the works reviewed here, the experience of post-Soviet Russia is not simply an exotic story of interest to area specialists, but rather a crucial case study for theories of comparative democratization in the contemporary period. These works also show us the importance of combining the very best methodological tools now being developed within diverse social science paradigms. Rational choice analysis provides a useful method for analyzing the likely effects of formal electoral institutions in new democracies—and, as we have seen, it can also help us understand and predict the ways in which such institutions are likely to be subverted for short-term personal gain. Statistical analysis can help us sort out the multiple potential causes of poor institutional performance, often pointing toward counterintuitive analytic conclusions. However, rational choice theory and quantitative analysis alone tell us very little about the sources of social imagination that can inspire collective action in the service of new political visions—whether for good or for ill. Indeed, as we have seen, understanding the weakness of post-Soviet democracy requires us also to understand the 74-year experiment of Soviet developmentalism; but the rise and fall of the USSR, in turn, is inexplicable without taking into account the seemingly crazy dreams of marginal Russian Marxists of the early twentieth century such as Lenin, Trostky, and Stalin. In turbulent social environments characterized by ubiquitous short-term instrumental action, then, it may be precisely the tiny minority of politicians with sincere ideological commitments who have the most decisive impact on the future direction of institutional change. If so, we should prob-

ably pay much greater analytical attention today to the worldviews of those marginalized by contemporary capitalist globalization as we attempt to explain the success or failure of democratic transitions.

## Notes

- 1 Thelen 1999.
- 2 Konitzer 2006, 4.
- 3 Konitzer 2006, 84.
- 4 Konitzer 2006, 125.
- 5 Moraski 2006, 40.
- 6 Moraski 2006, 123; Golosov 2004.
- 7 Moraski 2006, 82–84.
- 8 Moraski 2006, 129.
- 9 Hale 2005, 124–25.
- 10 Hale 2005, 11–15.
- 11 Hale 2005, 178–90.
- 12 Hale 2005, 236; Kitschelt et al. 1999.
- 13 Hale 2005, 228–29; Shefter 1995.
- 14 Smyth 2006, 43–44.
- 15 Smyth 2006, 31–32.
- 16 Smyth 2006, 162.
- 17 Olson 1965.
- 18 Linz and Stepan 1996.
- 19 Stoner-Weiss 2006, 9.
- 20 Stoner-Weiss 2006, 31.
- 21 Stoner-Weiss 2006, 33.
- 22 Stoner-Weiss 2006, 60 n. 40.
- 23 Stoner-Weiss 2006, 83–84.
- 24 Stoner-Weiss 2006, 89.
- 25 Stoner-Weiss 2006, 92.
- 26 Stoner-Weiss 2006, 103.
- 27 Stoner-Weiss 2006, 147.
- 28 Migdal 1988.
- 29 See, for example, Lewin 1988.
- 30 Derluguian 2005, 61.
- 31 Derluguian 2005, 98; Martin 2001.
- 32 Derluguian 2005, 110.
- 33 Derluguian 2005, 302.
- 34 Volkov 2002.
- 35 Solnick 1998.

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