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## Democratic Consolidation in Russia?

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### Abstract

Much of the discussion of democratic consolidation focuses upon the role played by elites in this process. Central is the way in which they create and develop political institutions which then shape the movement of the political system in a democratic direction. However in Russia, the history of elite relations and institution-building does not give an unambiguous picture of the consolidation of democracy. If this is combined with a broader analysis of the emergence of a new business class with close links to prominent politicians, the prospects for Russian democracy appear much bleaker than many had hoped.

### 1 Introduction

One of the most important issues facing scholars in particular and the international community more generally is the fate of democracy in the former communist-ruled states of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Following the collapse of communism and the installation of democratically-based regimes in most countries of the region, the question remains how these regimes can be stabilized and consolidated, and their longevity thereby secured. The focus of attention has thus shifted from the transition to democracy to its consolidation, from the conditions that would facilitate the replacement of authoritarian by democratic rule, to how the latter can be entrenched in the society.

Much of the discussion of the consolidation of democracy in a post-communist context has generally been very different to the main themes of analysis when the question of democratic stability and longevity last achieved prominence on the intellectual agenda. This was in the late-1950s through the 1960s and was a reaction to the failure of democracy to take root in much of the post-colonial world despite many of these states being left with democratic political institutions. The type of explanations sought for the failure of democracy in a post-colonial context, and therefore by implication the conditions for democratic success, focused upon levels of development and

values. Authors argued that democracy was likely to be consolidated only in states where there were substantial levels of economic development, and while there may have been disagreement over what the precise level was, there was general accord that those characteristics accompanying higher levels of economic development (eg. education, literacy, prosperity) favoured the flourishing of democracy (cf. Lipset 1959). Others argued that crucial for the development and stability of democracy was a certain set of values which, in the words of the most influential work of this genre, constituted a sort of civic culture (Almond and Verba 1965). This culture comprised the sorts of values and commitments which were believed to underpin successful, stable democratic development. Although both of these approaches have been evident in the analysis of "third wave" democratization (Huntington 1991; e.g., Diamond 1992; Lipset et al. 1993; Lipset 1994; Moore 1995), the main focus of analysis has been very different.

## 2 Elites and democracy

Much of the study of the transition to democracy during the "third wave" has concentrated upon the role played by elites; it has been the combination of elite manoeuvring and elite agreement which has been seen as crucial to determining the outcome of the process of democratic transition (cf. O'Donnell et al. 1986). A similar focus has been evident in the analysis of the consolidation of democracy.

The key to the consolidation of democracy for many has been the ability of elites to agree to the establishment of a democratic structure and to abide by the rules of that structure in the conduct of political life. A particularly clear statement of this position is provided by two scholars who define a consolidated democracy as "a regime that meets all the procedural criteria of democracy and also in which all politically significant groups accept established political institutions and adhere to democratic rules of the game" (Higley and Gunther 1992, p. 3; Valenzuela 1992; Gunther et al. 1995, pp. 5-10). While this assumes that those elites are committed to certain sorts of values, these are very different from the values implicit in the notion of civic culture. What is seen to be important is not belief in such values as equality and freedom, but commitment to certain procedural norms whereby the system is meant to function. Elites must accept the rules embodied in the constitution, the principles of action contained in regulations governing the functioning of political institutions like legislatures, elections and courts, and they must tailor their action to fit such restraints. In this view, it does not matter whether the elites have a fundamental commitment to democratic values, although the system would be more soundly based if such commitment did exist, as long as they accept

the rules of the democratic game. If such rules are accepted and regularly followed, it is assumed that they will gain normative authority and thereby become embedded in the political lore of the land. The longer the period that elites tailor their actions to the rules of the game, the more entrenched those rules will become and the greater their normative authority. The democratic system is thereby consolidated.

Implicit in this line of analysis is the importance of the "crafting" of institutions (cf. Di Palma 1990). Elites must agree to the construction of institutions which will serve the democratic end, and establish political bodies which are subject to the popular will and which operate in accord with rules giving all sections of society ample scope for participation. This emphasis upon institutions is reflected in the nature of the discussion concerning the relative merits of a parliamentary versus a presidential system (cf. Stepan and Skach 1993; Lijphart 1992, 1993; Linz 1993; Linz and Valenzuela 1994). But ultimately, even if scholars were to agree that one of these types better facilitated democratic consolidation than the other, the fundamental principle would remain: the precise institutional form is less important than the fact that the institutional structure meets minimum democratic requirements and its rules are followed by political actors.

What does this sort of analysis tell us about the prospects for democratic consolidation in Russia? And does the Russian case have any lessons for this style of analysis?

## 3 Crafting Russian democracy?

When Russia emerged as an independent state from the shell of the Soviet Union in December 1991, it inherited a form of government that was an awkward mix of a parliamentary and a presidential system. To the traditional Soviet parliamentary structure, in which the chief executive had formally drawn his powers from the legislature, had been added a popularly elected presidency in 1991. Little thought had been given to how these two principles could be reconciled. Furthermore, the political institution which had been at the heart of the old system and which had provided both its basic direction and the lubricant enabling it to function, the communist party, had been removed from its dominating role. The institutional configuration at the top of Russian politics appeared therefore distinctly problematic at the time of Russian independence.

This institutional fluidity, which is discussed further below, occurred within a context of the ambiguity of the rules meant to govern the political process. The Constitution in force at the time of independence was that introduced in 1978 for the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. It had

been amended on a number of occasions, including to make provision for the presidency, but this had involved only minor tinkering with the wording of the document instead of the sort of substantial redrafting that would have been needed to make the Constitution appropriate to the new form of executive power. The document was further amended in 1992-93 in an attempt to make it relevant to the new conditions of an independent state. However, the effect of these amendments was to increase the level of incoherence in the document. The amendments were partial, and almost ad hoc, and instead of creating a coherent outline of the structure of supreme power in the country, they projected a disjointed picture of a patched together political structure many of the elements of which did not fit together easily. The process of wholesale amendment thus produced a document in which many of the articles were contradictory and conflicting, and which could therefore not provide the sort of clear guidance to leading political actors and institutions which a constitution should do. Perhaps more importantly, it portrayed the Constitution as the product of political manoeuvring and factionalism, subject to cynical manipulation for crude political ends, rather than a superior law providing independent ground rules for political life. Under such circumstances, it could not generate the sort of normative authority essential for such a document to be effective.

Not only did ambiguity and uncertainty exist within the formal rules of the game, but it was also evident in the informal rules. These are the norms and principles which, although not formally codified, are crucial for the structuring of political activity. They define what is appropriate behaviour and what is not, and although they possess no legal force, they are normally endowed with normative authority; political actors believe that they should act in accord with their provisions. The informal norms in place to structure elite political activity in 1992 were those stemming from the Soviet period, albeit modified by the experience of the last five years of Soviet rule. While they may have been appropriate to the institutional structure and norms of Soviet political life, the applicability of many of them to post-communist Russia was an open question.<sup>2</sup> Many believed that the shift from an authoritarian system in which real openness and popular participation were strictly limited to the sort of system in which these were meant to be central and all-pervasive necessitated a fundamental shift in the norms governing elite behaviour; the norms governing a politics of secrecy conducted in isolation from the people had to be different to those of an open polity in which the popular voice was meant to be decisive. Yet where were these norms to come from in the immediate wake of Soviet collapse?

The ambiguity of both formal and informal rules meant that the processes of government rested on an uncertain foundation. Had the political elite remained broadly united, it may be that the uncertainty of the rules would

have been of little importance. Through the developing regularity of interaction within a broad policy consensus, the new system could have generated its own rules appropriate for the new situation, building on those inherited from the Soviet past but adapted to apply to the new reality. However, elite unity was not forthcoming; it was fractured by a combination of policy differences and institutional and personal ambition. The course of this conflict has been explained many times (e.g., Steele 1995, ch. 11; Sakwa 1993, ch. 2; Brudny 1995) and will not be outlined here. But what is important is the implications of this for the consolidation of democratic institutions.

The central dynamic of the conflict as it was played out until September-October 1993 involved a struggle for power between the two main arms of the state structure; the legislature and the presidency. The legislature comprised the Congress of People's Deputies and a smaller, standing legislative body, the Supreme Soviet. Formally this had the power to adopt laws and other acts and was envisaged as the main legislative body in the state structure; it was said to exercise the totality of state power and to delegate it to executive organs (see Remington et al. 1994, 162). The government did not reside in the legislative chamber, with the result that there was no institutional necessity to establish stable majorities or to enact a coherent legislative programme. As a result, the discipline imposed by governing rested only very lightly on the shoulders of many of the legislators. Furthermore, political parties had played little part in the March 1990 election, with the result that when deputies entered the Congress and Supreme Soviet, while they gathered in loose factional groupings, they did not cohere into particular party groups. As the course of the conflict between president and legislature escalated, the overriding issues of economic reform and executive-legislative relations undercut the different bases upon which nascent parties could have emerged and increased the power of the (anti-Yeltsin) Chairman of the Supreme Soviet.<sup>3</sup> Constitutionally the president wielded supreme power, and in November 1991 he was granted by the Congress of People's Deputies the power for a year to adopt measures by decree to further economic reform (*Rossiiskaia Gazeta* 2 November 1991). Until June 1992 Yeltsin also combined the position of prime minister with the presidency, thereby blurring the boundaries between these two institutions. The president was served by an administrative structure in the form of the presidential apparatus, which included a series of advisory councils and committees, with an increasing number of experts and advisers (see Willerton 1994, 49). In addition, the president had the power to appoint the government, although from December 1992 the appointment of the prime minister and the so-called "power ministers" was subject to legislative approval. This method of forming the government meant that it had no direct popular mandate but was directly responsible to the president.

The relationship between legislature and president was one which was ambiguous from the outset. Both possessed a popular mandate, although Yeltsin's was both more recent and less tarnished by its Soviet heritage having been obtained when the power of the Soviet system was clearly much more in decline<sup>4</sup>; and both were deemed to be the exerciser of supreme power, both president and Supreme Soviet had the power to issue direct orders to government ministries and agencies (Brudny 1995, 86), and there was no indication as to which had primacy, presidential decrees or parliamentary laws. When differences over policy emerged and extended into questions of institutional competence and personal prestige, there was no way that the Constitution could resolve the question. However, as this conflict proceeded until September-October 1993, both sides acted for the most part with significant moderation; despite rhetorical threats and often extravagant language, the actions of both sides remained relatively restrained. Both sought to use legal means, with Yeltsin issuing decrees and the legislature adopting laws in an effort to implement their policies, the result being a virtual "war of laws". For much of this time, both observed the strictures of the Constitutional Court when this body declared their action illegal. Both made attempts at various times to reach tactical compromises, including giving the legislature some power of oversight of the composition of the government. Both sides engaged in institutional aggrandizement in an attempt to strengthen their positions and gain an advantage over their adversary. Yeltsin in particular used the dispute to develop and strengthen the presidential administration, adding new departments and sections with a brief to cover increasing sectors of Russian life. Similarly, the legislature generated a series of bodies designed effectively to shadow the work of the presidential administration. In both cases, the growth of a bureaucratic infrastructure was designed to strengthen the capacity to direct affairs in all areas of public life at the expense of the rival.<sup>5</sup> In practice, despite vigorous and at times inflammatory rhetoric and threats, both sides were restrained in what they actually did. But given the constitutional ambiguity and the willingness of neither side to back down, there was no way the dispute could be resolved within the terms of the rules of the game as then understood.

One way of seeking to break this impasse would have been to seek the judgement of the people; but although both sides courted public opinion, the populace were not called upon to play a decisive part in resolving the dispute. On one occasion, in April 1993, the populace was mobilized into the conflict through the conduct of a referendum, but this was structured in such a way that it could not resolve the dispute. The four questions asked in the referendum involved a vote of confidence in Yeltsin, support for his economic policies, and whether there should be early legislative and presidential elections. These questions did not broach the crucial constitutional issues at the

heart of the dispute, and therefore the people were not asked to decide which of those bodies possessing a popular mandate should be supreme.

Yeltsin chose another way of breaking the impasse resulting from the general observance of the rules. On 21 September he dissolved the legislature, and declared that elections would be held for a new legislature and a plebiscite conducted on a new constitution. These declarations were both illegal and unconstitutional and, when sustained opposition from a group of deputies (supported by Yeltsin's own vice-president) degenerated into violence, Yeltsin summoned the military to shell the legislative building. Yeltsin's opponents surrendered and were placed in gaol. The forced dissolution of the legislature not only seemed to leave Yeltsin unchallenged, but severely disrupted any developing sense of regularity that may have been growing around the Russian political process and smashed any emergent sense of the principle of adherence to law. Although some may argue that such action was necessary to protect the democratic process, this argument did not seem strong in the light of the president's actions in the lead-up to the December poll.<sup>6</sup>

The months leading up to the dissolution of the legislature had seen extended efforts to draft a new constitution. In the middle of the year agreement had been reached on a draft, which was then submitted to regional leaders for approval. This draft, which did not receive approval from the regions, was now jettisoned by Yeltsin, whose team drafted a new document which substantially shifted power to the president. This was placed before the electorate, but only four weeks before polling day, thereby giving insufficient time for a reasoned and searching debate.<sup>7</sup> Yeltsin banned some parties from participating in the election,<sup>8</sup> temporarily closed some opposition newspapers (*Nezavisimaia Gazeta* 7 October 1993), and set down limits about what could be debated during the election campaign. When polling took place, if later reports are correct (*Izvestiia* 4 May 1994), there was massive fraud in the counting of votes; large numbers of votes were misallocated, with the Liberal Democratic Party reported to have gained some six million votes in this way; some people were declared elected who did not receive a popular mandate; and less than the necessary 50% of voters took part in the constitutional plebiscite, thereby in strict terms rendering it invalid. If the essence of democracy is not just deciding on issues but framing the nature of the issues to be decided and involving people of all views in the decision, Russian experience at the end of 1993 was not very democratic.

Despite the question marks over the legitimacy of the structure now inaugurated through the new Constitution, the establishment of a new constitutional and legislative framework which was a decisive break from its Soviet forebear, did give the Russian system the opportunity to start anew the building of patterns of democratic rule. This new start was assisted by a sense of toleration on all sides, as both president and legislature realized how

dangerous the brinksmanship of the past had been. This sense of toleration was reflected in the legislative amnesty given to those who had opposed Yeltsin in the previous autumn (and to the coup plotters from August 1991), which was accepted with some bad grace by Yeltsin (*Rossiiskaia Gazeta* 24 February 1994; *Izvestiia* 25 February and 1 March 1994), and by the signature by most political actors of the Pact on Social Accord in April 1994.<sup>9</sup> This committed them to moderation in action and word until after the next legislative and presidential elections. This commitment was honoured, with the result that a significant degree of regularity and normality seemed to characterize the functioning of the system.

The adoption of the new Constitution following its claimed public validation in December 1993 ushered the development of the Russian system into a new phase.<sup>10</sup> Now it possessed its own fundamental law, with none of the problems posed by the Soviet origins of its predecessor. Not only was it not tarnished by its past, but it provided a much clearer division of powers and responsibilities between the executive and legislative arms of state, with the presidency becoming much the more powerful; it referred to the president as ensuring "the coordinated functioning and interaction of all bodies of state power" and as determining "the basic guidelines for the state's domestic and foreign policy" (#80). Henceforth, the legislature's powers were substantially reduced, giving the president and government significant freedom to rule the country regardless of the views of legislative deputies.<sup>11</sup> This strengthening of the presidency transformed Russia unambiguously into a presidential republic and strengthened the argument that it is best seen as a delegative democracy (e.g., Kubicek 1994).

Yeltsin used the strengthening of his position in the Constitution to build up the office of the presidency even more, surrounding it with a range of institutional supports and symbols designed both to extend its power and bolster its prestige (Huskey 1995). He strengthened the advisory and supervisory organs in an attempt to exert presidential control more effectively over national life, although the systematization of the functioning of that apparatus at the top has remained deficient.<sup>12</sup>

Although the legislature became of secondary importance compared with the presidency, the new bicameral Federal Assembly did develop a sense of institutional identity during this period. The upper chamber, or Council of the Federation, comprising representatives of the 89 administrative subjects of the federation, has emerged as a defender of the rights of the regions. Its members have been vigorous in the defence of the interests of the regions from which they have come, even though prior to the regional elections of late-1996 and early 1997 they also generally adopted a pro-president approach.<sup>13</sup> This sort of building into the system of a means of protecting regional interests is a common, and virtually essential, feature of true federal systems, but it is

unclear how long these individuals can combine their roles of local administrator and central legislator without one side suffering. The lower house, or State Duma, is more a party house, at least to the extent that members gain election under party banners. There was some development of a form of party politics within the chamber (Lester 1995, App. 4a and 4b), and there was a vigorous (if not always fruitful) process of debate. A committee structure has emerged to service the chamber, and the proceedings of the Duma have taken on a greater sense of regularity than was characteristic of its predecessor.

The relationship between president and legislature has also been less conflictual than in 1992-93. At various times both sides have differed considerably on major issues: the February 1994 amnesty, the conduct of the Chechen war, the adoption by the Duma of a measure seeking to revoke the Belovezhskaia Accords inaugurating the CIS and thereby abolishing the Soviet Union, and the foreshadowing within the Duma of the elimination of the office of the presidency and the restoration of a parliamentary system, were all issues leading to a terseness in relations between legislature and president. But these strains were not allowed to break down and lead to the sort of conflict which had been so destructive in the past. Both sides sought to avoid a rupture in relations.<sup>14</sup> Thus, simply through its functioning without major disruption, the executive-legislative relationship has gained a sort of regularity which, if continued, should consolidate these institutions firmly within the Russian system.

The other institution relevant to this issue of democratic consolidation is elections. The citizens of independent Russia have gone to the polls nationally on three occasions, December 1993, December 1995 (legislative elections) and June-July 1996 (presidential elections). In various parts of the country, there have also been a series of local elections. All of the national elections have been conducted on a competitive basis, with a variety of party groups competing for popular support, and although there has been some fraud and tampering, and in the presidential elections Yeltsin stretched the advantages of incumbency and the support of a pliant press beyond the limits of propriety, the faith of the population in the electoral process does not appear to have been undermined. This is suggested by the figures for participation in the national elections: 1993 54.8%,<sup>15</sup> 1995 64.4% and 1996 70%/69%.<sup>16</sup> The results in the regional elections have not been as good, with lower voter participation rates and uncontested elections in some areas, but this may be a similar phenomenon to that witnessed widely in the West where the electoral process is much less vigorous at the lower levels than at the national level.<sup>17</sup> The apparent popular support for competitive elections, elite acceptance of the results of the elections,<sup>18</sup> and the scheduled holding of the 1995 and 1996 elections in the face of significant calls for their postponement, suggest that the electoral process may have become embedded in the Russian political landscape.<sup>19</sup>

This survey of the leading institutions of Russian democracy suggests that, in terms of consolidation as discussed above, some progress may have been made toward the consolidation of a democratic political system. Following the disruption of Yeltsin's dispersal of the legislature, the main institutions have conducted their business in a more or less regularized fashion,<sup>20</sup> and this pattern was not disrupted by the absence of the president due to ill health following the presidential election. It is, however, only a short time since the new configuration at the top of the Russian state was established and it is therefore too early to predict confidently that consolidation has been achieved. But in any case, formal adherence to the rules of the democratic game is not sufficient to establish the existence of a genuine democracy.

#### 4 A broader perspective?

Clearly a focus on institutions is important for evaluating the progress made in the consolidation of a democratic political system. However, a focus on institutions and procedures alone cannot enable us to distinguish between democratic forms and democratic essence. Executive-legislative relations may be stabilized and conducted in accordance with the constitution, competitive and fair elections may be held on a regular basis, and the leading politicians may be subject to popular accountability, and yet the democratism of this structure may be subverted by the effective distribution of power in the society. If the formal institutions are a mere facade, the fact that they accord with democratic norms does not make the system democratic. Even if the formal institutions are not a facade, but there are major power centres which exist outside them and exercise significant power at the governmental level, the democratic credentials of the system are likewise impaired. The conditions of the Russian transition have contributed to the emergence of this situation in contemporary Russia.

The most important aspect of the Russian transition for this question is that of economic transformation. The need to shift the economic system from one based on central planning to one based on the market in principle involved some recasting of all of the economic institutions in the country, the creation of new types of institutions, and the death of others. New legal regimes had to be established, and new patterns of action and interaction on the part of economic actors had to be generated. All of this occurred in a deteriorating economic environment; deindustrialization hit many parts of the country, economic (especially industrial) production dropped significantly, inflation soared, levels of economic hardship increased dramatically for large parts of the population, and crime became an important feature of the Russian scene. But, while many parts of the economy stagnated, parts of the retail and com-

mercial sectors boomed, resting principally upon the sale of imported goods and funded in part by speculative capital. Reflected in the activities of a host of petty traders operating in the big cities, the growth of commercial activities was the most public face of Russian economic change. But potentially more important were some of the structural trends occurring in a less public form.

The key characteristic of this economic transformation was uncertainty. None of those businessmen and entrepreneurs who sought to establish businesses and to function in the economy had any real experience of how a market system operated, let alone how the sort of system in a state of fundamental change that was the Russian economy should function. The sorts of established patterns of interaction and institutional channels and fora which are taken for granted in a functioning market economy were absent in Russia. The notion of trust reinforced by law which is fundamental for the functioning of a market system did not exist. The legal regime was inadequate; there was not even an effective system of land title registration at the time the Soviet Union was dissolved. The Soviet distribution network had in part broken down, so there was no certainty of supply of the materials and resources enterprises needed to function. Inflation undercut the value of the currency, thereby encouraging speculation and undermining financial stability. Crime, both petty and organized, increased the uncertainty of conducting business and even made it physically hazardous; according to a report from early 1994, some 70%-80% of all privatized enterprises and commercial banks had had to pay between 10% and 20% of their turnover in extortion payments to criminals or corrupt officials.<sup>21</sup>

In these conditions of uncertainty, would-be businessmen and entrepreneurs have used a variety of strategies in an attempt to lessen that uncertainty. Association in broad networks of mutual protection, often structured around organized criminal gangs, has been one response to the security problem (*Izvestiia* 21 September 1995). The use of large security forces (*Izvestiia* 21 September 1995) has been another such response. But a more important response to this uncertainty, at least in terms of the question currently under discussion, is to seek a close relationship with the government. Such a relationship could be useful in terms of security; the state still maintains a substantial coercive arm in the form of the police, military and security services, and potentially has significant capacity to combat the high levels of crime currently afflicting Russian business. With a weak legal system, political connections may be crucial for such protection. But a government connection can also be important in economic terms. Government contracts should provide a major source of certainty when other customers are more problematic. Government policy plays a crucial part in structuring the economic environment in which businessmen must work; for example, establishment of a rouble corridor in mid-1995 substantially reduced the profits available through

financial speculation and directly contributed to the banking crisis later in the year.<sup>22</sup> More directly, some sectors of the economy, in particular those emerging from the Soviet military industrial complex, remain highly inefficient and reliant on government protection against foreign competition, while other sectors, like the energy complex, favour a more open system with government assistance for their exporting efforts. Government favours may be central to successful performance. These may take the form of state contracts, subsidies, loans, credits, guarantees, favourable policies and generally sympathetic consideration. Political contacts are thus a very important currency in the conduct of Russian business, and while this may in general apply to many countries, the high levels of uncertainty prevailing in Russia give it an added potency.

The nature of the emergent Russian business class also encourages a reliance upon personal contacts. A substantial part of this emergent class comes from within the old Soviet structures and gained much of its initial wealth and position through privileged access to party, and in particular komsomol, resources. During the perestroika period, commercial activity began to emerge, as organs were established with the aim of accumulating capital and while some of this was to be remitted to the party centre, it also provided the opportunity for individuals and groups to accumulate on their own behalf.<sup>23</sup> As Gorbachev liberalized the Soviet economy, increased opportunities were opened for those in positions of influence to exploit. The formal approval for the establishment of joint stock companies enabled officials effectively to privatize parts of those organizations for which they were responsible, often by means of issuing shares to those institutions and dividing those shares among senior management, with the result that state property was transformed into private property. Officials could use state funds to establish and set up what effectively were private commercial concerns, as ministries were replaced by companies, state banks by commercial banks and state distribution agencies and trade organisations by stock and commodities exchanges, joint ventures and trading companies.<sup>24</sup> By the time official policies of privatization were introduced by the Yeltsin government, many of the most potentially profitable enterprises had already passed into the hands of former state officials. When the Yeltsin privatization plans were set in motion, they too enabled those already in managerial positions to dominate the process.<sup>25</sup> As a result, much of the productive capacity of independent Russia fell into the hands of people who had been in responsible positions under the Soviet regime.

Such insider privatization reflects the fact that members of the Soviet nomenklatura were able to translate their former privileged positions into new positions of power and privilege. This capacity should not be unexpected; in all revolutions, some members of the former privileged groups have been able to maintain their positions under the new regime. Furthermore,

this capacity has not been unique to the economic sphere. A recent survey has shown the percentage of members of different elite clusters that came from the Soviet nomenklatura to be as follows:<sup>26</sup>

Table 1 The Soviet nomenklatura

President's inner circle	75.0%
Government	74.3%
Regional elite	82.3%
Party leaders	57.1%
Business elite	61.0%

It is clear from these figures that a significant proportion of those in leading positions in both political and economic life came from within what may loosely be called the Soviet establishment. Many may have come from middle and lower rungs of the nomenklatura, but there was also a solid constituency from its upper levels.<sup>27</sup> As many Western studies of power distribution have made clear, common background does not necessarily equate to common outlook, beliefs or values. However, what a common background in the nomenklatura would have given these people was familiarity with a common approach, or way of operating. One of the key aspects of the nomenklatura was its personalist basis, the way in which promotion up the nomenklatura hierarchy was often dependent more on personal contacts than ability and merit. The currency of the bureaucratic politics of the Soviet period was in significant measure, although not entirely, personal connections. Similarly, success in the Soviet period was often closely related to personal contacts, not only in terms of promotion, but also of fulfilling tasks. When economic success depended upon meeting plan targets but insufficient supplies were provided through the distribution system, recourse was had to informal means of gaining those supplies. Such informal means usually had personal connections at their base. Thus even though many of these people originating in the nomenklatura did not know each other personally, they shared common assumptions about appropriate forms of behaviour, and these assumptions would have had personal connections at their heart.

But of course many people in these elite clusters did know each other personally. Much of Yeltsin's early entourage shared his Sverdlovsk/Ekaterinburg background. Many leaders of the oil industry had long-time close contacts stemming from shared time in the Tyumen region. In many of the privatized concerns emanating from ministries, such as Gazprom, the leading ranks were filled by those who had formerly been at the head of the ministries and thereby were colleagues of long-standing. Many middle-ranking officials also crossed over into the new commercial concerns, taking with them their connections

with their former ministerial colleagues; many even continued to work from their former ministerial premises.<sup>28</sup> The more these sorts of personal contacts crossed institutional and sector boundaries, the stronger the web of personal networks became, and the more pervasive was the reliance upon personalized methods instead of institutional channels.

This was reinforced by forms of networking emerging in the economy. One type of networking has been the tendency for different sectors of the economy to group together to form unofficial cartels. Chief among these are the energy sector (gas and oil), the financial sector, machine-building and metallurgy (which stems from the Soviet military-industrial sector), and agro-industry. These cartels consist of formally distinct commercial entities; for example, there have been more than 2500 commercial banks in Russia.<sup>29</sup> These individual companies may compete against one another, but they also cooperate to further the general interests of the sector. The banks have joined together to oppose the entry of foreign banks into Russia. The components of the machine-building and metallurgy sector have combined to press for continued protection. Energy companies have united to support government policies maintaining domestic and international price differentials.

Another type of networking has been a more formal interlocking of economic concerns. Cross share ownership and interlocking directorates, both within and between different economic sectors, have become common; for example, in cooperation with Lukoil, Gazprom created the Imperial Bank and acquired shares in two other banks, Rossiiskii Kredit and Vneshtorgbank (Rutland 1996, 13). Potentially the most important type of interlocking is the financial-industrial groups, initially set up under presidential decree at the end of 1993.<sup>30</sup> These comprise financial, industrial and commercial bodies linked together in order to coordinate economic activity, sometimes combining to monopolize all stages in a particular industrial field (e.g. aluminium), while others possess interests in a range of different economic areas. Many of the groups formally combine state and private ownership and possess close links with state ministries. Their essence is the linking of industrial capacity with bank capital; by autumn 1995 there were said to be seven major financial-industrial groups focused on the banks uniting a large range of companies in single "empires".<sup>31</sup> Such interlocking, both within and across sectors, has relied heavily on personal contacts.

Personal connections have linked the sectors of the economy with the upper levels of political life. There have been some attempts to establish lobby groups<sup>32</sup> and political parties to unite business or agrarian interests,<sup>33</sup> but more important has been the sort of link provided by the personal presence in government circles of representatives of the various economic sectors. The most public manifestation of this occurred in mid-1992 when Yeltsin, under pressure from the legislature for, among other things, leaving his economic policy in the

hands of young and radical academics instead of professionals, promoted into the government three representatives of the old industrial sector – Viktor Chernomyrdin, Georgii Khizha and Vladimir Shumeiko. Chernomyrdin, who had been Soviet gas industry minister and chairman of Gazprom, became prime minister in December. Significant numbers of people who have held high positions in the Yeltsin administrations have been seen as working to represent the interests of sectoral economic concerns. Fuel and Power Minister Yuri Shafrannik, First Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Shumeiko, Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandr Zaveryukha and Central Bank Chairman Viktor Gerashchenko have been seen as the virtual godfathers of the energy, defence industry, agrarian and finance sectors respectively (*Izvestiia* 6 December 1994, 10 January 1996). Machine-building, metallurgy and military industry were seen as being linked to Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets. These individuals are representative of the significant leavening within leading political circles of those who come from sectors of the economy,<sup>34</sup> and who often act as the direct representatives and protectors of the interests of those sectors in the bureaucratic politics of Moscow. And they are underpinned by that web of personal links between commercial concerns and the ministries noted above.

It is not unusual in the West for individual politicians to become identified with particular sectors of the economy and to become virtual spokesmen for their interests in government circles. But this situation differs markedly from that sketched above. Russia has neither the formal rules forbidding conflict of interest nor the conventions which encourage politicians in most countries to distance themselves from commercial concerns with which they have formerly been connected but which may now be subject to decisions they make as politicians. Furthermore, the widespread conception that the period of economic disruption provided opportunities for personal enrichment open to exploitation by those in positions of power (Shlapentokh 1996, 398-399) gave a sort of legitimacy to such activity. Moreover, the degree of interlocking between government, state ministries and business is much greater in Russia than in most democracies of the West. In most stable and established democracies, government would not be seen in terms of a struggle between lobbies representing the various sectoral economic interests, as it has been in Russia (*Izvestiia* 6 December 1994). Such a situation runs directly counter to notions of public service, and legitimates politicians acting as godfathers to sectoral interests in government councils.

## 5 Conclusion

The circumstances of the Russian transition have produced a new class of businessmen reliant on personal contacts and integrated both personally and

institutionally into leading political circles. Their privileged position and power rest not on their role in formal political institutions, but on their ability to exploit the opportunities created by the course of economic transformation. The privileged position occupied in the Russian political system by these new businessmen constitutes a potential qualification to the democratic credentials of Russia. Although president and legislature may formally be chosen by popular ballot, if the government is unduly influenced by representatives of this emergent business class based in the leading economic sectors, the essence of democracy is corrupted. The forms may be present, but the reality will not approximate the democratic ideal. This is clearly a problem for the growth of Russian democracy, and may suggest the future development of a politico-economic structure like that of some of the semi-corporatist states of East Asia, although perhaps without the economic dynamism evident in this area. While the result may be a formal democracy with formal adherence to democratic rules, the power wielded by business combines must modify the substance of this democratic claim.

It also highlights a problem for the scholarly study of democratic consolidation. It reinforces the view that a study which focuses overwhelmingly upon the formal institutions and which uses a purely proceduralist (and therefore minimalist) definition of democracy, cannot provide a satisfactory analysis of the state of democracy. The peculiar circumstances of the post-communist, and thereby Russian transition, with substantial economic transformation accompanying political change and the consequent emergence of new and powerful economic forces, shows how an attempt to analyse democratic consolidation that does not involve sociological analysis of the broader distribution of power in society cannot hope to be persuasive. Only if the broader contours of socio-economic power are included in the analysis can we see whether they reinforce the formal political structure or are in tension with it. If they are in tension with it, the system remains potentially unstable and could collapse as a result of its own contradictions. It can hardly, therefore, be said to be consolidated. A procedural focus, even when supplemented by reference to attitudinal values and beliefs,<sup>35</sup> cannot generate a satisfactory analysis of whether a political regime has become consolidated without broader sociological investigation.

But once the analysis embraces the broad contours of socio-economic power, the procedural conception of democracy is no longer adequate because it cannot be used to evaluate this sort of power. It is only by applying the substantive principles of democracy to the analysis of process and power that the democratic credentials of the system can be evaluated. The reluctance of transition scholars to use such an approach means that they may be able to tell us much about the course of transition and of consolidation, but they can tell us little about the character of the regime. Satisfactory analysis of the

processes of transition and consolidation therefore demands a focus that broadens from an elite and procedural concentration to embrace socio-economic structures of power, and that involves evaluation of those elements in terms of the traditional principles of democratic theory. Only if both are involved, can analysis address both questions implicit in the study of democratic consolidation: is it consolidated? and is it democratic?

### Notes

1. The analysis will be concerned only with the central political institutions, even though two other considerations could legitimately be considered to be relevant. These are, first, the struggle by the centre to assert its control over the regions and, second, the power wielded by non-elected office-holders. The most important case of the latter has been the influence reported to have been exercised over the president by his chief of security, Aleksandr Korzhakov. For example, see *Argumenty i fakty* 31 January 1995; *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* XLVII, 4, 22 February 1995, pp. 2-4.
2. For one discussion of the informal rules governing Soviet politics, see Rigby 1984.
3. For a discussion of alignments within the legislature which gives primacy to the pro/anti-Yeltsin issue, see Remington et al., esp. pp. 172-177.
4. Yeltsin was elected in June 1991, the legislature in March 1990.
5. On the expansion of the presidential apparatus, see Sakwa 1993, pp. 50-54. Also see Huskey 1995 and Derleth 1995.
6. This stance was adopted widely in the West.
7. It was published in *Izvestiia* 10 November 1993.
8. Sixteen social and political organizations were banned straight after the end of the crisis, including communist, fascist and nationalist parties. *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* 7 October 1993. Some of the bans were soon lifted. For the final list of those allowed to compete, see *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* 11 November 1993.
9. "Dogovor ob obshchestvennom soglasii" *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* 29 April 1994. However, two of the most important, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and Yabloko, did not sign.
10. The Constitution was published in *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* 25 December 1993.
11. The legislature's weakened position is clearly demonstrated in the constitutional provisions that enable the president to dissolve the State Duma if it thrice rejects his nomination for prime minister or twice passes a no confidence motion in the government within three months (§§111 and 117). It was also made very difficult for the legislature to remove the president (§93).
12. For example, he did not create one body to bring all of the advice together in a coherent fashion, thereby contributing to significant conflict between individual advisers. For a discussion of the lack of coherence in the drafting of presidential decrees, see *Kommersant-Daily* 8 June 1995; *CDPSP* XLVII, 23, 5 July 1995, pp. 7-8. Also Huskey 1995.

13. This pro-president orientation has been moderated by the election of more oppositionist candidates to leadership positions in the regional elections.
14. Yeltsin even established within this apparatus a special Department for Interaction with Deputies of the Federal Assembly. See *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* 3 August 1994 for an interview with its head.
15. This is the official figure for voting in the constitutional plebiscite. If the claims about vote tampering are correct, only 46.1% will have participated.
16. These are the figures for both rounds of the presidential poll. For comparison, 62.9% of voters participated in the April 1993 referendum.
17. For the results of 33 regional elections held in autumn 1996, see OMRI Russian Regional Report 1, 17-18 December 1996. Of the 25 regions for which voter participation figures are given, in 13 regions less than 50% of voters turned out.
18. In both the 1993 and 1995 legislative elections, Yeltsin suffered a rebuff, but his acceptance of the results was eased by the knowledge that the legislature had little power. In 1996 it was principally the communists who were rebuffed.
19. Although arguments about electoral regulations preceding the polls suggests there may still be some fine-tuning to do.
20. Although at times, Yeltsin has ignored the views of the legislature and, in the case of the Chechen War, also the public (Parrish and Rutland 1996, p. 21).
21. *Izvestiia* 26 January 1994. This article, which is based on a report prepared inside the presidential administration, gives details of this sort of activity. For another report which discusses criminal involvement in economic activity, see *Izvestiia* 21 September 1995. For an argument linking the emergence of organized crime to the end of the state economic monopoly, especially over property, see Varese 1994.
22. This was the most public of a series of government measures taken in the first half of 1995 which effectively squeezed commercial banks (Hellman 1996, pp. 6-7).
23. Initially in the form of Centres of Scientific and Technical Work of the Youth. For one, brief, discussion, see *Izvestiia* 10 January 1996.
24. In practice, the state often kept a major share-holding in many of the largest privatized concerns e.g. some 40% of Gazprom shares were reserved for the state. See the discussion in *Izvestiia* 18 December 1993.
25. For a discussion of Yeltsin's privatization, see Fortescue 1994; Clarke 1992; McFaul 1995; Rutland 1994; Sutela 1994. For one view which emphasizes the role of organized crime, see *Izvestiia* 18 December 1993.
26. *Izvestiia* 10 January 1996. An earlier survey suggested that of those in Yeltsin's inner circle, 37% rose to prominence under Brezhnev and 39% under Gorbachev. *Izvestiia* 18 May 1994.
27. One prominent example was former prime minister Ryzhkov who entered the banking sphere.
28. For example, the headquarters of Gazprom shares a building with the Ministry of Fuel and Energy.
29. "Banking Blues", *Transition* 2, 10, 17 May 1996, p. 5. Most of these were former accounting departments of enterprises.
30. *Izvestiia* 16 November 1993. Significant government concessions were given to assist the establishment of such groups. For support for the creation of such groups

- by Foreign Economics Relations Minister Glazyev, see *Rossiiskiy vestnik* 21 April 1993; CDPSP XLV, 18, 1993, pp. 11-12.
31. These seven were: Promstroibank with more than 20 concerns, Vneshtorgbank, Menatep with about 60 concerns, ONEKSIMbank-MFK with more than 30 concerns, Rossiiski Kredit with more than 30 concerns, Inkombank with about 30 concerns, and Most with 42 concerns (*Izvestiia* 10 January 1996).
32. For example, The Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs headed by Arkady Volsky was meant to be a representative peak organization for these people, but its influence has been minimal. Various sectors have developed their own pressure groups; for example, the League for Assistance to Russia's Defence Enterprises, the Russian Union of Arms Manufacturers, the Association of Russian Banks, the Round Table of Russian Business, the Federation of Russian Manufacturers, and the Coordinating Council for Collective Actions by Working People of the Russian Agro-Industrial Complex. For discussions, see *Izvestiia* 6 December 1994; Kubicek 1996; Peregodov and Semenenko 1996.
33. Attempts were made to field pro-business parties in both the 1993 (e.g. the Consolidation Party sponsored by Alexander Tikhonov and the Party of Economic Freedom led by Konstatin Borovoi) and 1995 (e.g. United Industrial Party of Russia led by Arkady Volsky) legislative elections, but the only such party to gain any representation in the party list section was the Party of Unity and Concord which was supported by the oil and military industry lobbies. Rutland p. 11-25 and *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* 7 April 1995. The most successful party has been the Agrarian Party.
34. In this regard, it is interesting to note that according to the survey cited earlier in this paper, 42.3% of members of the government had come from the Soviet economic nomenklatura (*Izvestiia* 10 January 1996). Businessmen have been present not only as government ministers, but in advisory positions as well. A recent example is the appointment of Boris Berezovsky to the Security Council.
35. Linz and Stepan (1996, pp. 7-15) essentially add to observance of democratic norms, popular and elite commitment to the democratic system.

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