

Democracy, Civic Culture and Small Business in Russia's Regions: Social Processes in Comparative Historical Perspective. By Molly O'Neal. London: Routledge, 2016. xix, 237 pp. Notes. Glossary. Index. Figures. Tables. \$110.00, hard bound.

At a time when Russia is depicted as an increasingly authoritarian, monolithic state, Molly O'Neal has provided a refreshingly nuanced analysis of how democratization processes played out very differently in Russia's widely diverse regions from 1991 to 2010. The book's core questions are to what extent—and how, exactly—the prevalence of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) affected the development of democracy at a regional level. The book begins with an analysis of what democratization theory posits about this relationship in general; Chapters 2 and 3 provide a quantitative analysis of the same issue in regard to Russia. What brings the book to life, however, are the four fascinating case studies of post-Soviet “political economy” in the regions of Samara, Smolensk, Rostov, and Perm. The main conclusion is that the relationship between small-business prevalence and democratization is neither straightforward nor uniform.

The book begins with a consideration of theories of democracy, which is interesting in its own right but is not central to the book's analysis of the relationship between democratization and small-firm prevalence in Russia. What matters analytically is the functional definition of democracy, which is based on the index of ten indicators of democratization established by Nikolai Petrov and Alexei Titkov (33–34). The hypothesis is that there should be a positive correlation between the extent of democratization and the prevalence of small firms in any given region. While the data indicate that this was true for most regions, for a substantial minority of regions it was not; the question is why?

O'Neal proposes that the “democratic breakthrough” in Russia in 1991 led to the emergence of entrepreneurs and business associations, and that they then pushed democratization forward, which in turn enhanced the development of “civic business culture.” However, the extent to which this model held in different regions depended on the strength of the initial “democratic impulse” and the “antecedent conditions” in each region (4). The most important antecedent conditions were “civic memory,” urbanization, economic geography, natural resource endowments, and industrialization (212–13).

Space prohibits a detailed description of the case studies, but they make riveting reading. The cases represent the range of possible outcomes in terms of the relationship between democratization and the prevalence of SMEs. Samara is the “paradigmatic case” supporting the model, scoring high on the democracy index and high on the density of SMEs. Smolensk in its way supports the model too, scoring low on both indicators. The Rostov region, on the other hand, had a relatively high density of SMEs but a very low score on the democracy index. Perm Kray was the opposite, scoring high on the democracy index but low in terms of small-firm density. O'Neal does an excellent job explaining the variety of outcomes.

In all the cases, regional elites played a central role. Where there was extensive elite renewal—Samara and Perm—that included entrepreneurs entering the elites, democratization progressed. In Smolensk, the “old guard” reconsolidated after 1991, and in Rostov the governor centralized power in a form of “patrimonial politics” that stymied democratization in spite of the prevalence of small firms.

Similarly, the multiplicity of associations played a central role. Where associations like the Chamber of Commerce and branches of the Union of Entrepreneurs' Organizations of Russia were strong, democratization tended to thrive. The signature cases were Togliatti and Samara. The Perm Chamber and the Perm region's employer association *Sotrudinichestvo* played similar roles.

Finally, O'Neal argues that the strength of the democratization impulse in these regions was influenced by the "civic memory" of entrepreneurs. The book claims that when the people could reach back to tsarist period traditions of business, or to a history of regional opposition to the Bolsheviks, entrepreneurship and democratization advanced more quickly. I found the evidence for this claim the least substantial and convincing, but the general argument holds regardless.

For all the book's strengths, two issues raise analytical questions. First, although the case studies purport to be about *regions*, they are primarily about *cities*. While the cities dominate their regions, we cannot assume that the process of democratization in the cities would be the same as in the regions as a whole. It would have been helpful to analyze the same processes in smaller cities and towns. Second, some readers would challenge the author's characterization of 1991 as the moment of "democratic breakthrough" in Russia (3). Richard Sakwa, for example, famously describes the period from 1991 to 1993 as "phony democracy" (Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*, 2008, 40). Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinski go further, arguing that Yeltsin's government (among other things) "reduced the power and revenue base of local self-government, and by 1994 had imposed a regime of Byzantine authoritarianism on the country" (Reddaway and Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms*, 2001, 628). It seems incumbent on the author to explain regional "democratization" in light of the national political context, and indeed to explain how the author sees that context during the years in question.

It would be fascinating to know how democracy in Russia's regions has fared in the years since Putin's return to the presidency. This book would provide an excellent basis for comparison.

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