

Civil Society from Above? Statist and Liberal Models of State-Building in Russia

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Some recent international exchanges on the development of civil society in Russia can give the impression that participants are talking at cross purposes. Both sides claim to be supporting civil society, but they often have very different conceptions of what “civil society” is, and thus they reach starkly different conclusions as to whether it is developing in Russia and whether the Russian state is promoting or systematically destroying it. Since civil society is presumed to be good (civil), such debates often amount to little more than attempts to stamp developments in Russia with a positive or negative label and frequently obscure what scholars are really interested in: the status of *state-society relations* in Russia. Unfortunately, some commentators have taken the additional step of branding the competing conceptualizations the “Russian” and “Western” models of civil society. This national labeling has the damaging effect of charging the debate with cultural attachments to the detriment of dispassionate analysis, ignoring the great diversity of thought within both Russian and Western scholarly traditions, and most important, presuming the answer to what should be a question for scholarly investigation: Which forms of state-society relations are in fact best suited to which countries and which environments?

To answer this question and provide the most effective policy recommendations, we need to move beyond debates on whether real “civil society” is developing in Russia. In part, this means avoiding usage of the term “civil society” when other terms can more accurately and less normatively reflect the analytical concepts in mind. For example, although it might seem clear to follow many Western scholars in using “civil society” to refer solely to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs),¹ this narrow definition does not escape the semantically and historically positive normative implications of the term, which can lead to the problems just described when one encounters scholars who do want something civil but who tend to see the state as a necessary part of civility. If one is seeking

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to explain the development of NGOs, therefore, analytical clarity and social scientific progress are better served by simply using the term “NGO” rather than risking confusion or distraction by invoking “civil society.”

The more substantial challenge, however, will be to focus more explicitly on the three core political questions that are really at issue but are often obscured in present debates:

- How do different patterns of state-society relations impact state-building, democratization, and the quality of life of citizens?
- Toward what patterns has Russia historically moved up to the present day and with what effect?
- Toward which pattern should Russia, based on its history and culture, progress?

I contend that the pattern of state-society relations best for a particular context depends on a series of important tradeoffs and risk assessments associated with each. I discuss two such patterns, which I refer to as “models” because they reflect distillations of important relationships that serve as useful heuristic devices as well as rough blueprints to guide policymakers interested in promoting one of the patterns. The *statist* model places society at greater risk of falling into tyranny while minimizing the chances of anarchy. The *liberal* model runs a greater risk of anarchy while minimizing the risk of tyranny. The collective selection of model must, of course, be made locally. But the choice should be made with full awareness of the dangers and pitfalls associated with each, with judicious learning from foreign and domestic historical experience, and in conditions where people are able freely to debate and choose between ideas to which they have ready access. To suggest a preliminary choice for Russia, my analysis ventures that a liberal conception of state-society relations is actually most appropriate given Russia’s historical and cultural context as well as public opinion. I then step back to consider the most positive roles that foreigners might play in these processes.

Statist and Liberal Conceptions of State-Society Relations

If we abandon the cultural labeling and the confounding terminology of “civil society,” what are the competing models of state-society relations that are really at issue? Following the helpful distinction of competing schools developed by Alexander Domrin, the first vision might appropriately be called the *liberal model of state-society relations*.² This model envisions society as a set of associations standing between the private sphere (encompassing individual and family activities) and the state, acting independently of the state.³ The role of the state is primarily one of establishing and enforcing the rights necessary for such groups to operate independently of the state no matter who is in charge of the state. The state, therefore, is charged with (a) proscribing these rights formally, notably rights of free speech and free association; (b) guaranteeing these rights through the creation of an independent judiciary that will interpret laws impartially; and (c) creating a more general societal climate favorable to the flourishing of such groups (for example, structuring tax codes and creating simple, transparent registration procedures in ways that minimize opportunities for state manipulation).

In the liberal view, this nonstate sphere of social organization serves at least three useful functions. First, it links citizens and the state, facilitating the collective action of individuals aimed at expressing demands, needs, or preferences to state authorities and empowering those individuals in pushing for their views to be heard and acted on.⁴ In this view, interest groups must be as autonomous of state influence as possible so that the institutions really represent interests and do not simply impose state interests on society.

A second vital function of autonomous social organizations in the liberal model is to act as a guard against tyranny, or what Graham Allison has called a “barrier to backsliding” toward authoritarianism for new democracies.⁵ As Allison has argued, leaders genuinely committed to helping their societies are bound to feel hamstrung by the institutions of democracy because the essence of democracy is to limit the power of individuals, often through systems of checks and balances, and to provide representation and some power to those who might disagree with the leaders. Even altruistic leaders, therefore, are likely to be tempted to suspend democratic institutions to accomplish good things such as improving the economy or fighting crime. Vibrant civic organizations serve as means for people to resist encroachments on their autonomy and rights, supplying them with pre-formed organizations that have vested interests against tyranny and that can therefore be counted on to call attention to and actively oppose creeping autocratization.

Third, autonomous social organizations have been portrayed as the social fabric that “makes democracy work.” According to Robert Putnam, civic organizations independent of state hierarchies foster the creation of “social capital,” consisting primarily of interpersonal and generalized social trust as well as societally productive norms of reciprocity.⁶ This capital accumulates precisely because it is “horizontally” constituted among autonomous social equals, as opposed to being “vertically” constituted in a hierarchical fashion, as is the case with associations such as the state. Social capital does not accumulate in hierarchical institutions since hierarchy implies cooperation borne of coercion, which is inimical to the norms of trust and voluntary, unconditional reciprocity that are so essential to social capital. In the liberal conception of state-society relations, people come together as equals and build mutual trust and cooperation skills and networks. Social capital has been shown by scholars to play an important role in improving the functioning of both the state and democracy by minimizing inefficiencies associated with mistrustful behavior.⁷

Although certainly not unique to the United States, the dominance of this view in American policymaking and academic circles can be seen as growing out of the American political experience with what George Hudson has dubbed “bottom-up” civil society development.⁸ The founders of the American polity proceeded from a strong tradition of local self-government. Their ability to realize the benefits of a larger polity, given this tradition of localism, could only be achieved politically by building in institutional guarantees that the new central government would not eventually lead to tyranny. In part, these ideals were the product of a specific moment in history. Before the foundation of American central government, the

lack of centralized statehood was widely considered to be *functional* relative to the expectations of the colonial population. As Huntington has argued, by adopting the U.S. Constitution, American state-builders were choosing a form of overlapping and divided government (in the form of checks and balances) that was actually becoming obsolete in much of Europe, where many countries were opting for a more efficient centralized system.⁹ Americans have typically come to accept inefficiency in government as a necessary price to pay to avert tyranny, a view inculcated in the broader population from the earliest grades in schooling. The liberal conception of state-society relations, therefore, survives strongly (if imperfectly implemented) in this type of political culture.

An alternative point of view, enunciated most clearly by the legal scholar Domrin, has been propounded by such prominent figures as Sergei Markov (political editor of the influential pro-Kremlin Web site *Strana.Ru*) and Vladimir Shlapentokh (sociologist).¹⁰ This view might best be called the *statist conception of state-society relations*. Whereas the liberal notion conceives of social organizations existing and operating independently of the state, the statist version sees the state and society as integrally related, part of the same organic whole. Indeed, the state itself grows out of and cannot be distinguished clearly from society since the state is inhabited, constituted, and continually reconstituted by individuals who are themselves “also” part of society in capacities outside their roles as state employees (as well as by individuals who merely recognize the state as an institution). Relations between the state and nonstate society are characterized by mutually restricted cooperation, with nonstate society completing the state rather than diminishing it. The state, therefore, plays a strong role in the creation and ongoing activities of (formally) nonstate social organizations. The state’s role is to protect nonstate society, ensuring its continued existence, as well as to protect the interests of the state itself, which is seen as the embodiment of the nation.¹¹ This statist school can be seen to be squarely in line with a scholarly tradition of thought about the nature of civil society associated with scholars such as Hobbes, as is clear in enlightening reflections on the classics by Shlapentokh and Thane Gustafson.¹²

The statist vision described by Domrin and Markov, like the liberal vision above, implies a certain theory of the impact of different types of state-society relationships on state development and democratization. Its most critical feature is the idea of a *two-way transmission of interests* between the state and nonstate society. On one hand, as in the liberal conception, the statist model is intended to allow nonstate society to represent its interests directly through the state. That is, through an intimate cooperative relationship between the state and nonstate society, nonstate society is able more effectively to communicate its needs, preferences, and demands and therefore more efficiently to have those needs met. When the state and nonstate society are not in a conflictual relationship, this is more easily accomplished. Whereas the liberal preference for state-society relations holds that the state is best kept from tyranny by establishing society’s independent power vis-à-vis the state, the statist conception holds that it is precisely an integrated, cooperative relationship that enables nonstate society to restrict the

state, to prevent it from overstretching its authority over people's lives.¹³ Laws are therefore needed to guarantee the rights of NGOs to exist and function so that they can serve their nonstate-society-representing functions.

Since the statist conception of state-society relations is founded on the notion of a "two-way street" between the state and nonstate society, it places much greater emphasis than the liberal model on the need for the state to "restrict" a nonstate society that is seen less as a guarantor of freedom than as a threat to itself and to the nation and state. A key role for the state in its relationship to nonstate society is therefore to restrict what are seen as the destructive activities of much of nonstate society. Destructiveness is sometimes said to include overly confrontational attitudes and methods vis-à-vis the state and even heavy-handed criticism of the state's history and national traditions.¹⁴ As Markov stresses, the nonstate society should look out more for the whole of society than for individual interests.¹⁵ Accordingly, the state is encouraged to play an active role in shaping the kind of organizations that come to dominate public discourse and activity in the social sphere.¹⁶

The current prominence of the statist notion of state-society relations in the Russian political establishment is of course conditioned by Russia's political experience and constructed memory. Whereas public understandings developed throughout American history have held that "lack-of-state-ness" is primarily functional and that the greatest danger is therefore tyranny, the dominant discourse in Russian media has been that "lack-of-state-ness" is essentially *dys-functional* and that anarchy is to be greatly feared and tyranny less so than in the West. As Domrin astutely notes, Russian citizens at the end of the Brezhnev era evidently did fear tyranny (totalitarianism) more than anarchy, but the experience of the past ten years, with its precipitous decline in stability, security, and incomes for a majority of people, has done much to associate the lack of state control over nonstate society with problems resulting from the particular path chosen after communist rule collapsed.¹⁷ The communist system was designed to destroy the capacity of society to be independently prosperous and was built on the assumption of a hyper-strong role for the state, formally claiming and controlling all but the most intimate aspects of individual lives.¹⁸ Indeed, some historians argue that the desire to avoid chaos is a deep and defining element of Russian political culture, stemming from the fragile existence that early Slavs led facing the hostile climate in their settlements of the first millennium.¹⁹ Many Russians' identification with the state as a global power has also contributed to the rise of the appeal of state-society conceptions that stress the importance of protecting the state against societal elements that would weaken it.

Critical Tradeoffs Involved in Choosing Models of State-Society Relations

The purpose of identifying different models of state-society relations is not to say which one "really" is "civil society," but to allow for a clearer analysis of what the different effects of the different models are likely to be in different cultural contexts. This naturally entails the question, What have been the effects of different models in different cultures when they have been tried? In answering, one

must take into account the unique conditions and cultures of the society in question. One must also recognize that any model-based policy program must be adapted to fit the local environment and that attempts simply to impose “pure” foreign models wholesale are doomed to fail and perhaps even to cause significant damage in international relations. It is the job of the social scientist, legal specialist, and policymaker to identify how each model is likely to function in each milieu, that is, how the local milieu is likely to shape the realization of the goals that the movement toward any model is intended to achieve.²⁰ This analysis must be done explicitly and using the tools of social science methodology, not simply by waving the mental wand of “it originates from a different culture and therefore will fail” or “it originates here and therefore will succeed.” I argue that the choice of model involves tradeoffs in risks inherent to each model and that in the Russian context, there is at least as much evidence that the statist model could lead to a dysfunctional outcome as there is that the liberal model would do.

What, then, of the statist and liberal models of state-society relations? If the statist conception continues to be implemented by Russian president Vladimir Putin along the current trajectory as manifested in his policies, what are likely to be its effects on the development of Russian statehood and democracy? How might this differ from what one might expect from a liberal conception of state-society relations?

Each model involves important tradeoffs in expected outcomes. First of all, it is absolutely essential to note that no outcome can be predicted from the choice of any one model with 100 percent certainty. Indeed, the literature is littered with the inaccurate predictions of social scientists, as has been documented in a fascinating set of studies of the cognitive tendencies of “experts” by psychologist Philip Tetlock.²¹ Analysts would thus be best advised to state their predictions probabilistically, recognizing the inherent complexity of politics and the number of unanticipated events that typically influence politics.²² (Specialists on Russia should be acutely aware of this!)

Thinking probabilistically, we can see that both the liberal and the statist models of state-society relations serve to make some outcomes more likely and others less so (but no outcome certain). If we treat as a “wash” the claims that the statist vision makes societal input more direct and efficient and the claims that the liberal version promotes a fuller representation of the voices in society, the most dramatic difference between the statist and liberal conceptions is the following: The statist conception is aimed primarily at reducing the danger of anarchy (by emphasizing the protection of the state and the nation from destructive elements in non-state society), while the liberal version seeks more to guard against tyranny (by building up the power of societal associations to resist the state). The other side of this conceptual coin is that at least in the short run, the statist notion of state-society relations makes the restoration of tyranny more easily realizable, while the liberal version makes more possible a descent into anarchy.

In Allison’s terms, the statist vision removes critical “barriers to backsliding” that could prevent a future Russian leader from going beyond the powers intended for him or her by altruistic creators of a statist system. The statist model has

this effect by providing the state with additional levers to use to control those groups that might resist antidemocratic state behavior, levers such as the right of a state to declare an association “destructive” or the tougher bureaucratic requirements for registration that the statist conception requires in practice.²³ Furthermore, by fostering a more organic relationship between state and approved parts of nonstate society, the statist model gives the nonstate societal organization a vested interest not in resisting “backsliding” but in accepting it or even collaborating with it, especially if the nonstate social organization can expect increased power if it becomes an agent of the state (i.e., the *completion* of the *law-governed* state can become the *agent* of the *arbitrary* state). This is especially true in current Russian circumstances: In conditions of nationwide poverty, “unofficial” Russian groups find it extremely hard to collect the funds and human resources necessary to resist creeping autocratization, and the “approved” associations deemed “constructive” by the state face grave difficulties if they buck an encroaching state because this would likely mean a famine of resources, probably a split in the organization between loyalists and resisters, and perhaps physical danger to “disloyal” members. To the extent that the state controls pockets of wealth in the country (for example, in the gas sector), independent centers of power capable of pushing against authoritarianization will face even greater difficulties. The danger of this happening would seem to be far greater in Russia’s political culture than in most Western cultures, given their respective histories.

The effect of eliminating real barriers to backsliding, therefore, would be to make permanently possible the kind of state-destroying leadership that Yeltsin displayed in refusing to recognize and negotiate with important elements of nonstate society to agree on a series of economic and political reforms that could unify society. One could certainly make the case that Russia would have been much better off had Yeltsin taken a compromising approach to the opposition early on, when he still exercised great authority in his own camp. Fewer “radical reforms” would have been implemented in the economy, but even reformists argue that they did not implement enough of them to have succeeded (because of the opposition). There is evidence that constitutionality was taking root in the late Soviet period; even the August 1991 coup-plotters felt the need to give their actions a legal veneer—certainly something that, say, Nigerian coup-plotters have not usually felt the need to do. The statist version of state-society relations, therefore, only increases the chances of “another Yeltsin,” be it Putin or one of his successors.

This is the half of the statist glass that is “empty,” of course. There is also a half that is full, as is implied by the notion of tradeoffs mentioned above. Because the collapse of the USSR and its effects are very real and apparent in the Russian imagination, it is significant that the statist conception of state-society relations is distinguished primarily by its claim to reduce the dangers of descending into anarchy, of the disintegration of the Russian state. In the best case scenario, the statist vision would forge dynamic collaboration between the state and nonstate society, promoting a prosperous Russia that re-emerges in the world as a great power not only militarily, but economically and culturally as well. Indeed, Theda Skocpol has argued that the state played a critical role in the development of

America's famed civic organizations, and Hudson has pointed to the strong role of the state not only in the United States but also in other Western countries such as postwar Germany.²⁴

But the advantage attributed to the statist option depends on two important assumptions that are at least questionable in the Russian context. The first is that autonomous nonstate social organizations are actually threatening to the state, that nonstate society is actually "destructive." For example, to characterize human rights activist Sergei Kovalev and the organization Memorial as Russophobic and destructive not because of any armed insurrection (nor advocating this) but because of their calls on Russia to come to terms with, and move forward from, problems in its past, could be seen as a serious overreaction (as well as an illustration of how easily a statist state-society structure could wind up squelching freedom of speech not popular with the government). Indeed, some would argue that the greater the number of views the Russian state has to draw on the more it is strengthened and the less intimidated people are from expressing their own ideas vis-à-vis the state. Others would attribute the modern strength of the German state as being at least in part based on passing through the kind of painful social self-examination that Memorial calls for in Russia. From this point of view, the uncontrolled realm of individuals that some statist fear only appears to be a problem because the state has not yet learned how to compromise and to work *with*, and not *over*, nonstate society.

The second questionable assumption underlying the advantages of the statist vision of state-society relations is that the state itself is a functional institution, that it is not destructive of Russian nationhood, of society, or, indeed, of itself. The organization Transparency International, compiling the results of fourteen studies conducted by seven organizations, ranked Russia a depressing seventy-ninth out of ninety-one countries surveyed in terms of clean government.²⁵ Those perceptions are mirrored in Russian public opinion. Surveys consistently show that few Russians believe they can trust any state institution other than the army. The police, which should be the core of a law-governed state, consistently rank toward the bottom of ratings of public faith. One series of Russian surveys has found that among state institutions, only the army has been able to consistently maintain the full trust of more than a quarter of the Russian population since the mid-1990s. Trust in the president has risen sharply with Putin, but this change is clearly associated with the persons of Putin and Yeltsin rather than the institution of the presidency itself.²⁶ Although the notion of a truly functional law-governed state working integrally with nonstate society is certainly appealing, the notion of a predatory state, rife with corruption, tangled in red tape, strapped inextricably to the rest of society, is decidedly not appealing—not to Russians, not to Americans who care about Russia. That vision is even more disturbing to the extent that the nonstate society to which it is strapped is shaped by the same predatory, corrupt, and bureaucratic forces while other expressions of societal preferences are subverted or ignored. Thus while statist are right to suggest that state-building is vitally necessary for Russia, to predicate a plan for state-society relations on a strong role for the state and to begin trying to impose this plan on

Russian society before the state is anything close to the “law-governed state” they have in mind (a state capable of really protecting nonstate society) is to run a serious risk of corrupting nonstate society too, making a law-governed, “civil” polity even less likely to develop.

The State of the Statist Model in Russia

What evidence is there regarding the effects of the liberal and statist models of state-society relations in the Russian context? From a social scientific point of view, it is unfortunate that Russia has never experienced a liberal state-society relationship, so we have no evidence by which to claim that this model has either a positive or a negative effect in Russia. The Yeltsin government willfully failed to facilitate the development of an autonomous societal sphere (nonstate society) in its effort to implement its version of economic reforms unhindered by those parts of society that might disagree with it. Thus we cannot talk of a liberal conception of state-society relations as having been actually promoted during the Yeltsin era, despite its rhetoric.²⁷

On the other hand, we do have some evidence to weigh the effects of a statist model of state-society relations since this is the model that Putin has been seeking to establish in Russia.²⁸ What, then, have been the effects of recent laws either initiated or supported by Putin’s administration in its effort to remold Russian society? A survey of four spheres shows that the biggest threat to Russian stability comes more from the state than from nonstate society.

Parties and Electoral Associations

These organizations are the quintessential political mediators between the state and nonstate society. The Russian state has pushed hard in recent years to set up a legal framework for their operation, most notably with the Law on Parties passed in 2001.²⁹ Although the latter is only now going into effect, it is in the same mold as a series of other laws Russia has promulgated to regulate the political process.

The effects of state efforts to mold the rest of society have been mixed at best. On one hand, there is a great deal of survey evidence showing that parties have grown in status among voters since Russia’s first multiparty elections in December 1993. Voters increasingly structure their political preferences and decisions at the ballot box along partisan lines.³⁰ On the other hand, as noted above, a corrupt state has shown a marked tendency and growing ability to manipulate electoral processes through “statist” forms of legislation. Thus while parties have indeed risen in popular standing since 1993, they have failed to fully organize politics for people, have played only a small role (positive or negative) in executive power structures, and have frequently appeared and disappeared from Russia’s political map. This party weakness is widely recognized as part of Russia’s ongoing struggle to establish working democracy.³¹

Close examination of Russian elections, however, makes very clear that *the state itself* has played a large role in stifling the development of political parties, thereby contributing to the disorganization of Russian politics and weakening Russian

statehood.³² In particular, representatives of state executive power structures accomplish this using their “administrative resource,” a euphemism for machine politics and the illegal or behind-the-scenes abuse of state structures for electoral ends. Autocratic governors have been notorious in this regard.³³ Importantly, electoral law that gives great scope for state discretion, law designed for state “protection” of the democratic process, has actually played a strong role in facilitating abuse by state authorities by allowing selective application of stringent guidelines. In 1993 and 1996 this benefited Yeltsinite parties in most regions and the Communists in regions with “Red” governors. In 1999 it benefited the *Otechestvo-Vsya Rossia* (OVR) of Yevgeny Primakov and Yuri Luzhkov and the pro-Putin *Yedinstvo*. Indeed, OVR averaged 40 percent of the vote in six regions where governors were widely known to have supported it, as opposed to less than 5 percent elsewhere.³⁴ The Central Election Commission likewise had little trouble finding a technicality that could be used to disqualify the neofascist SPAS from the race. In fact, many believe that governors and the Kremlin use the powers at their disposal, including manipulating dependent courts, to disqualify candidates they don’t like, sometimes within days of the election. To the extent that a vibrant, uncorrupt party system is important for state stability and democracy, therefore, the chief cause of state weakness appears to be state behavior rather than any “antistate” society. The preliminary evidence thus suggests that a statist conception of state-society relations is likely to lead to further problems for Russia.

The Mass Media

Developments in the mass media, too, suggest the pitfalls of a statist model of state-society relations in the Russian context. On one hand, print media in Russia are extremely free.³⁵ For example, a book was recently published blaming the FSB for Moscow’s apartment building bombings of September 1999.³⁶ Under Yeltsin, too, print media frequently lambasted “The Family” and associated corruption said to surround the chief executive. Few have documented any real harm done to the Russian state by these or other publications other than to embarrass or consternate individual state officials; if anything, such reports give hope that corruption might one day be seriously tackled as a problem.

On the other hand, television has come increasingly under the direct or indirect control of the state with disturbing potential consequences for democracy and the overall health of the Russian state. It is useful to compare Russia’s two presidential elections in this regard. The 1996 elections clearly exemplified the height of the statist model of state-media relations. All major nationwide television networks were either owned primarily by the state or were bound tightly to it in the kind of collusive way called for by the statist model (NTV).³⁷ Not surprisingly, in the presidential runoff that pitted Yeltsin against Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov, all major television outlets blatantly favored Yeltsin in their coverage, arguably handing him the victory. The presidential election of 2000, however, represented some progress in the sense that NTV had broken (or so it thought!) its chains of dependence on the state and tilted its coverage toward Putin’s non-Communist opponents, notably Grigory Yavlinsky. Because the

state-owned channels, ORT and RTR, gave slanted coverage in favor of Putin, the result was that Russian voters for the first time had open access to different points of view in television coverage of the campaign process. In early 2001, however, the substantially state-controlled firm Gazprom embarked on a hostile takeover of NTV. Gazprom's success meant that all of the "big three" television networks were now effectively in Kremlin hands, directly or indirectly. While some of the old NTV team have recently reconstituted themselves as TVS, its media market is quite limited.

Both the 1996 and 2000 elections demonstrated that those in charge of the state tend eagerly to exploit any television resources at their disposal for electoral ends. These elections also showed that such manipulation can be extremely effective. The balance of evidence, therefore, suggests that the application of statist models of state-society relations in this sector are likely, at a minimum, to facilitate corruption and any attempts at tyranny that may come from state leaders in the future.

Human Rights Organizations

The statist model of state-society relations tends to stress the state's regulatory role regarding social organizations, aiming to prevent "destructive" and "anti-state" activity. As noted above, Putin's human rights commissioner has targeted human rights organizations (notably Memorial) as prime examples of destructive tendencies that need to be dealt with. These groups have not called for armed uprisings, nor have they engaged in such. If one analytically distinguishes between organizations such as Memorial and social organizations generally, the real problem in the Yeltsin era was not the existence of these social organizations but two other factors: (1) the uncontrolled Russian *state* under Yeltsin and (2) the *absence* of a vibrant set of social organizations independent of the state that could have represented the interests of workers, collective farmers, or other social groups, which ultimately paid the highest price for the transformation of the 1990s in Russia. The conclusion, again, is that the statist model of state-society relations has ultimately served the Russian state poorly, although it has served some of its masters quite well.

Economic Associations. As in the other areas of Russian state-society relations, the state's biggest problems seem to have come historically from instances where the state and leading economic actors have worked too closely together, where economic actors have looked primarily to the state for their earning opportunities. In fact, this seems to be the one thing on which all sides to the bitterly argued debate on the Yeltsin era agree. On one hand, getting the state out of the market has been the central theme of Western supporters of the Yeltsin-Gaidar-Chernomyrdin reforms.³⁸ Yet strongly opposing accounts describing the "pillaging" of the Gaidar-Chubais team in the 1990s indicate that it was precisely the collusion between top businesses and the Russian state that led to the sorry state of affairs in Russia.³⁹ Allegations of rigged auctions and state officials' property-grabbing all resulted from the intimate connection between state and economy in Russia.

One speculates that had truly independent and truly powerful economic competitors existed during the early-mid 1990s, they would have been in a position to resist much of what was happening as the “oligarchs” consolidated their control over the commanding heights of the Russian economy. This fear seems to have underlain banking mogul Alexander Mamut’s proposal to stratify the banking system, locking in a privileged status for the largest banks.⁴⁰

At the local level, regional state structures have had some success with corporatist-style collaboration between broad associations of business and government. Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, for example, credits such centralized cooperation between business conglomerates and government with being the most important source of successful governance in Russia’s regions.⁴¹ Now that Russian big business has shown progress in uniting at the federal level, empowering and transforming Arkady Volsky’s old Union of Entrepreneurs and Industrialists into a kind of representative body for oligarchs, perhaps Russia can implement a corporatist arrangement as some northern European countries have done in the twentieth century (before eventually stagnating). Nevertheless, this kind of vertical integration will likely give great power to some of the very oligarchs who, under Yeltsin, plundered much of Russian society. Collusion at the federal level has proved to be problematic in the past and it is unclear what the future will bring.

Overall, modern Russia has never experienced anything close to the liberal model of state-society relations, meaning that we have no proof that it would work on Russian soil. Nevertheless, there *is* evidence that Russia’s experience with the statist model has been primarily negative. The success of the statist model obviously depends heavily on the nature of the state itself, with which Russia has had a troubled history. It would be foolish to argue that either a good or bad scenario would be certain to result from an attempt to implement the statist model—much would undoubtedly depend on the nature of the Russian leadership that implemented it. One hopes that the faith Russian voters have in Vladimir Putin will be justified and that he will turn out to be an honest, strong, and capable leader who can rid the state of corruption and forge a productive, affirming, and intimate relationship between the state and nonstate society. The risk of the statist model, however, is precisely that it puts so many proverbial eggs in the basket labeled “Who is Mr. Putin?” If he is not who Russian voters hoped he would be in 1999, then the statist model would remove centers of societal power capable of resisting a turn by him to a form of Yeltsinism or worse. Moreover, even if we do end up seeing the “good Putin,” Russians may not be so lucky with their future leaders, who, having inherited a statist model of state-society relations, would then have few obstacles in society preventing them from becoming a second Yeltsin or an outright autocrat.

Russian Public Opinion

Political models certainly cannot be expected to work when the masses reject them as unsuitable. This puts a great deal of emphasis on how to interpret and to act on Russian public opinion. Statists usually contend that Russians do not want a liberal state-society model and instead have more faith in the institutions of the state.⁴² Survey evidence, however, presents a much more complicated picture, as

much depends on exactly how questions are worded. While Domrin cites evidence showing that 81 percent prioritize order over democracy, a survey designed by Timothy Colton and Michael McFaul and conducted by a Russian agency in 2000 found that only 15 percent supported restoring order "at all costs" and that a majority (51 percent) thought that this must be done "without violating rights."⁴³ In addition, although some have cited evidence that Russians have little faith in "institutions of civil society,"⁴⁴ it is equally clear from this and the polling data cited above that institutions of the state are also considered untrustworthy. As was noted, only the army consistently ranks highly in public faith, while other critical institutions such as the police have fared quite poorly in popular opinion. Although people are found now to have faith in the presidency, this obviously reflects the person of Putin rather than the institution, since public trust in the presidency went from the lowest among all institutions to the highest during the transition from Yeltsin to Putin.

In addition, the low public faith registered for nonstate organizations must also be seen as reflecting current Russian reality. When autonomous organizations are harassed, ignored, or generally cut out of the policymaking loop by a domineering state that considers them hostile, it is not surprising that few people want to get involved with them. Indeed, research by Kelly McMann in the Russian provinces indicates that one of the chief reasons people do not get involved in NGOs is the fear that they will fall victim to persecution by autocratic governors or their allies. In Russian regions where such persecution is less likely, there is noticeably more societal participation.⁴⁵

Overall, people everywhere tend to fear two extreme political situations, anarchy and totalitarianism. Americans have traditionally tended to consider the latter the greater danger. It is at least possible that Russians tend to fear the former more than the latter, although their history suggests that the greater risk is actually totalitarianism. Further public opinion research will need to address this specific question.

Conclusion

Overall, we should not be debating what is or what is not "civil society" but should instead be examining the likely effects of alternative statist and liberal models of state-society relations. We should not be making blanket statements about the "certain effects" of one model or the other, but should instead be considering probabilities and tradeoffs. The most topical tradeoff is that between anarchy and tyranny. The statist model tends to minimize the danger of anarchy at the expense of risking tyranny, while the liberal model risks anarchy to avoid tyranny. The debate should therefore turn to which risks are the ones most worth taking. For Russia to make this choice, it must take into account not only how the models work in other countries, but how they have worked in Russia itself and what Russian citizens think. In Russia, the liberal model has not been tried, although there is evidence that it has some support in the population. The statist model also has some support in public opinion, but unlike the liberal model, it has already been tried in Russia. Although the statist model has led to some local

successes, as in some regional economies, for the most part it has tended to facilitate arbitrary abuses of power by state authorities, which ultimately have weakened the Russian state and caused the rest of society to suffer. While Putin might be able to make a statist model work, the statist model puts a great deal of faith in the personality and skill of individual state leaders. We are now better understanding just “Who is Mr. Putin,” but we cannot be sure of the answer to the follow-up question, “Who is Mr. Putin’s successor?”

NOTES

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1. See, for example, R. Steven Fish, “Russia’s Fourth Transition: Rethinking Civil Society,” *Journal of Democracy* 5, no.3 (June 1994): 31–42.

2. Alexander N. Domrin, “Ten Years Later: Society, ‘Civil Society,’ and the Russian State,” *Russian Review* 62, no.1 (January 2003).

3. Fish, “Russia’s Fourth Transition”; Marc Morjé Howard, “The Weakness of Postcommunist Civil Society,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no.1 (January 2002); Richard Rose, “Postcommunism and the Problem of Trust: Rethinking Civil Society,” *Journal of Democracy* 3, no.3 (June 1994): 18–30; Michael McFaul, exchange with Sergei Markov on the Web site *Strana.Ru*, 2001, mimeo; Sarah Mendelson, “The Putin Path: Civil Liberties and Human Rights in Retreat,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 47, no. 5 (September/October 2000): 3–12; Sarah Mendelson and John K. Glenn, “Democracy Assistance and NGO Strategies in Postcommunist Societies,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Working Paper, 2000. See also, as cited by Domrin, “Ten Years Later”; Larry Diamond, “Civil Society and Democratic Development: Why the Public Matters,” paper published in the Center for International and Comparative Studies’ Distinguished International Lecture Series, University of Iowa, 1999, 6; Larry Diamond, “Rethinking Civil Society: Toward Democratic Consolidation,” *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 3 (July 1994): 3; and Adam B. Seligman, quoted in Susan Shell, “Conceptions of Civil Society,” *Journal of Democracy* 5, no.3 (July 1994): 5.

4. Howard, “The Weakness of Postcommunist Civil Society”; Theda Skocpol, “How Americans Became Civic,” in *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina, eds. (Washington, DC: Brookings and Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), 70, cited in Howard, “The Weakness of Postcommunist Civil Society.”

5. I am not aware of any publications in which Allison lays out his views, but they have been expressed in numerous discussions with the author and are thus credited to Allison. Future references to Allison have in mind these personal communications.

6. Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Putnam, “Bowling Alone,” *Journal of Democracy* 6, no.1 (January 1995): 65–78; Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988), 50–60.

7. Putnam, “Bowling Alone”; Putnam, *Bowling Alone*. For theoretical perspectives on inefficiencies and dysfunctions resulting from mistrust in certain social situations, see for example the following classic works: Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965); Russell Hardin, *Collective Action* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982); and Elinor Ostrom, “A Behavioral Approach to the Rational Choice Theory of Collective Action: Presidential Address, American Political Science Association, 1997,”

American Political Science Review 92, no.1(March 1998): 1–22. On the lack of this in Russia, see Rose, “Postcommunism and the Problem of Trust.”

8. George Hudson, “Civil Society in Russia: Concepts and Prospects,” paper presented at the conference “Ten Years Later: The Development of Russian Civil Society,” Wittenberg University, 3 November 2001.

9. Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale, 1968), chapter 2.

10. Domrin, “Ten Years Later”; Sergei Markov, “Grazhdanskoe Obshchestvo v Rossii ne Budet Otdelnoj Politicheskoy Siloj,” *Strana.Ru*, 6 August 2001, 14:47; Vladimir Shlapentokh, “Hobbes and Locke at Odds in Putin’s Russia.” See Domrin, “Ten Years Later,” for a discussion of the Russian literature in this tradition.

11. Domrin, “Ten Years Later.”

12. Thane Gustafson, “A Civil Society in the Soviet Union?” *Sovset Newsletter* 5, no. 4, CSIS Soviet Studies Program, 2 October 1989; Shlapentokh, “Hobbes and Locke at Odds in Putin’s Russia.”

13. Domrin, “Ten Years Later”; Markov, “Grazhdanskoe Obshchestvo v Rossii ne Budet Otdelnoj Politicheskoy Siloj.”

14. Domrin, “Ten Years Later.”

15. Markov, “Grazhdanskoe Obshchestvo v Rossii ne Budet Otdelnoj Politicheskoy Siloj.”

16. Domrin, “Ten Years Later”; Markov “Grazhdanskoe Obshchestvo v Rossii ne Budet Otdelnoj Politicheskoy Siloj.”

17. Domrin, “Ten Years Later.”

18. Rose, “Postcommunism and the Problem of Trust.” 21–22.

19. Edward Keenan, “Muscovite Political Folkways,” *Russian Review* 45, no. 2 (April 1986): 115–81.

20. Hudson, “Civil Society in Russia: Concepts and Prospects,” makes a good case for the comparative study of civil society.

21. Philip E. Tetlock and Richard Ned Lebow, “Poking Counterfactual Holes in Covering Laws,” *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 4 (December 2001): 829–43; Tetlock, “Theory-driven reasoning about plausible pasts and probable futures in world politics: Are we . . .” *American Journal of Political Science* 43, no. 2 (April 1999): 335–66; Tetlock, “Close-call counterfactuals and belief system defenses: I was not almost wrong but I was almost right,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75, no. 3 (March 1998) 639–52.

22. This is a point that has been made frequently by Graham Allison. On implications for social science, see Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry* (New York: Wiley, 1970).

23. Domrin, “Ten Years Later.”

24. Hudson, “Civil Society in Russia: Concepts and Prospects”; Theda Skocpol, “Unsolved Mysteries: The Tocqueville Files: Unraveling From Above,” *American Prospect* 7, no. 25 (March–April 1996): 20–25.

25. *Polit.Ru*, 28 June 2001, 1535.

26. Data compiled by Brian Taylor and Tatyana Vinichenko, University of Oklahoma, from *Ekonomicheskije I sotsial’nye peremeny: monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia* 50 (November–December 2000).

27. Domrin, *Russian Review*.

28. Ibid. This is evident in Putin’s choice in 2001 for Human Rights commissioner, Vladimir Kartashkin, who has echoed statist themes, branding Memorial and other human rights groups “destructive.” *Polit.Ru*, 12 September 2001, 1244. Putin replaced Kartashkin, however, on 11 July 2001, with the more liberally minded Ella Pamfilova. We will have to wait to see whether this signals a shift towards a more liberal state-society strategy on Putin’s part.

29. See Domrin, “Ten Years Later,” for an excellent summary of Russian legal activity

on state-society relations.

30. Timothy Colton, *Transitional Citizens* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Ted Brader and Joshua A. Tucker, "The Emergence of Mass Partisanship in Russia, 1993-1996," *American Journal of Political Science* 45, no.1 (January 2001); Arthur H. Miller, Gwyn Erb, William M. Reisinger, and Vicki L. Hesli. "Emerging Party Systems in Post-Soviet Societies," *Journal of Politics* 62, no.2 (May 2000): 455-90.

31. Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, "Central Weakness and Provincial Autonomy," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 15, no.1 (January-March 1999): 87-104.

32. Michael McFaul provides a good overview of these and related issues in *Russia's Unfinished Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 315-19. The critical role of a strong political party system in providing for the stability of federal systems has been noted in William H. Riker's classic *Federalism: Origin, Operation, Significance* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1964) as well as in Stoner-Weiss "Central Weakness and Provincial Autonomy."

33. See Henry E. Hale, "Will Elections Erode Russia's Democracy?" *The Fletcher Forum* (April 2000); Hale, "Machine Politics and Institutionalized Electorates," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 15, no. 4 (December 1999): 70-110; Hale, "Why Not Parties? Supply and Demand on Russia's Electoral Market," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, 31 August 2001; Kelly M. McMann, "The Personal Risks of Party Development," mimeo, 2001; Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, "The Limited Reach of Russia's Party System: Underinstitutionalization in Dual Transitions," *Politics & Society* 29, no. 3 (September 2001).

34. Statistical estimates of these effects are given in Hale, "Will Elections Erode Russia's Democracy?"

35. I am grateful to Vladimir Boxer for stressing this point.

36. A. Litvinenko and Yu. Fel'shtinsky, *FSB Vzryvaet Rossiu*, previewed in *Novaya Gazeta*, 27 August 2001.

37. For a discussion of NTV's intimate relationship with state structures especially during the 1996 presidential race, see David Remnick, *Resurrection* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998).

38. For example, Anders Aslund, *How Russia Became a Market Economy* (Washington: Brookings, 1995); Timothy Frye and Andrei Shleifer. "The Invisible Hand and the Grabbing Hand," *American Economic Review* 87, no. 2 (May 1997): 354-8.

39. And, some would argue, the American state and key elites. For the most influential critical accounts of the Yeltsin state's role in the economy during the 1990s, see Stephen F. Cohen, *Failed Crusade* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000); Dmitry Glinski and Peter Reddaway, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms* (Washington: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2001); Jerry F. Hough, *The Logic of Economic Reform in Russia* (Washington: Brookings, 2001); and Janine Wedel, *Collision and Collusion* (New York: St. Martin's, 2001).

40. *Polit.Ru*, 9 August 2001, 0925.

41. Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, *Local Heroes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

42. Domrin, "Ten Years Later."

43. McFaul, *Strana.Ru*. For a more elaborate discussion, see Timothy Colton and Michael McFaul, *Are Russians Democratic?* Working Paper, no. 20, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2001, 14-16.

44. Domrin, "Ten Years Later."

45. Kelly McMann, "Symbiotic Transitions: Democratic Development and Economic Independence in Post-Soviet Provinces," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2000.