

Social Capital and Grassroots Democracy in Russia's Regions: Evidence from the 1999–2001 Gubernatorial Elections

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The election of Vladimir Putin and the consolidation of a post-Yeltsin regime are perhaps the most significant developments in Russian politics since the constitutional plebiscite and “engineered founding elections” of 1993.¹ Although Putin’s election brought a decisive end to the Yeltsin period and marked the first transfer of democratic power in Russia’s history, it does not tell us all that much about the progress of democratic consolidation in Russia. Beginning with Gorbachev’s policies of *perestroika*, *glasnost*, and *demokratizatsiya*, and continuing to the present day, democratization in Russia has been largely a top-down enterprise. For democracy to work in Russia, however, much more needs to happen than simply conducting national legislative and executive elections on schedule every four years. In fact, given the country’s vast size, perhaps democratic consolidation in Russia will depend more on events in the regions, cities, and towns than in the country’s capital. Participation in local politics is low, however, as it is in most industrialized societies. That leads to a particularly troubling situation, therefore, since society’s involvement in local politics may be lacking at precisely the time that it is most needed—the period of postcommunist state building, which, under Putin, may progress into the development of a neoauthoritarian state. The major defense against that would be a strong grassroots base of democracy and democratic support. But does one exist in Russia, and if so, is it up to the task ahead it?

Since Russian democracy as a whole rests to a large extent on successful regional democratization, the progress being made in Russia’s regions is of critical importance. The recent wave of gubernatorial elections provides the opportunity to search for signs of emerging bases of grassroots democracy and, alternatively, for indications of slides toward authoritarian rule. After a brief

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introduction to the topic of regional executive elections in Russia, I proceed by reviewing the general results of the 1999–2001 gubernatorial elections, including such issues as the role of incumbency and Kremlin support. Continuing, I attempt to determine the strength of grassroots democracy in Russia and the factors that may contribute to its development by constructing a regional democratization index based on the results of the gubernatorial elections. I then explore the relationship between grassroots democracy and social capital by analyzing sets of correlates, including indicators of civic engagement, associational life, and interest in public affairs. The results indicate that there is great diversity among Russia's regions in terms of grassroots democracy, with some regions having a vibrant democratic fabric while others seem to be moving toward neauthoritarianism. Moreover, the existence of social capital does seem to contribute to the strengthening of grassroots democracy in Russia, although it appears to be only one of several factors involved in that process. I thus conclude by discussing what some of the other factors might be.

Regional Executive Elections in Russia

During the past decade, Russia's republics, regions, cities, and towns have all undergone political reforms alongside those taking place in Moscow.² Unfortunately, the relative success of democratic reform on the national level has not been matched in regional and local politics. Regional democratization is perhaps just as important, because genuine democracy is impossible without the development of grassroots support to serve as a foundation. One necessary component of democracy is of course the introduction of electoral competition for the many positions of political leadership in the republics, regions, and cities.

As early as 1989 and 1990, when Soviet citizens went to the polls to vote for delegates to their republic-level legislatures many also had the opportunity to vote for their regional and city legislatures. To withstand electoral challenges, however, local elites used their positions of influence to eliminate candidates at various stages of the electoral process and to manipulate the local media.³ Those tactics proved quite effective then, and they have lingered on in many regions. By and large the radical transformation that has taken place on the national level since the collapse of communism has not been accompanied by similar progress in the regions. In fact, one of the biggest problems Russia faces even today is completing the reforms being carried out unevenly in the regions.

Following the coup attempt in August 1991, the Russian parliament established the post of "head of administration" (*glava administratsii*) at the regional level, including for the kraia, oblasts, and autonomous regions. Today, there is great diversity among the executives who sit atop Russia's eighty-nine constituent units, increased by the republics' retaining the right to call their leaders as presidents. Despite such differences, the executive heads of Russia's regions are often referred to simply as governors (*gubernatory*).

Beginning in April 1993, Yeltsin began to authorize the direct election of those officials. Shortly after the incumbents, who had originally been appointed by Yeltsin, began to lose their re-election bids, Yeltsin postponed further gubernato-

rial elections out of fear that this might indicate a trend. It was only a temporary setback, however, and as he attempted to put a new political system into place in fall 1993, Yeltsin also prepared to initiate reforms in the regions, calling for local and regional elections to be held. He gave great discretion to local authorities, particularly the governors and republic presidents, over how the elections would be conducted.

Between late summer 1995 and spring 1997, seventy regions held executive elections, but the first real round of gubernatorial elections took place between June 1996 and March 1997, during which time elections were conducted in fifty-five regions.⁴ The average number of candidates on the ballot in those elections was slightly less than five, although in a few regions many more candidates took to the field. In most regions there were no more than three candidates on the ballot, a number that indicates a well-structured race, one that provides a real choice but does not offer such a wide selection that no real consensus can emerge. Another positive characteristic was the strong presence of entrepreneurs and economic figures on the ballot, alongside local officials such as legislative heads, mayors, and public administrators. Those facts seem to indicate that democracy is beginning to develop in Russia's regions.

The 1999–2001 Russian Gubernatorial Elections

Since many of Russia's governors were elected between 1995 and 1997, their terms began to expire in 1999, and another round of gubernatorial races began. In fact, between 1998 and 2002 almost every region held or will hold elections for executive leaders. I have decided to focus here on the executive elections held in sixty-five regions between May 1999 and June 2001. It would have been possible to include a few other regions in this analysis, as several regions held elections in 1998 and Irkutsk and Nizhny Novgorod were scheduled to hold elections in the second half of 2001. I have decided to limit my analysis to those regions that held elections between May 1999 and June 2001 for several reasons. First, the elections held in 1998 were likely affected by the financial crisis of that year, thus making them incomparable with regional elections held prior to the crisis or after it had begun to subside. Additionally, an end point needed to be established; concluding with mid-year 2001 included a significant number of additional cases while extending it further only added a few more. The sixty-five regions that are included represent a sufficient number of regions to conduct analysis and are representative of the country as a whole.

Throughout the electoral cycle some interesting trends emerged. For one, incumbents did well and were able to hold onto power more often than not. Since many incumbent governors were Communists, this meant that the Communists retained their strength in local politics. The Communist governors who won reelection include Nikolai Vinogradov of Vladimir, Viktor Shershunov of Kostroma, and Yuri Lodkin of Bryansk. In Bryansk the opposition fielded a candidate with the same name as Lodkin to confuse voters and diminish his support. The governor's team then did the same for the primary opposition candidates, so that two Demochkins, two Denins, and two Lodkins were on the ballot.⁵ In the end,

the voters were smart enough to see through the ploy and selected the same Lodkin as they had four years earlier.

Incumbents from other parties tended to win re-election as well. In Khabarovsk Krai, Governor Viktor Ishaev easily defeated Svetlana Zhukova, the director of a local personnel agency, walking away with 88 percent of the vote. The races were much closer for Governor Oleg Bogomolov of Kurgan, who barely received 50 percent of the vote in a run-off election, and for Governor Vladimir Platov of Tver, an outspoken supporter of Unity, who edged out Communist Party candidate Vladimir Bayunov by only about three thousand votes.

There was turnover as well. In a widely publicized election, retired general Boris Gromov beat incumbent Gennady Seleznev for the post of Moscow Oblast governor in a runoff election in January 2000. After the first round, which had coincided with the December 1999 Duma elections, Gromov and Seleznev faced each other in a runoff election. Seleznev, a leading figure in the Communist Party and the former speaker of the State Duma, had the explicit support of Putin, and Gromov, who is a member of the Fatherland—All Russia movement, had Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov behind him. Unlike the 1999 Duma elections, the Kremlin and the Communists lost this contest.

The most publicized gubernatorial race was probably the battle in Kursk, where incumbent governor Aleksandr Rutskoï was disqualified from running for re-election based on charges that he had made false tax declarations and violated electoral rules during his campaign.⁶ The charges had been filed against Rutskoï by Chief Federal Inspector Viktor Suzhikov and Kursk mayor Sergei Maltsev, both of whom were also running for the post. After he failed to convince the Supreme Court to overturn his disqualification, Rutskoï was out of the running. Suzhikov and Maltsev perhaps thought that they had removed their most serious competitor, but Communist Party regional secretary and State Duma deputy Aleksandr Mikhailov edged out Suzhikov in the first round, thus forcing a runoff election between the two. While Suzhikov sought to win over those who had supported the other candidates in the first round, Mikhailov ran a quiet and confident campaign, which was the best tactic in a region like Kursk, where there is a solid Communist electorate. Mikhailov easily won the runoff with 55 percent of the vote, compared to Suzhikov's 38 percent, with a turnout of almost 50 percent.

The situation was just the opposite down the road in Voronezh, where Communist incumbent Ivan Shabanov lost his re-election bid in December 2000 to former regional Federal Security Bureau director Vladimir Kulakov. Shabanov, who had been the Communist Party regional committee head and led Voronezh through a rather slow transition in the early 1990s, was first elected governor in 1995. His administration was plagued with corruption, however, and on the eve of the elections his support in the polls was hovering around 5–6 percent. Although Shabanov was able to garner 15 percent of the vote on election day, Kulakov won a landslide victory with slightly less than 60 percent. Overall, it was a competitive election, with six candidates on the ballot representing diverse platforms.

Although examining the particular details of specific elections is useful, general trends can give us a sense of the relative levels of competition and participa-

tion across the regions. Competition for the offices ranged drastically, from two candidates (the legal minimum) in such places as Khabarovsk to as many as twenty in some regions. Even more disturbing is the fact that in some cases in which an incumbent went up against a single challenger, the "challenger" was actually put on the ballot simply to meet the legal requirement. In some cases that was even done at the "suggestion" of the incumbent seeking re-election. In other regions the races were heavily contested, indicating genuine competition. Although competition for office is important, too much competition can split the vote among like-minded candidates. In most of Russia's regions, however, that does not pose a problem in gubernatorial elections because of a provision that the winner must receive 50 percent of the votes cast, forcing a run-off between the top two vote-getters when that does not occur.

The degree of competition can also be measured in terms of the percentage of the vote a candidate receives. In that regard, the elections also represented vast differences in levels of competition. For instance, in Khanty-Mansi, Fil-

ipenko received 90.8 percent of the vote, while in Pskov, Mikhailov received only 28 percent, with no run-off necessary because of a local electoral law that does not require a 50 percent minimum. Again, this illustrates the great discrepancy between regions that seem to be developing genuine democratic institutions and those that hold elections within the confines of the law simply not to draw undue attention to themselves.

Participation is another key component of democracy since democracy should represent the political interests of the community. Voter turnout also varied tremendously, ranging from a high of 79.37 in Tatarstan to less than 25 percent in Vologda, Tula, and Amur, where repeat elections had to be held. Although it may be simplistic to conclude that regions with high levels of turnout are interested in politics and regions with low levels are not, there is some significance to that distinction, whether political participation comes from the ability of local elites to mobilize their electorates in a show of support or from genuine feelings of political efficacy among the citizenry.

The Progress of Democracy in Russia's Regions

The results of the gubernatorial elections are interesting, and their analysis sheds great light on the diversity that exists across Russia. Some of Russia's regions have emerging grassroots democracy, with high levels of competition and citizen participation. Other regions, however, such as Kabardino-Balkariya and Tatarstan, where governors such as Kokov and Shaimiev are elected with over 98 percent of the vote and no competition, seem to be developing into "elective dic-

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tatorships” rather than democracies.⁷ The facts make it clear that the process of grassroots democratization in Russia is slow, problematic, and highly uneven.

Aside from anecdotal evidence about the apparent progress or failure of democratization in Russia’s regions, how can we determine precisely how uneven the process is and in which direction the majority of the regions are leaning? The answer I propose here is to develop an index of regional democratization based on levels of electoral participation and competition, using the results of the sixty-five gubernatorial elections held in Russia between May 1999 and June 2001. Such an index is useful for at least two reasons. First, it gives us the ability to examine the relative progress of democratic development across Russia’s regions. Second, it allows us to explore the relationship between grassroots democracy and factors that may contribute to its development.

Measuring Regional Democratization

As briefly introduced above, the relative success of democratization in Russia’s regions themselves is of critical importance for the democratic development of the postcommunist Russian state. To gauge more precisely the progress of regional democratization, therefore, I attempt here to develop an index of regional democratization based on levels of participation and competition in regional elections. In his study of global democratization, Tatu Vanhanen developed an interesting and widely applicable method for measuring democracy, which he labeled the Index of Democratization.⁸ Following the work of Dahl,⁹ the index is composed of two simple quantitative indicators based on a polity’s level of electoral competition and participation. Vanhanen applied the index to individual countries to determine their prospects for democracy, but as it is composed of indicators based on legislative and executive elections, this method of measuring democracy is also applicable to substate units, in this case, Russia’s regions.

The first indicator used in Vanhanen’s Index of Democratization is based on electoral participation. Specifically, it employs turnout rates for national elections such as presidential and parliamentary elections. Turnout rates, however, are taken as a percentage of the total population, not simply the registered voting population, as is commonly done. Vanhanen explains that this figure is necessary to eliminate the possibility that countries with a small voter franchise but large turnout rates of those eligible will appear to be highly democratic. Because I am dealing with a country in which there is universal adult suffrage, however, such a device is not necessary.

Since I am interested in measuring the regional dimension of participation, it makes sense to select turnout rates for regional elections. That permits two choices: regional executive and legislative elections. Regional legislative elections in postcommunist Russia have been held over a period of several years and according to various electoral schemes, even including multimember districts.¹⁰ Those facts would make a regional legislative indicator problematic. I therefore employ turnout rates for gubernatorial elections in Russia’s regions as my participation indicator.

Vanhanen's competition indicator is composed of two components, one each for the degree of competition in executive and legislative elections. Vanhanen recognizes that different political systems have different balances between executive and legislative authority, and he assigns weights to the indicators accordingly. In Russian regional politics, however, the regional assemblies are little more than "ceremonial parliaments" and have virtually no ability to check the power of the executives.¹¹ Therefore, it would be improper to include a measure of competition for regional legislative elections, and the competition indicator is therefore composed solely of executive competition. The degree of competition is measured by subtracting the percentage of votes for the winner from one hundred. Moreover, the range for this variable is restricted to between zero and fifty, since 50 percent is considered the "ultimate" level of competition, and any score higher than that is simply assigned a score of fifty.

After calculating those two components, I then combine them into an index of regional democratization by multiplying the two indicators. The assignment of equal weights assumes that one is no more important an element of democracy than the other. This method of combining the two is also useful since the index will result in "high values only if values of both basic indicators are high. If either of them is in zero, the value of ID [Index of Democratization] will also drop to zero."¹²

Once calculated, the index of regional democratization indicates that indeed there are vast differences in levels of grassroots democracy among Russia's sixty-five regions included in the analysis (see appendix 1 for scores). Levels range from a low of 337 in Kemerovo, where Governor Tuleev was re-elected with 93 percent of the vote, to 3,508 in Karachaevo-Cherkessiya, where Governor Semenov won a run-off election with a turnout of over 70 percent after failing to gain a majority in the first round. The mean for all regions included was 1,997, with a standard deviation of 773.04. That indicates that there is a substantial base of democracy across Russia's regions, but also that it varies widely.

Regions with the highest levels of democracy include Belgorod Oblast, the Koryak Autonomous Okrug, Kirov Oblast, the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, Pskov Oblast, and Tver Oblast. In those regions, participation in gubernatorial elections was high—over 50 percent in the top twenty regions in the analysis. Although other regions had high levels of participation as well, in those regions it was coupled with serious electoral competition. As an example, thirteen candidates ran against incumbent governor Evgeny Mikhailov in Pskov's November 2000 election. Another sign of the region's competition is the fact that Mikhailov was only able to secure 28 percent of the vote, while three other candidates each secured approximately 15 percent of the vote.

Regions that scored around the mean include Voronezh, Kostroma, Stavropol Krai, Arkhangelsk, and Ivanovo. In those regions, participation was between approximately 35 and 65 percent, and competition ranged from thirty to the maximum of fifty (although exceeding it in actuality). Voronezh serves as an example of the regions in this category. As discussed above, incumbent governor Ivan Shabanov was defeated in Voronezh's December 2000 election by regional security official Vladimir Kulakov, with 15 and 59.99 percent of the vote, respective-

ly. With six candidates on the ballot, two of whom received over 12 percent, Kulakov's election illustrated a high degree of competition in Voronezh and secured him a popular mandate.

Regions such as Khabarovsk Krai, Chukotka, Khanty-Mansi, and Krasnodar Krai scored near the bottom of the scale on the index of regional democratization. Politics in those regions is characterized by a lack of competition, despite relatively high levels of participation in some areas. The lack of competition is so extreme, in fact, that five of the six lowest scoring regions had elections in which the winner received between 87 and 93 percent of the vote, with most of the remaining votes going to the "against all" category. Moreover, in many cases this was done to re-elect incumbent governors. It is even more surprising when one considers the very low levels of popularity of some other incumbent politicians in Russia, such as Yeltsin throughout the 1990s.

In Chukotka, an exception to the incumbency rule, Roman Abramovich won with 90 percent of the vote and the blessing of the previous governor (Nazarov), hardly making it an exceptional case. A similar situation unfolded in Krasnodar Krai, where Aleksandr Tkachev was elected with almost 82 percent of the vote after being endorsed by long-time regional boss Nikolai (*Batka*, or "Poppa") Kondratenko, who declined to run for re-election due to health problems, although it was argued that this was actually just a new means of the Kremlin's attempting to "dump" a governor it did not like by compelling him to withdraw from the race.¹³

The results of the above analysis demonstrate the uneven progress of grassroots democratization. Although some regions are characterized by vibrant electoral participation and competition for political office, other regions participate in elections simply to re-elect their local bosses with staggeringly high percentages of the vote. Still other regions fall somewhere in between. The good news is that the first group of regions has a real chance of being able to counter effectively the power of the national government and contribute to the development of an effective form of federalism with powers shared more evenly by the Kremlin and Russia's subjects. The regions in the middle, although not bulwarks of democracy, at least should not contribute to any authoritarian tendencies in the country. It is the last group that is the cause for alarm, since, in varying degrees, politics in those regions appears to resemble local authoritarianism, and they would be likely to support or succumb to any moves by the Kremlin to develop a contracted transition to a neoauthoritarian regime.

The situation in Krasnodar Krai serves as a case in point, as Kondratenko allowed himself to be removed from office not by the ballot box but by the Kremlin. The reasons compelling him to do so may have ranged from threats to the promise of an alternative post. Not that Kondratenko was a model democrat; far from it, as he was a reactionary leader and an anti-Semite. Regardless, the fact of the matter is that Kondratenko chose to give in to federal authorities rather than battle against the center to hold on to his post. The situation in Primorsky Krai is perhaps even more illustrative. In February 2001, regional governor Yevgeny Nazdratenko resigned under pressure from the federal government and perhaps

even threats of criminal prosecution, although he claimed his resignation was due to popular protests over the energy crisis, not a Moscow directive.¹⁴ If that is true, then why didn't he resign in the midst of some of the other protests in the past?

Social Capital and Grassroots Democracy

At this point we have measured regional democratization in Russia and identified great variation among the regions. But what accounts for that variation? Why are some regions more democratic than others, and what factors contribute to successful democratization? One possible explanation is social capital. A growing body of research shows that social capital is critical to the effective functioning of democracy and that it contributes to the processes of democratization and democratic consolidation. Does social capital also contribute to the strengthening of grassroots democracy in Russia? To test this hypothesis, I correlate the index of regional democratization with indicators associated with social capital. More precisely, the indicators are meant to measure the presence of certain attributes that facilitate the formation of social capital. Before delving into this task, however, I first briefly discuss the nature of social capital and the question of its existence in Russia.

Social Capital, Democracy, and Russian Democratization

James Coleman was the first scholar to point to social capital, as it is understood today, as a factor in explaining the effectiveness of institutions. In his study of school performance, in which he sought to explain the relatively better performance of children from Catholic schools as compared with those from public schools, Coleman pointed to environmental and social circumstances that contributed to the effectiveness of the former.¹⁵ The first in-depth theoretical treatment of the concept was his *Foundations of Social Theory*, which identified social capital as relationships among persons, groups, and communities that foster trust and facilitate action. Coleman stated that "social organization constitutes social capital, facilitating the achievement of goals that could not be achieved in its absence or could be achieved only at a higher cost."¹⁶ The concept of social capital only came into the fore in political science with Robert Putnam's work on social capital and democracy in Italy and his later work on the disappearance of social capital in America.¹⁷

In *Making Democracy Work*, Putnam made a natural extension of the theory, as he applied the study of social capital to the study of democracy. Among other findings, Putnam's research on democracy in Italy led to the concept of the "civic community," defined as a community characterized by active participation in public affairs, vigorous associational life, horizontal relations of reciprocity and cooperation, and mutual trust. Putnam found that the "more civic a region, the more effective its government."¹⁸ He then concluded that stocks of social capital, as embedded in trust, norms, and horizontal networks of civic engagement, are the "key to making democracy work."¹⁹

The implications of Putnam's finding that social capital plays a critical role in the effective functioning of a democratic polity may not bode well for Russian

democracy. First, several scholars maintain that Russia seems to lack stocks of social capital.²⁰ Second, Putnam maintains that social capital is difficult to develop and that consequently, societies that historically have had low levels of social capital may face extreme difficulties in developing this requisite of effective democracy. If both of those statements were true, it would indeed seem that Russia's path to democracy would be plagued with difficulties in the best case or destined to failure in the worst. But in a previous study on the topic, in which I attempted to measure social capital in Russia in much the same way as Putnam did in Italy, by measuring attributes of a civic community in a cross-regional analysis, I found that there is actually great diversity among Russia's regions in terms of their levels of civic community.²¹ It

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would be incorrect, moreover, to talk of Russia as a whole lacking aspects of a civic community; as with Italy, certain regions seem to be better endowed than others. This research led me to suggest that Putnam's assertion that “Palermo may represent the future of Moscow”²² should be reformulated to read “Palermo may

represent the future of Kamchatka,” while perhaps Rome, given its high levels of civic community, may represent the future of Moscow.²³ In short, Russia does have stocks of social capital on which to draw, which seem to be used by those segments of society that have suffered the most in Russia's troubled transition to democracy and the free market. The question now is whether or not social capital contributes to grassroots democracy in Russia's regions.

One study has taken up a similar question. Stoner-Weiss, in her study of regional governance in Tyumen', Saratov, Nizhny Novgorod, and Yaroslavl', investigated the role of social capital as she sought to explain why some of Russia's regional governments have performed better than others in the postcommunist period.²⁴ For measures of social capital, Stoner-Weiss followed Putnam in using associational membership as an indicator as well as societal-level trust. She found that societal-level trust was low across all of the regions she studied, and as the regions varied in terms of performance, she concluded that this could not be said to have had an impact. In regard to associational membership, she notes that if “social capital was accumulating among elites in Nizhny Novgorod and Tyumen' [the two highest performing regions] and this had some influence on social structures and behavior in civil society, we would expect to see a greater number of voluntary organizations in the higher-performance cases (as we did).”²⁵ She seems to disregard this finding when drawing her conclusions, however, maintaining that social capital did not have a significant impact on government performance. She concludes that there existed few differences in “social-structural and cultural variations between [the] provinces that might indicate the influ-

ence of an accumulation of social capital.”²⁶ In explaining her reported variation in government performance, Stoner-Weiss concludes that the level of economic concentration in a region is the most powerful determinant.

Stoner-Weiss's work does not let us make a final determination as to the effect of social capital in Russian regional politics, though it remains an important contribution to the research on Russian social capital because it is an attempt to quantify what is often left to speculation. Because Stoner-Weiss included only four regions in her analysis, however, her conclusions are not generalizable to all of Russia and may not be robust enough to support any concrete conclusions regarding the role of social capital in Russian regional politics.

Measuring Social Capital

In attempting to measure the presence of social capital, scholars face the daunting task of attempting to measure something that is quite evasive and perhaps not even quantifiable. Although various attempts have been made to quantify social capital indirectly, using proxies such as the number of civic associations and their membership, or by using survey data to determine participation in civic associations and feelings of trust, social capital may also manifest itself in the form of spontaneous demonstrations, public outcry, and even strikes, which greatly confound quantification.²⁷ One of the most important functions of social capital, after all, is its ability to arise spontaneously in critical moments. How then does one assess its existence in times of relative calm, when its potential is not actualized? Moreover, are the quantifiable indicators used in the West applicable to the Russian context? Finally, how can we discern benevolent forms of social capital, such as those that support democracy, from other forms, such as those that might seek to install a reactionary or nationalist regime?

Although I do not have answers to those questions, I propose to measure the hypothesized effect of social capital in Russia's regions through the use of several indicators associated with social capital in the literature. They include the number of civic organizations (sign of civic involvement), participation in referenda and elections (sign of civic engagement), and the availability of print media (sign of civic interest). Specifically, I use the number of registered civic organizations in 1996 (CIVIC); participation in the 1993 referenda (REFEREND); participation in the 1999 Duma elections (DUMA); and the number of newspapers printed in a region in 1999 (NEWS) (see appendix 2 for details).

The selection of these indicators is not unique. When Coleman stated that “social organization constitutes social capital, facilitating the achievement of goals that could not be achieved in its absence or could be achieved only at a higher cost,”²⁸ he was identifying a particular environment in which social capital was likely to develop—the civic organization. When seeking to measure the presence of social capital in Italy, Putnam also placed great emphasis on the number of civic organizations, something directly observable and quantifiable. Other indicators used by Putnam included newspaper readership and voting turnout for referenda. In an attempt to gain insight into the civic engagement of the regional electorates, I also use voter turnout in the 1999 Duma elections. My reason for

selecting the variables is that they are supposed to measure the extent to which a region approximates a civic community, for it is in such civic communities that social capital is believed to be generated.

Social Capital and Regional Democratization

To determine the relationship between social capital and regional democratization in Russia, I ran several regression analyses using the index of regional democratization as the dependent variable. In the first model, I included all of the variables associated with social capital. The resulting regression coefficient was statistically significant and explained a sizable proportion of the variation in levels of democracy among Russia's regions ($R^2 = .180$). Given its low value, however, there must be other factors that account for the variation as well. In the second model, I removed the Duma turnout indicator, as it was not significant within the model and could potentially interact with the dependent variable, which includes a component based on electoral turnout, although for different elections. Removing that variable from the model did not decrease its explanatory power significantly nor did it affect its significance. The elimination of that variable, however, does seem to increase the strength of the other variables in the model (see table 1).

In model 3, I included a control variable for Russia's ethnic diversity, which has been shown to be a very significant factor in analyzing electoral results in postcommunist Russia.²⁹ To account for the great ethnic variation among Russia's regions, I used the proportion of a region's population that is *not* ethnically Russian. This allows me to measure a region's minority population, which is difficult since many of Russia's ethnic regions are composed of several minority nationalities. By including that control variable with all of the social capital indicators, the regression coefficient increases significantly ($R^2 = .215$) and is able to explain more than 21 percent of the variation in levels of democratization. To determine the effect the Duma variable has on the model with the control variable, I removed it from the model, which resulted in a very slight reduction in explanatory power and a greater adjusted R^2 , a natural result of removing one of the independent variables from the model.

Those findings are somewhat surprising, considering the strong quantitative relationship between similar indicators identified in several other studies. For example, using a similar model based on national level data in Russia I found very strong correlations between comparable indicators.³⁰ Putnam has found strong correlations in his studies, as well. In a recent effort to explore the role of social capital in the Trilateral countries, however, Susan Pharr and Putnam encountered similar findings, in that lower levels of analysis such as individual data did not seem to produce relationships as strong as those reached with aggregate data.³¹ Perhaps data such as these are problematic, or perhaps there is something different occurring at lower levels of analysis.

A few significant conclusions can still be reached based on these statistical analyses. First, the consistent relationship between social capital and the index of regional democratization indicates that a significant proportion of the variation in democracy across Russia's regions can be explained by the relative levels of

TABLE 1.
Regression Models of Social Capital Indicators Predicting
Index of Regional Democratization

Independent Predictors	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Unstandard Coefficients	Standard Coefficients	Unstandard Coefficients	Standard Coefficients	Unstandard Coefficients	Standard Coefficients	Unstandard Coefficients	Standard Coefficients
CONSTANT	-1733.336 (1367.472)		-437.187 (745.396)		-1588.687 (1352.387)		-1268.239 (842.991)	
REFEREND	16.004** (5.907)	.341	17.484** (5.774)	.373	20.843** (6.572)	.444	21.611*** (6.021)	.461
DUMA	24.505 (21.696)	.142			7.302 (23.974)	.042		
CIVIC	.346^ (.212)	.208	.405^ (.206)	.243	.512* (.233)	.307	.541* (.212)	.324
NEWS	6.645 (.119)	.068	7.879 (.119)	.080	.110 (.121)	.112	.117 (.118)	.119
ETHNIC					11.462 (7.189)	.234	12.448* (6.369)	.254
R-square	.180*		.161*		.215*		.214**	
R-square adj.	.122		.118		.145		.159	

Note: Standard errors are given in parentheses beneath coefficients. Significance levels are * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; ^ moderately significant at the .10 level. $n = 65$.

social capital in those regions. That is a positive finding for regions that have stocks of social capital on which to draw, but it is also troubling because the period of democratic consolidation is often one of declining civic involvement in community affairs. Indeed, that has been the case in democratizing states around the world, and it seems to be the case in Russia as well. One reason for this is that once the transition to democracy began, the ranks "of civil society organizations were rapidly depleted as activists were drawn into politics, government, or business."³² This is not to imply that stocks of social capital have disappeared, never to rise up again. But as the heady days of the fight for democracy against the Soviet system drift into the past, the citizenry becomes more preoccupied with the concerns of daily life and less involved in civic affairs.

Although we can still conclude that social capital contributes to regional democratization, it is certainly not the whole story. Other factors account for a sizable proportion of the variation. That should come as no surprise, given that myriad factors affect the process of democratic consolidation, from transition problems such as weeding out proauthoritarian officials to contextual problems including socioeconomic inequality and communal conflicts.³³ It is not necessary to point out that proauthoritarian figures still exist in Russia today, and that Russia's regions vary not just in levels of social capital, but in levels of socioeconomic development and the tenor of communal relations as well. The latter is particularly important in ethnically diverse regions, as evidenced not only by anecdotal evidence but also by the significant effect of the ethnicity variable in the above analyses.

Beyond those contextual issues, the actions of individuals are also important. Individuals not only lead a country to democratize, they also affect the process of democratic consolidation. As the analysis of the gubernatorial elections made clear, the development of grassroots democracy across Russia is largely affected by individuals and elites, not just underlying structural issues. As Huntington points out, the chances of whether a democracy will fail or consolidate "depends primarily on the extent to which political leaders wish to maintain it and are willing to pay the costs of doing so instead of giving priority to other goals."³⁴ Although those factors may defy quantification, this should not lead us to discount their significance.

Conclusions

In addition to examining the recent cycle of gubernatorial elections in Russia, in this study I sought to develop an effective measure of regional democratization and to analyze the relationship between regional democratization and indicators of social capital. As the analysis of regional democratization made apparent, there is great diversity among Russia's regions in terms of the relative success and failures of the process. But while some regions are facing extreme difficulties in the democratization process, others are having more success. The quantitative analyses of regional democratization conducted then confirmed that social capital contributes in at least some way to grassroots democratization in Russia, although it is not the only factor that contributes to the process.

The uneven and highly differentiated development of grassroots democracy in Russia is troubling not only for its effects on those who live under neoauthoritarian regimes, but also for its implications for the outcome of Russia's bold and as yet incomplete experiment with democracy. As the Putin regime continues to flex its muscles across Russia's heartland, the only thing that may be able to effectively check the power of the Kremlin is grassroots democracy in the regions. Whether or not they will be up to the task is open to further speculation, but we can be sure of one thing—the importance of grassroots democracy in Russia is an issue that we cannot afford to overlook.

NOTES

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APPENDIX I

Region	Participation	Competition	ID
Agin-Buryat	65.12	10.66	694
Altai Krai	71.23	22.59	1609
Amur	25.00	50.58	1250
Arkhangelsk	36.50	41.50	1825
Astrakhan	55.17	18.18	1003
Belgorod	71.33	46.54	3320
Bryansk	53.36	70.79	2667
Chelyabinsk	50.25	41.32	2076
Chita	50.29	42.98	2161
Chukotka	67.59	9.39	635
Evenki	68.28	48.92	3340
Ivanovo	42.88	37.64	2144
Jewish Aut. Oblast	68.70	43.24	2971

continued

APPENDIX I continued

Region	Participation	Competition	ID
Kaliningrad	47.02	43.53	2351
Kaluga	39.08	43.28	1691
Kamchatka	45.70	54.17	2285
Karachaevo-Cherkesia	70.17	24.29	3508
Kemerovo	52.17	6.46	337
Khabarovsk	46.45	12.16	565
Khakasiya	52.25	28.77	1503
Khanty-Mansi	67.96	9.18	624
Kirov	72.29	41.97	3034
Komi-Permyak	51.86	55.75	2592
Koryak	63.38	49.32	3126
Kostroma	39.56	36.91	1978
Krasnodar	46.73	18.22	851
Kurgan	40.94	49.62	2047
Kursk	47.30	44.46	2365
Leningrad Oblast	41.73	69.70	2086
Magadan	42.30	37.24	1575
Mari El	57.37	41.77	2868
Moscow city	66.13	30.11	1991
Moscow Oblast	46.01	51.91	2300
Murmansk	69.11	13.29	918
Nenets Aut. Okrug	73.77	31.72	2340
Novgorod	50.16	8.44	2507
Novosibirsk	50.57	45.68	2528
Omsk	51.25	42.97	2202
Orenburg	47.87	47.98	2393
Perm	48.92	48.52	2374
Primorskii Krai	36.00	61.00	1800
Pskov	54.12	71.99	2705
Ryazan	41.65	34.86	2082
Sakhalin	39.77	43.71	1738
Samara	45.34	46.75	2120
Saratov	74.99	32.74	2455
St. Petersburg	47.74	27.31	1304
Stavropol	43.33	43.43	2166
Sverdlovsk	40.00	36.91	2000
Taimyr	63.94	34.30	2193
Tambov	44.54	49.66	2227
Tatarstan	79.37	20.48	1625
Tomsk	48.61	27.17	1321
Tula	25.00	28.66	717
Tver	65.45	53.46	3272
Tyumen'	54.25	47.22	2562
Udmurtiia	50.23	62.16	2511
Ulyanovsk	56.29	43.74	2462
Ust'-Orda Buryat	54.04	46.33	2504

continued

APPENDIX I continued

Region	Participation	Competition	ID
Vladimir	34.00	34.38	1169
Volgograd	50.40	63.28	2519
Vologda	25.00	21.45	536
Voronezh	47.59	40.01	1904
Yamal-Nenets	68.66	11.90	817
Yaroslavl	68.53	36.22	2482
Agin-Buryat	65.12	10.66	694

APPENDIX II. Indicators used in regression models to predict regional democratization

Dependent Variables. Composed of two indicators: level of participation in the 1999–2001 gubernatorial elections and votes for candidates other than the winner of the election. Data obtained from the Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation Web site, <<http://www.fci.ru/>>.

Participation. Percent of eligible voters that participated in the election. If the first round was declared invalid due to a low turnout (as was the case in three regions: Vologda, Tula, and Amur) then participation is calculated as 25 percent, not as the level of turnout in the subsequent election (which could have been artificially “raised” to meet the minimum).

Competition. Calculated as the total number of votes given to candidates other than the winner. In cases in which there was a run-off election due to the failure of any one candidate to gain a 50 percent majority (as is required by law in most regions), then the level of competition is calculated as 49.99, not as the number of votes given to the loser in the run-off. That is because the level of competition is automatically high (as expressed in the first round) no matter how many votes go to the winner in the second round. The level of competition is not affected by a run-off due to low turnout.

Independent Variables (by coding names)

REFEREND. Level of participation in the 1993 referenda. The turnout for the April and December referenda are summed. Data from Leonid Smyrnyagin, *Rossiiskie Regiony Nakanune Vyborov-1995* (Moscow: Iuridicheskaya Literatura, 1995), 6–184.

DUMA. Percentage turnout in the December 1999 Duma elections. From Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation Website, <<http://www.fci.ru/>>.

CIVIC. The number of clubs and cultural associations in Russia’s regions in 1996 (*chislo uchrezhdenii klubnogo tipa*). Data gathered by author at Goskomstat Rossy, January 1998. Data available from the author on request.

NEWS. The number of newspapers published in each region in 1999, adjusted for population. Data from *Regiony Rossy 2000: Tom 2* (Moscow: Goskomstat Rossy, 2001), 256.

ETHNIC. The percentage of a region’s population that is not Russian, calculated as the percentage of a region’s population that is Russian subtracted from one hundred. Ethnic data obtained from *Narody Rossy: Entsiklopediya* (Moscow: Bol’shaya Rossiskaya Entsiklopediya, 1994), 443–41.