Civil Society and Democratic Consolidation in Russia[*]

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Abstract

This paper explores the democratic functions of civil society and provides a framework of analysis for understanding the development of civil society in Gorbachev's Soviet Union and Yeltsin's Russia. To identify the trends and patterns of Russian civil society, I clarify some conceptual issues of civil society and review different approaches to its origins in Russia. I argue that the origins, formation, strength, and weakness of Russian civil society were shaped by the broader set of political opportunities and institutional arrangements unique to the national context in which they were embedded. I use a framework of opportunities and constraints to explain and analyze the dynamic pattern of three types of civil society during three critical junctures within the context of changing state-society relations: (1) 1985-88: a regime-initiated civil society; (2) 1989-93: a society-mobilized civil society; and (3) 1994-99: an uninstitutionalized civil society.

Keywords: civil society; democratization; Russia; historical institutionalism; political opportunity structure

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From the 1960s and 1970s in the field of Soviet studies, many Western concepts and theories, most notably embracing interest groups, institutional pluralism, and modernization theory, were used by sovietologists as alternative approaches to the totalitarian model, but the term "civil society" had never been applied to explain the reality of Soviet society before Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985. Nevertheless, in East Europe this old Western idea of civil society was revived, and began to be used by some analysts as a useful concept for describing such phenomena as the autonomous and spontaneous social movement of *Solidarity* against the coercive apparatus of the Communist party-state in the late 1970s and early 1980s Poland. Responding to Gorbachev's top-down *perestroyka* and policies of opening access to participation such as *glasnost'*, socialist pluralism and competitive elections, a myriad of unofficial groups and social movements emerged from below. Analyzing the social dimensions of the process of reform, some Soviet specialists attempted to apply the same concept of civil society to describe this independent social activism in Gorbachev's Soviet Union. After the collapse of Soviet-type regimes, civil society was commonly recognized as one of the major factors contributing to different stages of democratization. Exploring the democratic functions of civil society becomes a new paradigm in the literature of transition from Communist regimes to a liberal democratic order.

Some important questions have often been raised through the inquiry into this "uncharted territory" of civil society. Why does the renaissance of this eighteenth century political thought, despite its divergent meanings in the context of historical development, have such a powerful relevance to the former and remaining Communist countries? Does the literature of transition from authoritarian regimes in Latin America and Southern Europe throw light on the developmental trend and pattern of Soviet-type

regime transition? How can this idea and the collective actor of civil society contribute to the breakdown of Communist regimes and to democratic transition and consolidation in post-Communist countries? How to operationalize the concept of civil society as a vital category for understanding emergent social realities and political phenomena? In this paper these general questions are the major concerns of my theoretical and conceptual explorations in the literature of democratization. The remaining questions to be answered are the following: How should the notion of civil society be applied to the particular case of Russian studies? How should we set about designing an analytical framework for the development of Russian civil society? The findings of this study will shed light on the puzzling dynamics of the democratic process in post-Soviet Russia and contribute to our understanding of the democratic functions of civil society in the process.

A Working Definition of Civil Society

"The concept of civil society," according to Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato (1992: vii), "in a variety of uses and definitions, has become quite fashionable today, thanks to struggles against communist and military dictatorships in many parts of the world." Despite its many meanings and its different contents or boundaries vis-à-vis the state, civil society is the arena which at least contains various associations which are voluntary, self-organizing, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state and which articulate their interests within the context of a state-society relationship. Civil society, which is distinct from "society" in general, is an intermediary entity, standing between the private sphere and the state, and involves an independent mass media, encompassing the flow of information and ideas (Diamond, 1999: 221-222).

In order to maximize civil society's utility as an analytical category for understanding emergent social realities, we should give civil society a working definition which can guide an empirical inquiry. I follow Philippe C. Schmitter's (1997) definition with some revisions or expansion provided in the footnotes, which provides us with a useful starting point for analysis. He identifies civil society, which rests on the following four conditions or behavioral norms, as a set or system of self-organized intermediary groups.

1. Dual Autonomy: These groups are relatively independent of both public authorities and private units of production and reproduction, i.e. of firms and families.[1]

2. Collective Action: These groups are capable of deliberating about and taking collective actions in defense/ promotion of their interests and passions.[2]

3. Non-usurpation: These groups do not seek to replace either state agents or private (re)producers or to accept

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[1] Civil society, therefore, according to Larry Diamond (1999: 221), "excludes parochial society: individual and family life and inward-looking group activity (recreation, entertainment, religious worship, spirituality)." Thus, autonomy must insulate a civil society actor from dominance or control not only by the state or firms but by an individual leader or ruling clique. In terms of internal structure of civil society organizations, the horizontal relations of trust and reciprocity rather than the "vertical relations of authority and dependency," as embodied in patron-client networks," are the building blocks of the civic community (Diamond, 1999: 229, 244; Putnam, 1993: 101). The activities and initiatives of civil society are unofficial, autonomous, and self-regulated outside governmental structures and institutions. They represent what Ernest Gellner (1994: 3-4) identifies as "institutional and ideological pluralism, which prevents the establishment of monopoly of power and truth, and counterbalances those central institutions which, though necessary, might otherwise acquire such monopoly."

[2] Sudden outbursts of discontent or an isolated incident of contention – for example, a mob or riot – cannot be treated as an indisputable indication of the existence of a robust civil society (although they contain more or less the attributes of solidarity or identity), unless they can be carried out into a sustained and stable organizational base (Ding, 1994: 296; Tarrow, 1998: 6-7).

responsibility for governing the polity as a whole.[3]

4. Civility: These groups do agree to act within pre-established rules of a "civil" or legal nature.[4]

These four indicators help us understand what an ideal-type civil society should be, especially in the phase of democratic consolidation. However, as they are contrary to the criteria of non-usurpation and civility, they cannot explain the oppositional role played by civil society, which contributes to the breakdown of Communist regimes. Nevertheless, they can serve as reference points for us to identify different types and roles of civil society in specific stages of regime transition in different countries.

Two Operational Dimensions of Civil Society

The idea of civil society is not only a normative aspiration of democratic values as well as a style of autonomous interest-advanced organization. It is also an intermediate arena coexisting with other arenas in the context of a modern polity. In the same vein, our working definition of four norms of civil society helps us to identify the two operational dimensions of civil society: relational and normative.

1. Relational Dimension

One can analyze the scope of regime transition or political

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[3] According to this definition, we exclude political parties from civil society on the grounds that they compete for national office (Whitehead, 1997; Diamond, 1999: 221). In our further discussion of the relational dimension of civil society, political parties belong to the arena of political society (Stepan, 1988). Accordingly, the changing boundary among civil society, political society, and the state is also one of my major concerns in this research.

[4] According to this criterion, criminal groups such as the Mafia, as well as associations defending minority rights through exceptionism or fanaticism against the rest of society cannot be treated as part of civil society (Kholodkovskiy, 1998: 9).

terrains of institutional design in terms of three interactive, but conceptually distinct, arenas of modern polity: civil society (e.g., manifold social movements and civic organizations), political society (e.g., political parties, elections, electoral rules, political leadership, intraparty alliances, and legislatures) and the state (the continuous administrative, legal, bureaucratic and coercive system) (Stepan, 1988: 3-12). Civil society can constitute itself politically to select and monitor democratic government through political society.[5] Political society mediates and channels the relationships between civil society and the state. The state structures relations *between* civil and public power and many relationships *within* civil and political society.[6] Parties and elections represented opportunities for the *remobilization* of civil society when phenomena of demobilization occurred after failures of early popular upsurges against authoritarian rule (Cohen & Arato, 1992: 53).[7] It is important to mention that the scope of the state should be a sovereign state with consensus on national identity and boundaries. Otherwise, the so-called "stateness" problem can be the major obstacle in the process of democratization (Linz & Stepan, 1996: 16-37).[8] The absence of a strong sense of national unity was one major reason why stable democracy could not take root before the collapse of the Soviet

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[5] According to M. Steven Fish's (1999: 800) comparative research on cross-national variation in the extent of democratization in the post-Communist region, "the highest achievers on democratization have the best-developed party systems and civil-societal infrastructures."

[6] According to a research on the collapse of the Weimar Republic, in the context of the absence of strong and responsive national government and political parties a vibrant civil society served to fragment German society and contributed to the rise of the Nazi Party (Berman, 1997).

[7] It should be noted that unlike some Latin American, South European or East-Central European cases, there is no "resurrection of civil society" in the former Soviet Union because independent movements and initiatives (rather than in the form of underground dissidents) did not exist before Gorbachev came to power.

[8] In the case of Palestine, Yossi Shain and Gary Sussman (1998) pointed out the predicament between sovereignty and democracy within the process of state-building.

Union. The complex interaction between civil society, political society and the state forms the common ground for describing and analyzing regime transition from communism to democracy in most current literature (White, 1994; Linz & Stepan, 1996; McAuley, 1997; Urban, 1997; Weigle, 2000).

In addition to the three major arenas mentioned above, the other two important arenas contributing to a consolidated democracy and a robust civil society are rule of law (constitutionalism) and economic society (institutionalized market) (Linz & Stepan, 1996). Civil society which has concrete boundaries and is composed of a diverse set of concretely located agents needs the sanction of the state, that is, legal regulation and protection by law. As Western history shows, the establishment of legal boundaries that protected the existence of an independent sphere of autonomy (the "public space" which was populated by a range of different autonomous organizations) from the exercise of state power was a critical juncture in the development of civil society (Bernhard, 1993: 3-4). The existence of rule of law embodied in a spirit of constitutionalism guarantees the civility and openness of civil society. Therefore, it combats antisocial behavior and criminal or underground undertakings. Economic society, according to Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996: 14), a set of socio-politically crafted and socio-politically accepted norms, institutions, and regulations, "produces the indispensable surplus to allow the state to carry out its collective good functions and provides a material base for the pluralism and autonomy of civil and political societies."

2. Normative Dimension

Linz and Stepan (1996: 9) indicate that a lively and independent civil society is indispensable at all stages of the democratization process: "A robust civil society, with the capacity

to generate political alternatives and to monitor government and state can help transitions get started, help resist reversals, help push transitions to their completion, help consolidate, and help deepen democracy." In order to maintain democratic institutions a civil-society-based culture should be crafted as an alternative to the Soviet legacy and traditional political culture.[9] At the same time, civil society also serves as a symbolic framing of meaning and identity which becomes the cognitive or ideational dimensions of collective action. For example, as Anthony Oberschall (1996: 121) maintains, "When provided with the opportunity to organize a democratic movement, Solidarity in Poland and the fledgling Hungarian opposition groups capitalized on the lack of regime legitimacy, and filled the ideological vacuum with a nationalist and democratic frame that had an immense appeal."

In the initial stage of democratization, non-violent "people power", the resurrection or resilience of civil society, the restructuring of public space, and the mobilization of all manner of independent groups, contribute to the breakdown of non-democratic regimes. In the later stages of democratization, completed democratic transition and especially consolidated democratic regimes, in the words of Larry Diamond (1994: 15), "civil society must be autonomous from the state, but not alienated from it. It must be watchful but respectful of state authority." The democratic functions of civil society help overcome the institutional obstacles left by the Soviet legacy and produce a civil-society-based culture replacing traditional conventions governing behavior.[10] In short, the development of a

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[9] Unlike Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and the Baltic states, Russia has no previous civic traditions that could be recovered.

[10] Drawing on Diamond (1994: 7-11; 1999: 239-250), I see eleven democracy-building functions of civil society:

robust and institutionalized civil society fosters democratic attributes, which are necessary for the maintenance of democratic institutions.

Civil Society in Three Phases of Democratization

Democratization involves three phases: (1) the breakdown of a post-totalitarian regime;[11] (2) the installation of a democratic regime and the completed democratic transitions; and (3) the consolidation of the democratic regime. Three types or degrees of civil society should go hand in hand with three stages of

1. Checking and limiting the abuse of the state power and preventing corruption; and in the end civil society must also complement and improve the state and enhance the latter's democratic legitimacy and effectiveness;
2. Supplementing the role of political parties in stimulating political participation, increasing the political efficacy and skill of democratic citizens, and promoting an appreciation of the obligations as well as the rights of democratic citizenship;
3. Cultivating the deeper values and norms of a democratic political culture, such as tolerance, moderation, a willingness to compromise, and a respect for opposing viewpoints; developing techniques for conflict mediation and resolution and offering these services;
4. Socializing young people and adults and stimulating their active participation in community affairs through democratic civic education;
5. Structuring multiple channels, beyond political parties, for the articulation and representation of interests;
6. Effecting a "transition from clientelism to citizenship" at the local level; weakening vertical chains of clientage and thus strengthening the social foundation of democracy;
7. Generating a wide range of cross-cutting interests, and so mitigating the principal polarities of political conflict;
8. Recruiting and training new political leaders;
9. Monitoring elections and educating voters on a non-partisan basis;
10. Widely disseminating information;
11. Spreading new information and ideas for achieving economic reform.

[11] Linz and Stepan (1996: 38-54) create a revised typology of modern nondemocratic regimes: totalitarian, post-totalitarian, authoritarian, and sultanistic. The differences and definitions of these regime types can be found in their book, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation.*

democratization: (1) an emerging civil society; (2) a mobilizational civil society; and (3) an institutionalized civil society.

Civil society as the symbolic framing of meaning and identity, an alternative symbolism to official Communist ideology, helped the development of consensus and action mobilization among social movement participants. Filling the ideological vacuum with a nationalist and democratic frame, the slogan of "civil society vs. the state" appeared to be a powerful resource that promoted participation in collective actions which were aggressive in style and confrontational in content. During this first phase of democratization the foremost goal of civil society was to destroy the Communist party-state and regime. This emerging and then mobilized civil society which served as an all-embracing opposition movement was more a union of all than an association of some.[12] After the collapse of the Communist regime, the simplified dichotomy in oppositional terms evaporated. In the words of Michael McFaul (1993: 16), "with the straightjacket of this bipolarity removed, Russia's post-communist civil society is bound to develop along new trajectories."

In the first phase mentioned above, civil society was more like an antiregime opposition movement of society than an

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[12] The same situation also happened in Communist Poland. Solidarity and the Roman Catholic Church claimed to represent the whole nation. Both of them were more a union of all than an association of some. As Christopher Bryant (1998: 20) argues, "neither Solidarity nor church constituted associations of a Tocquevillean kind; citizens were variously constituents of a mass or individual users of networks of personal connections, but rarely members of associations. Solidarity, in particular, represented society against the state, as Arato was quick to recognize, but it did not, and could not, provide the framework for autonomous individual and collective pursuit of different interests within a framework of law." Diamond (1999: 223) also mentioned the importance of this "partiality" to generate "one of the important consequences of a truly civil society," that is "the profusion of different organizations."

intermediary arena for interest representation of civic organizations. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the breakdown of the Communist regime transformed the conditions under which groups' searches for identity and influence took place, broke up existing coalitions, and stimulated the emergence of new organizations and alliances. Both the democratic regime and civil society were facing the challenge of adjustment and rebuilding during this transitional period.

In the period of democratic consolidation, a robust and institutionalized civil society will serve as formidable counterweights to the centrifugal forces created by the vastness, the territorial and the ethnic diversity of the country, the erosion of central power, and the rapid growth of localist pressures due to the so-called "weak state syndrome."[13] Hence a vital civil society (the existence of a large number and variety of intermediary organizations) contributes to stable, effective democracy (de Tocqueville, 1966; Putnam, 1993). The important role of a supporting state in strengthening civil society cannot be ignored. The weakening of the state in transitional ex-Communist societies does not automatically lead to the emergence of a strong civil society (Pei, 1994: 207). Weak state syndrome can retard the growth of the institutions of civil society, as M. Steven Fish (1995: 217) maintains: "A state that lacks effective administrative capacities and the authority to enforce universalization of the law – and the Russian state currently lacks both – may actually inhibit the growth and maturation of civil society."

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[13] Some Russian scholars argue that the fragmentation and particularization of society contributed to the weakening of the domination power of the central regime, but citizens did not thereby obtain full freedom. Firstly, the emergence of regional despotism; secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the occurrence of deep alienation of society from the state in the past few years (Khoros (Ed.), 1998: 265).

The Dispute on the Origins of Civil Society in Russia

Traditional Soviet studies emphasized the reach of the party-state and the stability of the Soviet system, creating a tendency to downplay division and conflict between state and society. However, different versions of modernization and development theory, treating society as a prime mover rather than an object of coercion, have been applied in efforts to avoid the pitfall of state-centered analysis and to explain and predict the dynamics of Communist systems and political change. Due to the weakening of the belief in Communist utopia as a foundation of legitimacy, there was a growing effort in a post-totalitarian regime to legitimate itself on the basis of performance criteria (Linz & Stepan, 1996: 49).[14]

A number of scholars pointed out that the accretion of quantitative changes in terms of the indicators of modernization – urbanization, educational attainments, occupational structure, and communications – gave birth to a qualitative change in Soviet society. They emphasize the implications of social and economic change for the distribution of political authority in Gorbachev's era. Moshe Lewin (1991: 146), for example, argued that Soviet society had come to need a state that could "match its own complexity." For Lucian Pye (1990: 6-11), similarly, the pluralizing changes of the Gorbachev era were a "vindication of

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[14] Some point out the legitimacy crisis in terms of poor economic performance. Though economic crises are neither necessary nor sufficient to account for authoritarian withdrawal, poor economic performance reduces the bargaining power of authoritarian incumbents and increases the strength of oppositions (Haggard and Kaufman, 1997: 267). Some Soviet specialists also argue that in the absence of mass terror, post-Stalin regime's legitimacy was established through the mechanism of a "social contract" – a tacit agreement between the party-state and the working class whereby the regime provided economic and social security in return for the workers' political quiescence (Breslauer, 1984; Hauslohner, 1987; Cook, 1993).

modernization theory" and a reflection of the "inevitable growth in the complexities of societies." Gail W. Lapidus (1989: 121) explicitly linked the emergence of civil society to modernization theory, seeing Gorbachev's reforms as a "long-delayed response by the leadership to fundamental social changes."

The political context in which the social change is embedded cannot be ignored. As Thomas F. Remington (1993: 270, 272) has noted, "it is troubling that there is no agreement on the precise nature of the link between the two sides of the equation – social change and political change." The same author adds: "An adequate model of the transition from communist rule therefore must accurately describe trends in the social environment and also provide better insight into the complex relationship between social and political change." A society-centered approach to Communist regime transition cannot fully explain how societal autonomy or activism could develop under state-dominant structure in the first place or why civil society was larger and more effective in some Communist countries than in others (Tong, 1997: 11). Accordingly, we have to turn to the state-centered approach to the regime transition, as well as the emergence of civil society in the former Soviet Union.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union there was a trend towards the renaissance of a statist approach. Fish (1995) constructs a statist approach to explain the emergence of the new societal institutions. His study claims to demonstrate that the character and development of Russia's new autonomous political society has been shaped above all by the structure, nature, and policy of the state, rather than by socio-economic modernization. Offering a theory of coalitional politics at the level of top leadership, Philip G. Roeder (1993) argues for the central causal effect of political institutions, which became constraints on the state power in responding to a demanding society, to explain the

stagnation and demise of the Soviet Union. Instead, focusing on the dynamics *within* institutions of state administration, Steven L. Solnick (1998) explains, contrary to most current approaches, that the source of Soviet hierarchical breakdown came from the opportunism from within, with the mid-level and local bureaucrats playing a vital role, rather than from the stalemate at the top or a revolution from below. Following the traditional state-centered analysis, I focus on the political genesis of civil society and argue that the emergence of civil society is more closely related to the political opportunity structure, especially the Gorbachev factor, rather than to the persistent social or economic factors that people experience.

Opportunities and Constraints: An Analytical Framework

The debate on the idea and practice of civil society has become popular not only in the Western literature, but also among the Russian scholars (Golenkova (Ed.), 1993; Kholodkovskiy (Ed.), 1996; Polyakova (Ed.), 1996; Levin, 1996; Diligenskiy, 1997; Khoros (Ed.), 1998; Vainshtein, 1998; Kholodkovskiy (Ed.), 1998).[15] The latter's debate focused on the applicability of the Western-born concept of "civil society" to the case of Russia. Russian researchers' major concern, as with their Western counterparts', can be simplified as one question: Is there a civil society in post-Soviet Russia? Kirill G. Kholodkovskiy (1998: 5-6) and his colleagues at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations acknowledged that if a civil society is

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[15] Despite an emerging literature on civil society by Russian researchers, most of these works concentrate mainly on theoretical or philosophical debate about the idea of civil society rather than on systematically empirical research or case study of civil society organizations.

defined as an aggregate of horizontal social links of autonomous associations separate from the state and is capable of protecting its members' interests, then this Western kind of civil society does not yet exist in contemporary Russia. However, they still argue that there are two justified reasons for applying the notion of civil society to the case of Russia. First, and most important, in reality the social structure of numerous voluntary organizations which are independent of the state, not only on the level of purely social associations but also on the level of political associations, does already exist. Second, methodologically speaking, civil society can be treated as an ideal-type concept, which can be used as a reference point for characterizing the phenomena of civil society in Russia.

This paper provides a framework of analysis for understanding the development of civil society in Gorbachev's Soviet Union and Yeltsin's Russia and sets the stage for what follows by briefly describing three phases of the development of Russian civil society from 1985 to 1999. Due to the state-dominant structure of Communism and the undertaking of state-building in post-Soviet Russia, this study focuses on state actors and institutional arrangements which structure the development of civil society within the dynamic context of state-society relations.[16]

I argue that the origins and development of civil society are

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[16] However, despite the fact that the state and institutions dominate the strategic choices and interaction among collective actors, "society is never entirely absent from political process," in the words of William M. Reisinger (1998: 233), "especially when one seeks to understand nontrivial process of social change." Thus, the reciprocal relations between the power of the state and the power of the civil society must be given close attention (Stepan, 1985). By the same token, a realist theory of civil society emphasizes the balance of power between state and society as a constraint that may make the costs of suppression too high for a government (Dahl, 1971; Roeder, 1998: 206). Thus the "top-down" argument of this study will be held in the context of state-society relations.

shaped by the broader set of political opportunities and institutional arrangements unique to the Russian national context in which they are embedded. I use an analytical framework of opportunities and constraints to explain and analyze the formation of three types of civil society in three critical junctures from 1985 to 1999: (1) 1985-88: a regime-initiated civil society; (2) 1989-93: a society-mobilized civil society; and (3) 1994-99: an uninstitutionalized civil society.

This section provides the following: first, a review of the concept of political opportunity structure; second, an attempted linkage between the concepts of critical junctures, historical institutionalism, and political culture as the specific national contexts in which civil society is embedded; third, an exploration of the opportunities for and constraints upon the development of three types of civil society in three critical junctures.

Political Opportunity Structure

Studies of transition from authoritarianism to democracy in Latin America and Southern Europe can shed light on the cases of post-totalitarian regimes. During the third wave of democratization in Latin America and Southern Europe, the analyses of the interaction between civil society and the state under bureaucratic authoritarian regimes concentrate on the effects of resistance by groups within civil society to repressive state rule and, reciprocally, on the ways in which the structures and strategies of authoritarian states have influenced the options and strategies of opposition social groups. These phenomena occurred when a previously closed system of opportunities had begun to open up. As Sidney Tarrow (1998: 7) argues, "changes in political opportunities and constraints create the most important incentives for initiating new phases of contention. These actions

in turn create new opportunities both for the original insurgents and for latecomers, and eventually for opponents and power holders."

Based on the experience of the emergence of the politics of contention in the former Soviet Union, Tarrow (1991; 1998: 71-90) indicates the importance of political opportunities in transforming the potential for mobilization into action, and identifies five major ways or dimensions in which political opportunity structure can be seen to expand (or, alternatively, to contract):

1. When levels of access to institutional participation have begun to open up;
2. When political alignments are in disarray and new realignments have not yet been formed;
3. When there are major conflicts within the political elite that challengers can take advantage of;
4. When challengers are offered the help of influential allies from within or outside the system;
5. When there is a decline in the state's capacity or will to repress dissent.

Tarrow (1991: 15) maintains that "the onset of a wave of mobilization can be seen as a collective response to generally expanding political opportunities, in which the costs and risks of collective action are lowered and the potential gains increase." His findings help us focus on the political genesis of Russian civil society rather than on the impact of socio-economic development on the origins of civil society.[17] According to Doug McAdam (1996: 29): "The concept of political opportunity structure has been used as a key explanatory variable in regard to two principal dependent variables: the timing of collective action and the

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[17] This character of political genesis of Russian civil society, rather than based on specific socio-economic interests, produced a negative legacy on its sustainable development resulting in, among other factors, its demobilization.

outcomes of movement activity." In addition, the form of movement appears to be another dependent variable that should be attributed, in part, to differences in the nature of the opportunities that set the movements in motion.

In sum, applying the concept of political opportunity structure to our case, we can argue that the origins of civil society in the former Soviet Union were due to the expanding political opportunities initiated by Gorbachev's top-down reform, such as emerging splits within the elite, the opening of access to participation for new societal actors, and a decline in the state's will to repress dissent, rather than by socio-economic development (Brown, 1996; Zdravomyslova, 1996). The expansion of the public arena diminished the role of central control and inevitably gave new impetus to the emergence of civil society. In the light of the late Soviet experience, we can explain that, in a reform process, the relationship between the regime's ability to control the pace, direction, and agenda of reform and the extent of change is affected by a shift in the balance of power between the state and society.

Critical Junctures, Historical Institutionalism, and Political Culture

Following the coming to power of a reformist General Secretary in 1985, the introduction of contested elections of 1989, the collapse of the Communist regime in 1991, the establishment of Yeltsin's supreme executive authority in 1994, and the financial and economic crisis and political turmoil of 1998, standing poised between the threat of disintegration and the unknown terrain of reconfiguration, Russia in the late 1980s and the 1990s was indeed at a sequence of critical junctures. Adapting the concept of "critical juncture" to comparative historical research, Ruth Berins

Collier and David Collier (1991: 29) have defined the term as "a period of significant change, which typically occurs in distinct ways in different countries (or in other units of analysis) and which is hypothesized to produce distinct legacies." The elements in this definition are relevant to the present study. The major watersheds in political transitions are Gorbachev's *perestroyka* and Yeltsin's state-building (elite choice and institutional design); the contrasts involve the changing relationship between civil society and the state; and the legacies consist of three types of civil society in three periods of fundamental change, that is 1985-88: a regime-initiated civil society, 1989-93: a society-mobilized civil society, and 1994-99: an uninstitutionalized civil society.

Accordingly, the concept of a critical juncture suggests path-dependent political phenomena in the sense that it rejects the traditional postulate, that the same operative forces will generate the same results everywhere, in favor of the view that the effect of such forces will be mediated by the contextual features of a given situation often inherited from the past. Institutions are seen as relatively persistent features of the historical landscape and one of the central factors pushing historical development along a particular set of paths (Hall and Taylor: 1996). As Kathleen Thelen and Sven Steinmo (1992: 27) indicated, "political evolution is a path or branching process and the study of the points of departure from established patterns ('critical junctures' of institutional choice) becomes essential to a broader understanding of political history."

Historical institutionalists not only try to explore how institutions shape political strategies and influence political outcomes, but also typically seek to locate institutions in a causal chain that accommodates a role for other factors, notably socio-economic development, changes in the balance of power,

and the diffusion of ideas or beliefs. Institutions may break down in a national or international crisis, but they are never constructed entirely from scratch; successor institutions bear the stamp of their predecessors, partly because they are reconstituted out of pieces of the old (Thelen & Steinmo, 1992: 32). Despite some new institutional arrangements, post-Soviet Russia inherited certain state institutions, and long-practiced conventions of political behavior. Mary McAuley (1997: 17) contends that "at a time when political structures are demolished and new rules introduced, the informal conventions governing behavior will provide the only element of stability in an uncertain world. We cannot ignore them. Anyone who has observed or participated in political activities in post-communist Russia will have quickly become aware of conventions and attitudes carried over from the Soviet past."

Thus, some argue that looking at Russia is a matter of looking at its special character. The public attitudes, the traditional values, and the learned behaviors that came out of the long-term tsarist and Communist experience are indeed unique. Therefore, the process of building democracy in Russia is a troubled one. Some observers are concerned about how political culture is linked to democratic development. Ronald Inglehart (1990: 14) argues, "Different societies are characterized to very different degrees by a specific syndrome of political cultural attitudes; that these cultural differences are relatively enduring, but not immutable; and that they can have major political consequences, one being that they are closely linked to the viability of democratic institutions." In a recent study of political culture in developing countries, Diamond (1993: 13) writes, "It is, by now, a cardinal tenet of empirical democratic theory that stable democracy also requires a belief in the legitimacy of democracy." Some theorists have long argued that particular elements of

political culture such as moderation, bargaining, co-operation, and accommodation are necessary to cope with one of the central dilemmas of democracy: to balance cleavage and conflict with the need for consensus (Almond and Verba, 1963: 489-493; Lipset, 1981: 78-79; Diamond, 1993: 10). In the case of Russia, the continuity of a political culture rooted in the autocratic traditions of the relatively recent as well as more distant past presents an obstacle to the development of a vibrant civil society.

Three Types of Civil Society in Three Critical Junctures

Facilitated by Gorbachev's top-down reform, the structure of opportunity came in two stages: the first was the advent of *glasnost'*, and the second was the institution of competitive elections. Post-Soviet politics appears to be a further critical juncture. However, Yeltsin's institutional arrangements and the Soviet legacy restrain the development of a robust civil society. Treating civil society as a whole, three types of civil society in three critical junctures are analyzed in this section: I. 1985-88: A Regime-Initiated Civil Society; II. 1989-93: A Society-Mobilized Civil Society; and III. 1994-99: An Uninstitutionalized Civil Society.

I. 1985-88: A Regime-Initiated Civil Society

In the Communist regime, the extraordinary institutional penetration by the party-state deprived the public of their autonomy, and thus control over public space fell in the domain of the state. Changes in the pattern of the state-society relationship prompted by Gorbachev's *glasnost'* and *perestroyka* provided an arena within which informal group activity flourished. The January 1987 plenary session of the CPSU Central Committee and

the 19th Party Conference of 1988 called for the general pluralization of Soviet society and the further reform of the political system. The top-down initiatives for reforms stimulated the proliferation of civic organizations and widespread social movements from below. Gorbachev tried to revitalize public life and mobilize into politics new social forces that would ally with reformers within the establishment in opposition to the vested interests of conservative bureaucrats. The motor of change was more of a matter of elite choice than societal initiatives.

The liberalization of the mass media and a public competition of ideas were the hallmark of *glasnost'*. Gorbachev and Aleksandr Yakovlev conducted the *glasnost'* campaign by means of the turnover of editors of certain publications. Many previously banned books and articles were published. Debate on the Soviet past, and particularly on Stalinism, appeared in the official press. The previously heavily politicized opinion polls were reformed through the creation of the All-Union Center for Public Opinion Research headed by Tat'yana Zaslavskaya to gather data on the public's attitude towards reform. Works which for many years had existed only in *samizdat*, and hence in extremely small numbers accessible only to a few, were increasingly published in substantial editions, thus providing new information that often contradicted what had hitherto been the Soviet orthodoxy. *Glasnost'* created a pluralism of cultural life and contributed to the general erosion of inhibitions and fears.

The expansion of political opportunities offered significant incentives for mobilizing societal forces. The emergence of informal groups provided an important indicator of changes both in the political climate and in society. The extent of the diversity of their organizations, membership, political goals, and activity was huge, as shown by various groups, such as Memorial, the Federation of Socialist Social Clubs, and the Movement for the

Defense of Baikal: Initially, they functioned as auxiliaries rather than opponents, aiming at solving social problems and supporting *perestroyka*. From 1985 to 1987 informal groups emerged chiefly within small elite clubs of the intelligentsia. Such clubs became *sui generis* discussion forums but proved unable to acquire mass bases of support (Shevtsova, 1993: 49). Although a number of individuals with their own political agenda had entered these circles earlier, late 1987 or early 1988 marked the development of informal associations into a political movement (Urban, 1997: 95-103). Democratic Union, the first self-proclaimed anti-regime "political party," appeared in May 1988, followed by the emergence of popular fronts in the Baltic states which in turn inspired the founding of the Moscow Popular Front. By the end of 1988, popular fronts had appeared in over twenty Russian cities, while the election campaign of 1989 stimulated a second wave of organizing in others (Urban, 1997: 114).

"With neither property rights nor civil law to rely on," as Michael Urban (1997: 98) points out, "informal associations were directly dependent on the patronage of party-state authorities for those resources that they required to function." Weakly organized, fraught by personal, ideological, and strategic conflicts, informal groups appeared weak in contrast to the Communist regime. However, in the course of 1987 and 1988, with the party-state structures largely in flux, the newly unleashed forces of societal activism were becoming increasingly assertive and autonomous from state control.

II. 1989-93: A Society-Mobilized Civil Society (Lin, 2003: 73-101)

In contrast to a regime-initiated civil society as the political ally of "*perestroyka* from above," a society-mobilized civil society was the driving force of "reform from below." Two types

or functions of a society-mobilized civil society existed in this second critical juncture, 1989-93: (1) 1989-91, an elections-stimulated and anti-regime civil society (the politics of liberation); and (2) 1991-93, a pro-reform and anti-restorationist civil society (the politics of state-building). The miners' movement and DemRossiya were the representative cases operating within the context of three sets of institutional arrangements – elections, social partnership, and executive-legislative relations.

Although the initiatives from the top were the main motor of change in the first four years of *perestroyka*, the 1989 elections for the USSR Congress of People's Deputies represented a watershed in the course of Russia's political development, fundamentally redefining the relations between state and society. Elections in the pre-Gorbachev period obviously had less to do with choice than with mobilization, legitimation and conformity. Nevertheless, after 1989 the election-initiated mobilization forces tried to transform or replace the Soviet order rather than to conform with it or to renew it. Competitive elections were the stimulus to the mobilizing force in society by lowering the risks of persecution and opening channels for citizens to participate and influence the policy-making process. Various voters' clubs and electoral blocs, such as Moscow Popular Front, Moscow Associations of Voters, and DemRossiya, were created by grass-roots activists to support opposition candidates. Three sets of contested elections (even though they were not multi-party elections) in 1989, 1990, and 1991 "went beyond liberalization and were a crucial part of the breakthrough to *democratization* (Brown: 1996: 155-156)."

Within the USSR Congress of People's Deputies, progressive deputies coalesced to form a liberal bloc called the Interregional Group of Deputies, which was an opposition faction in the

legislature and around which informal groups and voters' clubs began to unite for further democratic mobilization throughout 1989. In January 1990, the Democratic Platform reform faction within the CPSU was founded in Moscow to demand rapid democratization of the Communist Party. The revoking of Article Six of the Constitution became the major demand of democratic demonstrations. The election campaign and the appearance of opposition factions in the Congress and the Communist Party created qualitatively new phenomena in Soviet politics.

Gorbachev's reforms also resulted in significant worker activism by way of the massive coal miners' strikes in 1989, with the demands for better wages and improved working conditions. Bypassing the official trade unions and local authorities, the miners set up their own strike committees, which later transformed themselves into permanent workers' committees, to formulate their demands, co-ordinate their activities and negotiate with the central authority. Longing for economic independence and autonomy, which (perhaps mistakenly) the workers believed would enhance their economic welfare, the miners' unrest provided an opportunity for the encroachment of the newly autonomous republic-level governments on the center by demanding transfer of the mines from central to republic jurisdiction. Their alliance exacerbated the center-periphery cleavage and further undermined the central government and state structures. The social partnership (corporatist) approach to Soviet and post-Soviet state-management-labor relations, in October 1990 and in November 1991 respectively, failed to shape interest representations and to promote a social basis of support for state power.

DemRossiya, the election coalition social movement, attempted to play the same role as Solidarity, the Civic Forum, the New Forum, and Sajudis had played in Poland, Czechoslovakia,

East Germany, and Lithuania, respectively. Like these social movements, DemRossiya, by means of mass rallies and elections, successfully mobilized the populace to topple the Soviet *nomenklatura* (Brudny, 1993). After the common enemy had been destroyed, civil society had to face the challenge of changing its role from resistance to representation. Adjusting itself to the political reality of post-Soviet Russian state-building, DemRossiya mobilized support for Yeltsin's administration in its struggle against what was perceived to be the "anti-reform" parliament. The Russian Congress of People's Deputies was dissolved by force in the autumn of 1993. The presidential constitution approved by the December 1993 national referendum liberated the president from all institutional constraints. Yeltsin's contingent strategy of enhancing his personal authority had a negative impact on building his own long-term grass-roots organizational base.

III. 1994-1999: An Uninstitutionalized Civil Society (Lin, 2001: 157-189)

Viewing the post-Soviet political context as a whole, if 1991-93 were years of institutional conflict, especially constitutional crises, 1994-99 witnessed stronger executive rule, a demobilized society, and increasing center-periphery cleavages. Despite the large increase in the number of social organizations, civil society appeared to be weak and listless in terms of membership and participation. Accordingly, to understand the functions of civil society, it is important to examine the political context that structures its formation. A few factors, mainly resulting from the Soviet legacy, such as a weak state and a weak political party system, the social consequences of economic reform, the absence of rule of law, a manipulated mass media, and popular alienated attitude towards civic life, impeded the

development of a robust civil society and resulted in an uninstitutionalized civil society.

The Russian state tended to be weak in any dimension of state capacity. State weakness had negative consequences for building a supportive and connective infrastructure for the development of civil society. At the local level, the horizontal ties and autonomous participation of grass-roots organizations were blocked by the vertical dependence of clientelism. The related laws on civic organizations had been established, but they still needed to be implemented, improved, or complemented with economic mechanisms such as fair taxation. Privatization benefited the former *nomenklatura* and stimulated the emergence of economic oligarchs at the expense of interest formation and associational activity. As a result, economic relations were weakly developed and failed to generate the complex patterns of social differentiation and interdependence that lie at the heart of civil society in sociological discourse.

The party system in post-Soviet Russia was weak. A growing gap between political parties and civil society caused the demobilization of the latter and reduced its democratic function as intermediary associations between the state and society. Yeltsin's superpresidential system, which reflected the personalization of power and further undermined state capacity, reduced the incentives for political and economic actors to invest in the civil society concerning the weakness of the legislature. Rampant lobbying was the alternative way of influencing policy in the absence of a stable political party system as a medium of interacting between the state and civil society.

Compared with Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, Russia has virtually no experience with democracy. The lack of organizational skills and civic-mindedness necessary for the formation of autonomous groups proved to be another barrier to a

robust civil society. The absence of rule of law caused some civic associations to be uncivil. Constitutionalism cannot be practiced and maintained without a legal culture with strong roots in civil society. This situation can be realized in the words of Urban (1997: 22): "The effective absence of legal structures under communism would be coextensive with an absence of legal practices and a legal culture...., law would function less as a regulator of conflict than as a weapon employed by state authorities against one another." The appointment pattern at national and subnational levels, with those once in power becoming alienated from democrats and creating a largely personal authority, demonstrated the existence of traditional patronage politics. The mass media were heavily politicized and manipulated by state officials and private business interests to shape public opinion. The majority of Russians did not have confidence in the political institutions.

Despite the above constraints upon the institutionalization of Russian civil society, the conditions of making civil society work can be constructed. There are three approaches to building a cohesive and connective infrastructure of a robust and institutionalized civil society: a supporting and self-limiting state; the assistance of international NGOs and foreign aid donors; and the efforts of autonomous civic initiatives. In the end, the mutual empowerment between civil society and the state contributes to democratic consolidation.

Conclusion

To identify the trends and patterns of Russian civil society, I clarify some conceptual issues of civil society and review different approaches to its origins in the former Soviet Union. I offer a working

definition of civil society, which includes four norms (dual autonomy, collective action, non-usurpation, and civility) as well as two operational dimensions (relational and normative). Exploring the democratic functions of civil society in the dynamic process of democratization, I argue that three stages of democratization (the breakdown of an undemocratic regime – transition – consolidation) should go hand in hand with the three types or degrees of civil society (emerging – mobilized – institutionalized) in order to have a consolidated democracy.

In order to conduct an in-depth inquiry into the specific case of Russia, I provide an analytical framework of the opportunities for and constraints upon the development of civil society at three critical junctures from 1985 to 1999. I define the concepts of political opportunity structure, critical junctures, historical institutionalism, and political culture. The distinguishing features of the development of Russian civil society mirrored the protracted process of Russian democratization. Contrary to the normal sequence of the growing strength and institutionalization of three forms of civil society in the three stages of democratization, three types of Russian civil society appeared in three critical junctures: 1985-88: regime-initiated; 1989-93: society-mobilized; 1994-99: uninstitutionalized.

The specific case study of Russia sheds light on the general debate in the political science literature on civil society and democratization. Political opportunity structure and the institutional arrangements which facilitated the construction of Russia's nascent civil society will continue to condition the development of a robust civil society. Due to the fact that civil society has been weak and uninstitutionalized in post-Soviet

Russia, long periods of transition and infrastructure-building are required for the embryos of civil society to mature into functioning institutions which will contribute to democratic consolidation.

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188 政治學報

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