

# DEMOCRACY IN RUSSIA: A TOCQUEVILLIAN PERSPECTIVE

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[Forthcoming in Aurelian Craiutu & Sheldon Gellar (eds.), *Conversations with Tocqueville. The Global Democratic Revolution in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).]

“There are at the present time two great nations in the world, which started from different points, but seem to tend towards the same end. I allude to the Russians and the Americans....The American struggles against the obstacles that nature opposes to him; the adversaries of the Russian are men. The former combats the wilderness and savage life; the latter, civilization with all its arms. The conquests of the American are therefore gained by the plowshare; those of the Russian by the sword. The Anglo-American relies upon personal interest to accomplish his ends and gives free scope to the unguided strength and common sense of the people; the Russian centers all the authority of society in a single arm. The principal instrument of the former is freedom; of the latter, servitude. Their starting point is different and their courses are not the same; yet each of them seems marked out by the will of heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe.”

Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1835.

## Introduction <sup>2</sup>

Alexis de Tocqueville famously predicted that America and Russia would rise to dominate world politics, given that each country had vast resources, a large and rising population and ambitious leaders.<sup>3</sup> He also saw Russia as doomed to servitude, just as America was destined for freedom.

Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* (1835) is interesting not just for what it tells us about the American society of his day, but also because it can be taken as one model for how a social scientist can go about studying a given society. In this and his other works, most notably *The Old Regime and the Revolution* (1856), Tocqueville showed an extraordinary self-awareness and sensitivity to questions of method and approach, one that truly marks him as one of the founders of modern social science. The goal of this chapter is to take up the framework which Tocqueville developed in *Democracy in America* and to use it to analyze the prospects for democracy in post-1991 Russia.

One problem with this exercise is that while Tocqueville was trying to explain the roots of democracy’s *success* in America, with regard to contemporary Russia the challenge is to explain the *failure* of democratic institutions to take hold. Also, the

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<sup>2</sup> I benefited greatly from conversations about Tocqueville with Stephen Engel and Boris Kapustin.

<sup>3</sup> On Tocqueville and Russia, see Martin E. Malia, “Did Tocqueville foresee totalitarianism?” *Journal of Democracy* – vol. 11, no. 1, January 2000, pp. 179-186; Irena G. Gross, *The Scar of Revolution: Custine, Tocqueville, and the Romantic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

circumstances of Russia in 2007 and the United States in 1830 differ so radically, and in so many dimensions, that the task cannot be one of direct “comparison.” Rather, this will be an intellectual exercise to see whether Tocqueville’s method can yield fresh insights into the political sociology of Russia today.

Tocqueville looked at America through the triple prism of “conditions,” “mores” and “institutions.” Our conclusion will be that geopolitical conditions and societal morals are indeed vital to explaining the duration of autocracy in Russia, yet these factors are often overlooked in Western analysis of contemporary Russia. Specifically, by “conditions” we have in mind factors such as a country’s vulnerability to foreign attack, and by “morals” the role of religion. Tocqueville’s analysis of institutions concurs with the mainstream of contemporary Western thinking about the importance of rule of law and civil society activity, the absence of which is held to account for the failure of Russia’s democratic transition.

It is quite common for Russia to be compared to the other post-socialist countries, even to countries in transition from authoritarianism in Latin America. But few scholars now attempt a direct comparison between Russia and the USA. Back in the time of the Cold War, it was quite common to see studies written by Americans that stressed the *differences* between Soviet and American society – a natural outgrowth of the military-political rivalry between the two systems. The genre ranged from Hedrick Smith’s dissection of daily life in *The Russians* (1976) to Paul Hollander’s comparison of Soviet propaganda and American advertising.<sup>4</sup> However, the comparative approach (even a comparison grounded in difference) has fallen out of favor in America since 1991. Russia is now so widely reviled as the “other,” a potage of poverty, crime, corruption, and extreme terrorism, that Americans no longer write books comparing Russia with the USA. There is of course a long tradition of Western literature treating Russia as the “other”: an alien culture at Europe’s door, dating back at least to the Marquis de Custine’s trip to Russia in 1839.<sup>5</sup> Recent years have seen a somewhat surprising revival of the old arguments about Russian backwardness, based on a belief that Russia has followed a unique historical path that has “locked in” authoritarian political values and institutions.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, in Russia itself the comparison with the United States remains a common point of reference, although analysis does focus more on contrasts than similarities – hence the publication of books explaining “Why Russia is not America.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hedrick Smith, *The Russians* (New York: New York Times Books, 1976); Paul Hollander, *Soviet and American Society: A Comparison* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> Astolphe, Marquis de Custine, *Empire of the Czars* (New York: Doubleday, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Stefan Hedlund, *Russian Path Dependence. A People With a Troubled History* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Andrei Petrovich Parshev, *Pochemy Rossiya Ne Amerika* (Why Russia is not America), (Moscow: Krymskiy Most, 2000); see also Sergei Chugrov, *Rossiya i Zapad: Metamorfozy vzaimovospriyatiya* (Russia and the West: Metamorphoses of Mutual Perception), (Moscow, 1993).

## The Sorry State of Russian Democracy

After 1991, most American observers quickly assumed that Russia was on a path to a Western-style market economy and liberal democracy. They took the Soviet collapse as vindication of Francis Fukuyama's prescient 1989 essay on "The End of History," which argued that liberal democracy was now unchallenged as a blueprint for national development and social progress.<sup>8</sup> In the 1990s both the Russian and US governments operated on the shared assumption that Russia was in the process of becoming a democracy, one that would take its rightful place among the Western family of nations – a status recognized by Russia's accession to the G8 group of advanced democratic nations in 1997.<sup>9</sup> Despite these initial hopes, however, Russia's political trajectory since 1991 has been a grave disappointment to Western observers.

After seven decades of Soviet authoritarian rule, the perestroika reforms launched by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev after 1985 led to a degree of press freedom and partially contested elections in 1989-90. But the social and ethnic unrest unleashed by Gorbachev's reforms led to the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991. The Russian Federation emerged as an independent state with a more or less free press, a spectrum of independent political parties and social movements, and an elected legislature and president. Ironically, Russia probably experienced its highest level of democratic freedom in 1991, when it was still part of the Soviet Union. Since then, the scope for political contestation has steadily contracted

Russia's first president, Boris Yeltsin, won a fairly free election in June 1991.<sup>10</sup> But his decision to launch radical economic reform in January 1992 led to an ugly standoff between the reformist president and a Congress which opposed his "shock therapy." This confrontation culminated in September 1993 with Yeltsin's unconstitutional order disbanding the legislature. When the deputies refused to depart, Yeltsin ordered the army to storm the parliament building. A new constitution giving stronger powers to the president was adopted in December 1993, at the same time as voters elected a new parliament, the State Duma. But those elections were won by nationalists and Communists, so the political stand-off between the executive and legislative branches continued. In a bid to deflect political criticism, Yeltsin launched a brutal war to regain control over the rebel province of Chechnya at the end of 1994. Yeltsin narrowly won re-election as president in June 1996, after a campaign marred by biased media coverage and shady back-room maneuvering. Still, during the years of the Yeltsin presidency (1991-99) the media were more or less free, with some independently-owned TV and radio stations criticizing the government. Elections were held on schedule and the results broadly reflected the will of the voters.<sup>11</sup> In the course of coming to

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<sup>8</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History," *National Interest*, no. 16, summer 1989. The essay was "prescient" because it was written in the spring of 1989, three months before the Hungarians took down the border fences and six months before the fall of the Berlin wall.

<sup>9</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy* (New York: Random House, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Lilia Shevtsova, *Yeltsin's Russia: Myths and Reality* (Brookings Institution, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Richard Rose and Neil Munro, *Elections Without Order: Russia's Challenge to Vladimir Putin* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Timothy Colton, *Transitional Citizens: Voters and What Influences Them in the New Russia* (Harvard University Press, 2000); Michael McFaul, *Russia's Unfinished Revolution: Political Change from Gorbachev to Putin* (Cornell University Press, 2001).

power, Yeltsin had struck deals with regional leaders, weakening the capacity of the federal government and allowing a de facto decentralization of power to the provinces.

Yeltsin resigned in December 1999, nominating his hand-picked successor Vladimir Putin as “acting president,” and Putin cruised to victory in the March 2000 presidential election.<sup>12</sup> President Putin moved quickly and decisively to roll back the nascent political pluralism of the Yeltsin years, and recentralize authority in the Kremlin in what came to be called the “power vertical.”<sup>13</sup> Within weeks of taking office Putin tightened state control over the media, sending into exile two of the oligarchs who had controlled national television stations during the Yeltsin years. The restrictions on organized political opposition were gradually tightened. Putin removed the elected regional governors from the upper house of parliament, and in the December 2003 elections the pro-Kremlin United Russia party won more than two-thirds of the seats in the State Duma. Subsequent changes to electoral law made it even more difficult for opposition forces to win representation: the single-member seats that used to fill half the Duma were abolished, and the minimum threshold for representation in the proportional representation party-list race that now filled the whole body was raised from 5 to 7%. Putin also took steps to limit federalism, imposing legislative uniformity across Russia’s regions; tightening central control of the state budget; and in 2004 abolishing elections for regional governors.<sup>14</sup> The erosion of democracy was due partly to the machinations of the presidential administration, and partly to the inability of opposition forces to coalesce behind coherent parties that offered a viable alternative to the Kremlin.<sup>15</sup>

Economic developments also played a role in the retreat of democracy. The economic slump of the 1990s, during which GDP and living standards fell by 30-40%, was inevitably associated in the public eye with the onset of democracy. What use was democracy, if it could not protect citizens from such a fate? In Central European countries such as Poland or Hungary, the transitional state was able to do a better job at preserving the welfare state and thus to some degree ameliorating the costs of transition for the poor. The Russian state dismally failed in such a role in the 1990s. At the same time the economy was going through a rapid process of privatization, with 70% of state assets being transferred into legally independent corporations. A small group of “oligarchs” managed to seize control of about one third of these former state industries during the highly corrupt privatization process. This meant that the decentralization of power that one would have expected to follow from the introduction of capitalism failed to materialize. Most of the oligarchs maintained close relations with the Kremlin, and those that did not eventually paid a price for their independence. The most striking example is that of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the founder of the Yukos oil company, who was briefly the richest man in Russia with an estimated personal wealth of \$16 billion. Khodorkovsky was funding opposition parties in the run-up to the December 2003 Duma elections, and he seemed poised to back a candidate to challenge Putin in the March 2004 presidential election. So Khodorkovsky was arrested on trumped up tax evasion charges

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<sup>12</sup> Lilia Shevtsova, *Putin’s Russia*, (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2005).

<sup>13</sup> M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> For an overview, see Lilia Shevtsova, *Yeltsin’s Russia: Myths and Reality* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999); Lilia Shevtsova, *Putin’s Russia*, (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Henry Hale, “Why not parties? Electoral markets, party substitutes, and stalled democratization in Russia, *Comparative Politics*, vol. 37 no. 2, January 2005. 147-66.

in October 2003, and subsequently sentenced to eight years in jail. The Yukos oil company was forced into bankruptcy and its assets divided up amongst the state-owned companies Gazprom and Rosneft. Putin also bought up some of the other private oil companies and pushed out foreign oil ventures, effectively renationalizing the crucial oil sector, which was driving Russia's post-2000 economic recovery. Observers started to argue that Russia was falling prey to the "resource curse," which refers to the fact that very few countries that are dependent on oil exports make a successful transition to democracy.<sup>16</sup>

The best known democracy index is that compiled by Freedom House. Countries are graded on a seven point scale for the level of political rights (PR) and civil liberties (CL), with 1-2 being "free" and 6-7 "unfree." Freedom House regarded the new Russian Republic as "partly free," ranking it 3 for PR and 4 for CL from 1993 through 1997. (See Figure One.) Russia's grade slipped to 4 for PR and 5 for CL in 1999 and 5/5 in 2000-2003. In 2004 Russia was relegated to the category "unfree", with a 6 for PR and 5 for CL.<sup>17</sup> That ranking actually places Russia's political system *below* that of places like Afghanistan or Bahrain, which seems somewhat unrealistic, given the level of violence, the absence of contestation, and the seclusion of women in those countries. But even if the international comparisons may be shaky, the Freedom House index fairly accurately captures the trajectory of Russian democracy over time.

In terms of civil liberties, daily life for Russian citizens is quite free, with respect to freedom of movement and travel, freedom of religion and so forth. For example, the Soviet registration system that required police permission to change one's place of residence was legally abolished. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have sprung up, and some have become an accepted part of the political scene – such as the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers. However, those which are seen as politically-motivated or connected to foreign sponsors have been the target of state crackdowns.<sup>18</sup> Even under Yeltsin in the 1990s some groups were harassed. For example, Western observers were alarmed by the 1997 law on religious organizations which forced all congregations founded during the previous 15 years to re-register. The Putin administration got more serious about curtailing NGO activities after Georgia's "rose revolution" in 2003 and the "orange revolution" in Ukraine the next year, both of which were actively assisted by Western-funded NGOs.<sup>19</sup> A new, more restrictive law requiring all foreign-based NGOs to reregister came into effect in Russia in April 2006.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Fish, *Democracy*, 118-36.

<sup>17</sup> Robert W. Orttung, "Russia," *Nations in Transit 2005* (Freedom House, 2005), at <http://www.freedomhouse.org>.

<sup>18</sup> Sarah Henderson, *Building Democracy in Contemporary Russia. Western Support for Grassroots Organizations* (Cornell University Press, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Graeme Herd, "Colorful revolutions and the CIS," *Problems of Post-Communism*, v. 52, n. 2, March 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Anastasia Kornya, "NGOs fail the test," *Vedomosti*, 29 June 2006.

## The Tocquevillian approach

Tocqueville divided the relevant factors shaping American democracy into three: historical and geographic conditions; the prevailing mores; and the ruling institutions. Tocqueville was not deterministic: he recognized the constraints of history and geography, but also gave ample room for human agency in choosing to live by certain moral codes and creating certain institutions. France and America had experienced revolutions as a result of which new moral codes and political institutions were brought into being, so Tocqueville did not see history as a vice. He was not a believer in “path dependency,” a popular approach in contemporary political science which sees countries as “locked in” to certain institutional arrangements by the sequence of historical events they have experienced.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, as he showed in *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, he was aware of the powerful continuities in human history, such that even after a revolutionary upheaval a society will still carry many features of the preceding regime. This truth became all too apparent in Russia under President Putin, as, one after another, partially-submerged features of the Soviet system started to resurface.

Tocqueville’s approach is deeply sociological: he does not dwell on contingency, or the chance sequence of events, though he does recognize that human interventions produce unintended consequences. Nor does he over-emphasize the role of leadership. In contrast to most contemporary writing on America’s origins, he does not provide a “Great Man” account of the role of the Founding Fathers in America’s origin. Likewise, a majority of the books written on Russia’s transition to democracy also take a “great man” approach, often being written as straight biographies of Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin. Tocqueville reminds us that this is not the best way to write history.

## Conditions

Russia lacks nearly all the conditions understood by contemporary political science as prerequisites for a successful transition to democracy. In its long history there is no experience of democracy, and barely any experience of civil society, to draw on. Two centuries of the Mongol yoke (1240-1480) were followed by 400 years of the most oppressive autocratic rule in Europe. This was succeeded by 75 years of Soviet totalitarianism: the most innovative and deep-rooted system of authoritarian rule the world had ever seen.

In contrast, Tocqueville’s America was a former colony of Britain, with 150 years’ experience of rule of law and a degree of self-government which was high by contemporary standards. The United States itself came into existence through an act of rebellion and an assertion of self-rule against a central state. In contrast Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union that succeeded it were both multinational empires, different versions of an “empire-state” whose national identity was forged not in self-rule, but in ruling over others. (The population of the Russian Empire in 1917 was only 44% ethnic Russian, while that of the USSR in 1989 was still only 53% Russian.)

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Pierson, “Increasing returns, path dependence and the study of politics,” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 94, no. 2, June 2000, pp. 251-267.

It is true that Russia was not itself colonized or under lasting foreign occupation (since 1480). But this may be a liability rather than an asset, in the sense that among former colonies, experience of British rule positively correlates with democratization. And among former empires, US military occupation was instrumental in the introduction of stable democracy in Japan, Germany and Italy.

On the other hand, Russia shares with America the experience of being born out of revolution. The Soviet Union emerged from a revolutionary overthrow of the existing authorities in 1917, and today's Russian Federation came out of a quasi-revolution in 1991 whose slogans were democracy and sovereignty. However, from a Tocquevillian perspective the revolutions of 1917 and 1991 have more in common with the experiences of France in 1789 than America in 1776. The Russian revolutions involved the breakdown of social order and a collapse into anarchy, rather than the positive affirmation of a new community. Russian public opinion itself is ambivalent over whether 1917 should be seen as a step forward, while an overwhelming majority regards 1991 in negative terms.<sup>22</sup> Famously, in his state-of-the-nation address on 25 April 2005, President Putin described the collapse of the Soviet Union as "the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the century."<sup>23</sup> In contrast, in the United States the revolution of 1776 continues to be regarded as an unadulterated good. Clearly, the Soviet collapse did not launch the Russian Federation in a spirit of optimism and self-determination; and a sense of defeat and despair is not conducive to the flourishing of freedom and democracy. Western observers usually dismiss this sense of historical loss as part of Russians' alleged nostalgia for empire, and they do not typically make the connection between this experience and Russia's subsequent lack of readiness to embrace democracy.

Tocqueville stressed America's freedom from foreign attack (a "nation without neighbors"), due to its fortuitous location behind the Atlantic ocean, as tremendously important in creating the space for a free society to develop. This happy situation continued for the United States throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, America's engagement in the two world wars did not bring any death and destruction to the civilian population of the continental US. Russia's experience is quite the opposite: centuries of fending off foreign invasion culminating in the devastating "Great Patriotic War" of 1941-45. That was followed by the Cold War: a decades-long institutionalization of vulnerability to total destruction. This fear of foreigners did not disappear with the dissolution of the USSR. In effect, the Soviet Union lost the Cold War, and in the wake of that defeat many Russians felt their country was weakened and even more vulnerable than before. From their perspective, all of Russia's *recent* enemies remained in place after 1991, from NATO to China; while *old* foes were stirring (Poland, Turkey) and *new* ones were rising (radical Islam). The men in charge of Russian security after 1991 were all born and bred during the Cold War: it was unrealistic to imagine that their fundamental assumptions about the character of the global system as a threatening environment would change overnight. And this sense of existential vulnerability,

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<sup>22</sup> For example in a 2002 survey, 27% gave a negative assessment of the October 1917 revolution, 33% said it "gave a push to socio-economic development," and 27% said it opened a new era. Levada Center Press Release, 5 November 2002, <http://www.levada.ru/>. Opinions about August 1991 were more negative. In a July 2005 poll, only 10% saw the events as a democratic revolution, 36% saw them as a "tragedy for the country" and 43% characterized them as "the usual elite struggle for power." Levada Center Press Release, 18 August 2005.

<sup>23</sup> [www.kremlin.ru/eng/](http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/)

Tocqueville would tell us, is not fertile soil for the flourishing of freedom. Russians seem willing to give up a degree of political pluralism in return for the security of a strong leader.

Although Russia had been “defeated,” it still possessed the nuclear arsenal that had guaranteed its security during the Cold War. This led Russia’s leaders to believe that its place at the table of the leading powers was assured, that it could and should be a rule-maker and not a rule-taker in the international system.<sup>24</sup> Even Yeltsin, who was making genuine overtures to the West, wanted Russia to be respected as an equal. Under Putin, the contradictions in Russia’s position became sharper still, with Moscow resisting international pressures to embrace democratization when the latter came to be seen as deliberately intended to weaken the Russian state.

In terms of economic circumstances, Russia does have the vast land and resources that Tocqueville saw as giving America better living conditions and fewer social conflicts, than Europe. However, the economic preconditions for democracy have changed since the time of Tocqueville. Post-industrial and internationally integrated economies are now the most developed, and the most compatible with democracy. From the Soviet period Russia inherited an economy that was predominantly industrial, but with 20% of the workforce still engaged in highly inefficient agriculture. These traditional economic sectors were held together by state subsidies and by hierarchical, patriarchal social relations: an economic structure highly inimical to liberal democracy.

In the 15 years since 1991 the Russian economy has become more internationally integrated, with trade leaping from 10% to 25% of GDP. But this integration has been driven by the export of oil, gas and metals, leaving Russia prone to the “resource curse.” International experience suggests that resource dependency tends to distort the country’s economic development, shrinking its manufacturing sector, but also makes it more prone to authoritarian politics since it is easy for a small ruling elite to capture the revenue flow from resource exports.<sup>25</sup> The term “resource curse” was unknown in Tocqueville’s day, but he was clearly aware that the slave-owning, staple-exporting economy of the South was far less conducive to democracy than the family farms and manufacturers of the North.

Are there any conditions that are conducive to democracy in Russia? Most of the social infrastructure for modern life is in place. Russia has a highly educated, literate and urbanized population, with a high degree of gender equality in terms of women’s ability to access education and the labor market. However, very low life expectancy, especially for men (58.9 years) points to serious social pathologies which do not augur well for democracy.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Andrei Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2006); Robert Legvold (ed.), *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the Shadow of the Past* (Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Michael L. Ross, “Does oil hinder democracy?,” *World Politics*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2001, 325-361; Michael L. Ross, “The political economy of the resource curse,” *World Politics*, vol. 51, no.1, January 1999, 297-322.

<sup>26</sup> In 2004, out of 177 countries in the United Nations Development Project Human Development Index, Russia placed 65<sup>th</sup>. It ranked 33<sup>rd</sup> for education (88% school enrollment and 99.6% adult literacy); 59<sup>th</sup> for GDP per capita (\$9,902); and 115<sup>th</sup> for life expectancy (65.2 years). It dropped from an aggregate score of 0.813 in 1990 to 0.771 in 1995, recovering to 0.797 in 2004. UNDP, *Human Development Report 2006*. <http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/>

Tocqueville stressed America's advantages in being free of a landed aristocracy or an established Church. This gave it a head start in providing a foundation of social equality, at least outside the South. Land was not concentrated in a few hands, as in Europe, and the absence of primogeniture would help prevent the accumulation of large estates. The open frontier would ensure that land ownership was an option for the masses. These material conditions were matched by an absence of strict social hierarchies, compared to Europe.

The Soviet Union did not have a landed aristocracy or Church, having ruthlessly destroyed these institutions in the wake of the 1917 revolution. Soviet society was more egalitarian than 19<sup>th</sup> century France – Tocqueville's point of reference – but it was not as open and equal as 19<sup>th</sup> century New England. Its official ideology proclaimed social equality, and it was very difficult to acquire wealth in the form of property. But the Communist Party hierarchy was firmly in place, consisting of an elaborately graduated ranking of political status (the "nomenklatura") with accompanying privileges governing all aspects of life, from career opportunities, to vacations, to the purchase of sausage.<sup>27</sup>

In the course of the 1990s, Russian society has become more unequal at the same time that it has become more free. The nomenklatura system collapsed, though closed political elites remain in power in many regions. Market reform rapidly produced a new class of property holders, and the ownership of productive assets was highly concentrated in the hands of a new class of entrepreneurs and corrupt government officials. That perceived stalwart of democratic stability, the middle class, is but weakly present in contemporary Russian society. The old Soviet middle class of highly educated, state-employed professionals has eroded, and in its place a new middle class is slowly emerging, accounting for no more than one fifth of the population.<sup>28</sup> Most of the middle class is still employed by the state, and these teachers and doctors have very low salaries. About one million small businesses have emerged, but that number has not risen for the past 10 years, and they employ less than 10% of the labor force. Income inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient rose from 0.26 in 1991 to 0.409 in 1994 and 0.399 in 2004.<sup>29</sup> That is about the same as the US, but well below the level of inequality to be found in countries such as Brazil or India. Although economic equality is conducive to democratic stability, the coexistence of high levels of inequality and a functioning democracy in countries as diverse as Brazil and India suggest that inequality is not necessarily a barrier to the spread of democracy in Russia.

Perhaps the strongest "conditions" argument in favor of Russia's democratic prospects is that of living standards. Tocqueville understood that the abundance of land and corresponding higher standard of living in the U.S. was highly favorable for democracy. If the poor have the hope of a comfortable life through their own efforts, they are less likely to use democratic institutions to expropriate the rich. Contemporary studies show that countries with per capita income above \$5,000 per year are very likely to make

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<sup>27</sup> Mikhail Voslensky, *Nomenklatura: The Soviet Ruling Class* (New York: Doubleday, 1984).

<sup>28</sup> Harley Balzer, "Russia's middle classes," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 14, no. 2, April 1998, 165-86.

<sup>29</sup> T.Yu. Bogomolova and V.S. Tapilina, "Ekonomicheskaya stratifikatsiya naseleniya Rossii v 90e gody," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, no. 6, June 2001, 32-43, p. 32. The 2004 figure is taken from the UNDP Human Development Report.

the transition to stable democracy.<sup>30</sup> Russia dipped below that threshold in the 1990s, but is now rising well above it. In terms of purchasing power parity, Russian GDP per capita was close to \$5,000 per head in 1990, fell to \$3,000 by 1997, and had recovered to \$9,900 in 2004.<sup>31</sup> At the current exchange rate, GDP per capita was \$4,042 in 2004. GDP has grown at 5-7% per year since 1999, driven in large part by the boom in world oil prices. If this continues for another decade, then Russia's democratic prospects look fairly promising. Of course it turns out that Russia proves to be an exception to the correlation of wealth and democracy found in most other countries, due to a combination of the "resource curse" and the "Russian curse" (that is, 1200 years of authoritarian rule).

Ethnic homogeneity was not a prominent issue in Tocqueville's explanation of American democracy. America was a new community built on a shared identification with republican values, and consisting for the most part of English-speaking Protestants. (This homogeneity being assured by the exclusion of African and Native Americans.) But in the modern world ethnic fragmentation is generally seen as a serious obstacle to democratic consolidation. Ethnic polarization has undermined democracy in countries from Sri Lanka to Lebanon – although there are some outliers, such as India, where ethnic fragmentation has not prevented the functioning of liberal democracy. Russia is fairly homogeneous by international standards, with 79.8% of the population registered as ethnic Russians according to the 2002 census.<sup>32</sup> However, about half of the non-Russian population (12-15 million people) are Moslem. The Moslems of the middle Volga (Tatars and Bashkirs) have lived under Russian rule for 500 years and seem reconciled to their situation as a minority within the Russian state. They enjoy a substantial degree of autonomy through the system of Russian federalism, which grants self-rule to 21 ethnically designated "republics." Among the Moslems of the North Caucasus, however, the Chechen quest for secession triggered two brutal wars (1994-96 and 1999-2003). The Chechen question has its roots in Russia's historical legacy as an empire. The Chechens preserved memories of their conquest in the 1840s and the entire nation's deportation to Central Asia by Stalin in 1944. Some observers argue that the treatment of Chechnya alone rules out any consideration of Russia as a legitimate democracy. The outbreak of the second Chechen war in 1999 was closely connected to Putin's rise to power and his subsequent ability to concentrate power in the hands of an authoritarian presidency.

Although open resistance has ended, Chechen and Islamic resistance groups are still capable of mounting terrorist acts, which give the Kremlin a pretext for tightening authoritarian controls. Thus, after the dreadful Beslan school siege in September 2004, Putin abolished the direct election of regional governors: instead, they are now nominated by the president.

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<sup>30</sup> Carles Boix, *Democracy and Redistribution* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), Adam Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990* (Cambridge University Press, 2000). The exceptions are oil-rich Islamic countries such as Qatar or Brunei.

<sup>31</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2006*.

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.perepis2002.ru/>

## Mores

Tocqueville made it clear that the success of democracy in America was closely connected to the prevailing social mores. He saw the American revolution as animated by the spirit of liberty and the spirit of religion. Absent the internalization of norms of independence and responsibility among the common people, democratic institutions cannot be made to work effectively.

Centuries of Tsarist and Soviet rule seemed to leave Russian citizens sorely ill-prepared for the moral responsibilities of democratic citizenship. In the perestroika period Russians were fond of citing the Biblical experience of the Jews, who spent 40 years in the wilderness after they left Egypt. Only a fresh generation with no experience of slavery would be capable of building a new, free society. Obviously, this did not happen in Russia. The accelerating pace of global integration meant they did not have the opportunity to stop history for 40 years. Rather than wandering in the desert, for the past 15 years the Russians have been frantically constructing a new society, with new social norms that were still heavily shaped by the preceding Soviet society. (One can also note that they have been following leaders who are somewhat less inspired than Moses.)

Russians do have a certain anarchic affinity for freedom, and there were moments when the spirit of liberty was abroad in 1989-91, such as the televised debates of the first partly-freely elected congress in March 1989. But these were fleeting moments: 1991 was more a collapse than a revolution. Even Russian liberals would probably agree that fear of repression was a more powerful motivator than was an embrace of liberty. Even at the peak of mass mobilization in 1991, the demonstrations in Moscow were 200-300,000 strong – 3% of the city's population – and smaller still in provincial cities, where they took place at all. Contrast this with the millions that took to the streets in Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia.

Even during the perestroika period, opinion polls revealed a surprisingly strong well of public support in the Russian population for civil and political liberties.<sup>33</sup> Some skeptics argued that these polls were too abstract, in that ordinary Russians did not see those values embedded in the actual practices and institutions of emergent democracy in Russia.<sup>34</sup> Over the course of the 1990s the rift between abstract acceptance of democratic principles and discontent with their practical realization in Russia grew more pronounced. But the fact that Russians continued to express their support for elections, free speech and so on was encouraging to those who argued that Russia could yet become a genuine democracy. One key difference is that in the U.S. liberty was closely connected to property. This was not so in Russia, where property was historically monopolized by the

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<sup>33</sup> James L. Gibson, "A mile wide but an inch deep (?): The structure of democratic commitment in the former USSR," *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 40, 1996, 396-420; Timothy J. Colton and Michael McFaul, "Are Russians undemocratic?," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2002, 91-121; Jeffrey W. Hahn "Political culture in Yaroslavl' over time: How "civic"?" in Jeffrey W. Hahn, (ed.), *Regional Russia in Transition*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press 2001.

<sup>34</sup> James Alexander, *Political Culture in Post-Communist Russia* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000); Stephen White, Richard Rose and Ian McAllister, *How Russia Votes* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1996); Richard Rose and Neil Munro and William Mishler, "Resigned acceptance of an incomplete democracy: Russia's political equilibrium," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 20 (2004), 195-218.

state and there was no space to make the connection between property rights and individual freedom.<sup>35</sup>

Religious values feature prominently in Tocqueville's analysis of American democracy. ("It must never be forgotten that religion gave birth to Anglo-American society.") Protestantism cultivated a sense of equal worth and promoted individual responsibility for one's own fate, unmediated by priestly authority. Yet most published accounts of Russia's attempted transition to democracy barely mention the role of religion. In part this was due to the fact that Russian society was indeed highly secular. For seven decades the Soviet state had conducted a rigorous and effective campaign against religion, in the mistaken belief that modernity requires the abandonment of religious values. This dismissive attitude towards religion is shared by many Western liberals, which is another reason why religious values were usually absent from analysis of the prospects for democracy in Russia.

A further reason for downplaying religion is the fact that religious organizations did not feature prominently in the Russian transition. This is in stark contrast to the transition in East Europe. The Catholic Church was obviously pivotal to the anti-communist resistance in Poland, while in East Germany Protestant peace groups formed the core of the Leipzig protests. Indeed, in Russia religious groups were invisible during the transition. The Orthodox Church was seen as a bastion of the state authorities, be they communist or post-communist. During the Soviet period the Orthodox leadership, the Patriarchy, had made some significant compromises with the authorities, in a bid to maintain the Church's survival. The Church also quickly established a cosy relationship with the Yeltsin administration, winning substantial concessions in exchange for its political support. (These ranged from the return of buildings to the granting of import/export licenses for commodities from oil to alcohol.) Under President Putin the Church has been even more tightly embraced as the official ideology of the Russian state, with Putin introducing the practice of state officials attending Church services. Since 1991 there has been a minor upsurge in religious identification and practice amongst ordinary Russians, but this is more a fashion than a spiritual revival, and has few political overtones – other than support for the Yeltsin-Putin regime.<sup>36</sup> More often than not, religion has achieved political prominence only in the context of the negation of liberty, as in the 1997 Russian Federation law that cracked down on "non-traditional" religions, including Protestantism and Catholicism.

Western analysts tend to regard Orthodoxy, in Russia and in South-Eastern Europe, as the least conducive to democracy of all the Christian denominations. Focusing on spiritual salvation than worldly deeds, it did not encourage the separation of church and state (something that enabled the church in the West to become an independent political actor), nor did it focus on the individual.<sup>37</sup>

Individualism (a word introduced into the English language via Tocqueville) was central to his explanation of the American breakthrough, and it is deeply rooted in the Protestant tradition of an individual responsible for his or her own fate, through study of

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Pipes, *Property and Freedom* (New York: Vintage, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Zoe Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia After Communism*, (London: Routledge/Curzon, 2004); John Basil, "Church-state relations in Russia: Orthodoxy and federation law, 1990 – 2004," *Religion, State and Society*, vol. 33, no. 2, June 2005, 151-164.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Berger, "Christianity and democracy," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 15, no. 2, April 2004, 76-80.

the Bible. Russia is not a society devoid of prominent, and brilliant, individuals. It has more than its share of eccentrics, artists, holy men and anarchists. So the contrast with America cannot be reduced to black and white. But Russian individualism was not grounded in a system of property rights, nor in a theological discourse, nor in a social contract to form a new society. The Protestant concept of the individual is above all tempered by a respect for the laws governing social life – which derive from God but are “etched in the minds of men.” The weakness of religious belief in Russia thus correlates with lack of respect for the rule of law.

Protestant individualism was tempered by an urge to associate, which promoted awareness of common interests. Tocqueville’s emphasis on the vigorous associational life of the early colonists has become a salient theme for contemporary political science, with the revival of interest in social capital.<sup>38</sup> Much effort has gone into studying incipient civil society in Russia, and researchers were dismayed to find that Russians were reluctant to join organizations and to participate in public life beyond the act of voting.<sup>39</sup> They had a low level of trust in public institutions, and in their fellow citizens.

Closer analysis revealed that post-1991 Russian society did consist of dense social networks, but these were based on friends and family rather than public associations such as political parties, charities, clubs, etc.<sup>40</sup> Russian social networks were informal rather than formal, hidden rather than transparent, and based on manipulation and avoidance of state institutions. They had their roots in the networks of favors (*blat*) that evolved during the decades of central planning, when personal contacts were need to secure resources from state authorities, which controlled everything from political life to personal careers to food and housing. These networks were built on the principle of inclusion and exclusion – “our” people (*svoi*) and “theirs” (*chuzhye*). “Ours” must be trusted and helped, “theirs” cannot be trusted and may be cheated with impunity. (“He who does not steal from the state, steals from his family.”) This attitude was corrosive not just of civil society, but of any concept of the rule and law, duty and the public sphere. It still prevails in Russia today.

It turns out that just as there is “good” and “bad” cholesterol, so there is good and bad social capital. Russia in 1991 had deep reserves of social capital – but of the “bad” sort; and this actually flourished in the 1990s, finding new opportunities and tasks in the burgeoning but unregulated market economy.

The Soviet state tried to compensate for the absence of public trust by stepping up bureaucratic monitoring and coercion. Under Yeltsin, the post-Soviet state had neither the capacity nor the political will to embrace those authoritarian methods. Instead it turned to new “political technologies” of media manipulation. Under Putin there has been more of a return to authoritarian techniques, invigorated by patriotism and xenophobia.

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<sup>38</sup> B. Edwards, M.W. Foley, M. Diani (eds.), *Beyond Tocqueville: Civil Society and the Social Capital Debate in Comparative Perspective* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2001).

<sup>39</sup> Marc Morje Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Al Evans and Lisa Sunstrom (eds.), *Russian Civil Society: A Critical Assessment*, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005).

<sup>40</sup> Alena V. Ledeneva, *Russia’s Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchanges* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

## Institutions

Clearly, the odds were stacked against Russia becoming a democracy in terms of the geopolitical and economic conditions in which it found itself in 1991, and the moral universe it inherited from the *ancien regime*. Only a vigorous set of new democratic institutions could drag it into a viable civil society – a development that was possible to imagine, not least because of the strong shift in the international climate in favor of liberal democracy that accompanied the Soviet collapse. Unfortunately neither Mikhail Gorbachev nor Boris Yeltsin were able to build strong new democratic institutions. Their role was more that of destroying the old than creating the new. Absent strong institution-building from above, institutions were also slow to develop spontaneously, from below.<sup>41</sup>

Boris Yeltsin's Russia was an unstable combination of anarchy and authoritarianism. Yeltsin's priority was simple: to stay in power, to survive in a chaotic environment, and hopefully to set Russia on a path to a better future. He ruled through a mixture of threats and compromise, adapting some old Soviet-era institutions while closing others, and creating some new institutions on the spot. Powerful institutions that had ruled people's lives for decades disappeared almost overnight – not only state structures such as the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the State Planning Committee (Gosplan), but also institutions that shaped social behavior down to its roots, such as the Young Pioneers or the practice of queuing for goods. Some feisty if unstable new institutions sprang up in their place: an elected parliament and president, a burgeoning capitalist class, markets, a free press, and even (perhaps) a free citizenry.

Although Western commentators are rightly critical of the poor quality of Russia's democratic institutions, in a broader historical context, it is still quite remarkable how quickly some of the core institutions of modern democracy were put in place. Russia now has a federal structure, a written constitution, universal suffrage, and a directly elected president and lower chamber of parliament – things that we take for granted today, but that were novelties in Tocqueville's time.

Free media became an important agent of change in the Gorbachev era, but this positive trend went into reverse as the Kremlin and its oligarchic allies used the media to rally support for Yeltsin's re-election in 1996.<sup>42</sup> However, under President Putin media freedom has been radically curtailed. By 2007 the television stations had become completely subservient to the Kremlin's political agenda. Independent voices can still be found in a handful of newspapers, on the radio station Ekho Moskvyy, and on the internet.

During the Yeltsin period elections were regularly held, and while there may have been some fraud in some regions, the results generally reflected the will of the voters.<sup>43</sup> The situation deteriorated under Putin: elections were still held on time, but the restrictions on the political opposition were stepped up. After the victory of the pro-

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<sup>41</sup> Valerie Sperling (ed.), *Building the Russian State. Institutional Crisis and the Quest for Democratic Governance* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000).

<sup>42</sup> Laura Belin, "The Russian media in the 1990s," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2002, 139-61.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Rose and Neil Munro, *Elections Without Order: Russia's Challenge to Vladimir Putin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Timothy Colton, *Transitional Citizens: Voters and What Influences Them in the New Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); Michael McFaul, *Russia's Unfinished Revolution: Political Change from Gorbachev to Putin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

government United Russia party in the 2003 elections Putin established firm control over the parliament, which became to all intents and purposes an extension of the Kremlin.

Tocqueville put great store by the virtues of decentralization: democracy was rooted in free and self-governing local communities. Local government had never been a strong point of Russian political culture. Regional autonomy did receive a boost under Yeltsin, but Putin's recentralization drive has crushed most of what had been achieved in the 1990s.<sup>44</sup> Putin has also been adamant in striving to restore the Russian state as the dominant institution in society and the agent of progress and modernity. This kind of centralization would have been anathema for Tocqueville, who would see it as leading inevitably to corruption from above and the stifling of initiative from below.

Still, the Russian political system is not yet a personal dictatorship. President Yeltsin and Putin did face some checks on their power. They had to contend with competing groups within the state bureaucracy; and with the several dozen independent-minded wealthy businessmen who controlled about one third of Russia's economy.<sup>45</sup> They were also constrained by the need to win elections (even with the help of fraud); to maintain a loyal majority in parliament; and to avoid popular protest by non-violent means.<sup>46</sup> The main question mark hanging over the power structure that Putin solidified was whether it will survive the departure of its founder from office: he is due to step down as president when his second term expires in May 2008.

Following the writings of Aristotle and Montesquieu, the Founding Fathers were convinced that the best form of government was a mixed system that dispersed power across different institutions that combined democratic, oligarchic and monarchical elements. In a sense, the contemporary Russian political system fits the bill. It has a quasi-monarch (the president); it has direct elections for the presidency and the State Duma; and it has reinvented "oligarchy" in the sphere of economic management. There is little sign, as yet, of the emergence of a stable, closed ruling class, akin to the landed aristocracy that was for Tocqueville the major barrier to democratic rule. From 1997-99 the dominant fear was that Russian democracy would collapse into rule by the economic oligarchy, but the 1998 financial crash and the subsequent arrival of President Putin has laid that scenario to rest.<sup>47</sup> Nor has post-Soviet Russia yet developed an institutional structure equivalent to the old Communist Party of the Soviet Union that could reliably replicate the permanent suppression of democratic contestation.

Where modern Russian democracy would clearly disappoint Tocqueville is in the absence of rule of law. The rule of law was the unifying principle of American

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<sup>44</sup> Tomila Lankina, *Governing the Locals: Local Self-government and Ethnic Mobilization in Russia* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

<sup>45</sup> According to a World Bank study, 23 large firms controlled by 37 individuals accounted for 30% of Russia's GDP. World Bank, *From Transition to Development* (April 2004), [www.worldbank.org.ru](http://www.worldbank.org.ru)

<sup>46</sup> Thomas F. Remington, *The Russian Parliament: Institutional Evolution in a Transitional Regime* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Michael McFaul, Nikolai Petrov and Andrei Ryabov (eds.), *Between Dictatorship and Democracy. Russian Post-Communist Political Reform* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004).

<sup>47</sup> Stephen Sestanovich, "Force, money and pluralism," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 15, no. 3, July 2004, 33-58.

republicanism, but respect for the law is starkly absent in the Russian case.<sup>48</sup> Contemporary Russia is far from the Anglo-Saxon notion of law as an independent system that can serve as a check on the political authorities. And despite Putin's invocation of a "dictatorship of law," it is even some way from a Continental *Rechtsstaat*, in which the state obeys its own laws (while not subjecting itself to independent judicial review). The Russian state has shown a cavalier disregard of legal constraints: from Yeltsin's dissolution of the Supreme Court in 1993; to the waging of the war in Chechnya; to the persecution of Yukos in 2003-5. The public correspondingly lacks faith in legal institutions – although polls show public support for the jury trials that have been steadily introduced across the country. The public disrespect for the law goes back to the Soviet period, and is connected to the weakness of a religious moral code.

Western transitology has devoted more attention to institution-building in Russia than to pre-existing conditions or morals. Institutions may be more interesting because they seem to be the most amenable to human agency (and Western intervention). But by the mid-2000s, even former exponents of the transition school were having second thoughts about the feasibility of a rapid transition to democracy in the post-Soviet states.<sup>49</sup> As of 2007, of the 15 post-Soviet states only the Baltic countries and Ukraine were rated as "free" by Freedom House, while Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova were rated as "partly free." The remaining eight are "unfree." Clearly, factors other than constitutional design were shaping the political trajectory of these countries, such as the absence of respect for rule of law or a political culture of give-and-take among the political elite.

Transitology assumed that any developed society was ripe for democratization, and that democratic institutions could quickly be designed and installed. Russians themselves were skeptical on this score. Having been burned once by the experience of revolutionary transformation, they take a conservative stance on the malleability of human nature and social institutions. A popular Russian homily from the perestroika era was the tale of the English gardener. When asked how to produce such a perfect lawn, he replies "It's easy, just roll it every day .... for 300 years."

Were Tocqueville himself brought back to life and asked to comment on contemporary Russia, he would probably note both positive and negative features, and conclude that after 15 years it is far too early to say what will be the long-term character of Russia's polity. It draws attention to some features that tend to be overlooked in the current pessimism about the state of Russian democracy, such as the presence of oligarchic and monarchic elements (balancing out the dangers of populist majoritarianism). But overall the Tocquevillian perspective inclines one to be deeply skeptical about the possibility for the rapid introduction of democratic institutions in Russia.

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<sup>48</sup> Peter Solomon and Todd Fogelson, *Courts and Transition in Russia: The Challenge of Judicial Reform*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000); Robert Sharlet, "Putin and the politics of law in Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 17, no. 3, Jul 2001, 195-234.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Carothers, "The end of the transition paradigm," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 1 2002, 5-21.

## Conclusion

Does it make sense to try to apply Tocqueville's approach to contemporary Russia? Tocqueville's analysis has stood the test of time as a brilliant dissection of some key features of the American political system. He was writing at a moment when America was just developing as a democracy – a stage not unlike Russia today. In the 1830s, of course, democracy was virtually unknown on the global stage, and America was an exceptional case. Now, at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, democracy is the norm for developed, European countries, and Russia is the exception.

It is up to the reader to judge whether this is anything more than an empty intellectual exercise. One might say Tocqueville is irrelevant – that the world has changed since 1835, that giant bureaucracies like the KGB, or the welfare state, were unknown to Tocqueville, not to mention technologies like television. True enough. But some features of human society have stayed the same. The American political system itself still operates within an institutional structure created 225 years ago, in an age without modern bureaucracy, technology etc.<sup>50</sup> Some of the key innovations of that time – a written constitution, rule of law, independent judiciary, individual rights, religious toleration, checks and balances, etc – are now being encouraged for other countries such as Russia. It thus behooves us to look back at the geopolitical, moral and sociological context within which those institutions emerged.

Writing in the 1830s, Tocqueville failed to foresee some important developments in American society: the emergence of a powerful presidency and strong political parties; the industrial revolution and the rise of big corporations; and the role of money in politics, uniting these two trends. He only partly foresaw the cataclysm of civil war, although he did explore the differences between North and South and the conflicts they were engendering.

What does the Tocquevillian reading of Russian politics overlook? What, in the words of Donald Rumsfeld, are the “unknown unknowns” that we are omitting? No observer of Russian society would fail to note the strong presidency, the rise of big corporations, and the role of money in politics. Under the influence of Western democratic experience, US political scientists have spent much of the past 15 years anxiously awaiting the arrival of a strong party system in Russia. Suffice it to say that they are still waiting.

In contrast to the American case, a civil war is unlikely to explode on the scene. This was a widely-discussed fear in Russia in the period 1987-96, but it has largely disappeared since the consolidation of Putin's administration. Such a conflict would have been an ideological war for control over the state apparatus between Leftist and Rightist forces, as were its precursors in 1918-21 and 1930-37. Now, the only plausible civil war would be a widening of the Chechen insurrection to other Moslem regions of Russia, principally neighboring regions of the North Caucasus. This is a plausible and bloody scenario, but one that would probably lead to the further consolidation of Russian society around its leader.

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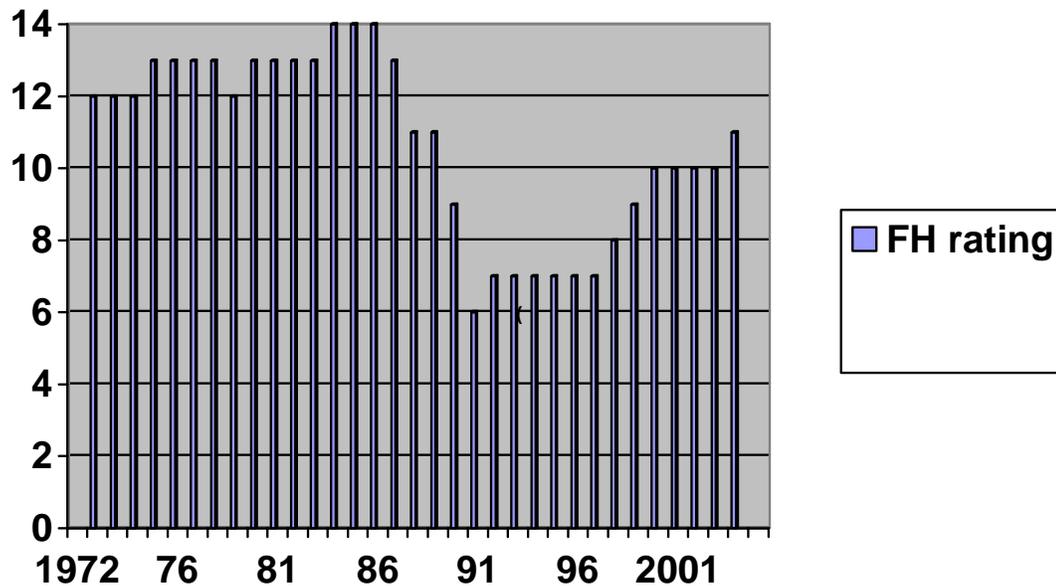
<sup>50</sup> Huntington rightly points out that most of these features actually evolved much earlier than 1787, in Tudor England, so the US constitution was enshrining a set of political practices that were already archaic. Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 122-33.

Many observers have warned of the emergence of a hard-line fascist regime, drawing parallels with Weimar Germany.<sup>51</sup> However, that has not come to pass: there are fascists in Russia, but they are an extreme minority, no more visible than in any other contemporary European democracy. And such thinking has not substantially influenced Russia's leaders: Yeltsin was not Slobodan Milosevic, invading his neighbors; and Putin has not reached the repression level of an Alyaksandr Lukashenko in Belarus or Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan.

Perhaps the most valuable conclusion from this exercise is that Tocqueville reminds us of the interdependence between the domains of conditions, mores and institutions. Foreign policy cannot be separated from domestic policy: the one feeds into the other. Western transitologists largely ignored Russia's sense of wounded pride due to its loss of superpower status, and hence the willingness of the people and the elite to support a leader who would act to restore that pride, even at the expense of democracy. Likewise, by overlooking the vacuum in religious beliefs, outside observers were over-optimistic in assuming that associational life and respect for the law would quickly and almost automatically take root in Russia.

**Figure One Freedom House ratings for Soviet Union and Russian Federation, 1972-2004**

(political rights and civil rights added together)



Source: Freedom House, [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)

<sup>51</sup> Jeffrey Kopstein and Stephen Hanson, "The Weimar-Russia comparison," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 13, no. 3, July 1997, 252-283.

**Figure Two****A Tocquevillian Checklist for Russia in 2007**

<b>Impact on democracy:</b>	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Positive</i>
<i>Conditions</i>		
Authoritarian past	XX	
Revolutionary legacy	X	
Vulnerability to attack	XX	
Former empire	X	
Ethnic fragmentation	X	
Economic structure	X	
Living standard		X
Education level		XX
<i>Morals</i>		
Lack of religiosity	XX	
Orthodox Church	X	
Individualism	--	--
Weak associational life	XX	
Equality of social status		X
<i>Institutions</i>		
Strong president	XX	
Strong security forces	XX	
Weak rule of law	XX	
Elected leaders		X
Universal suffrage	XX	
Weak checks and balances	XX	
Mixed system of government (presidential-parliamentary)		X
Federal structure		X
Lack of free press		X
Weak political parties	XX	