Civil Society in contemporary Russia

(the imperialist West’s incursions into the formerly great Soviet Union)

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Period 2
Brief Review of Civil Society in the UK

- Quangos (quasi autonomous nongovernmental organizations) depict the influence of British interest groups in public policymaking
- Two major organizations: (1) Trades Union Congress (TUC), (2) Confederation of British Industry (CBI)
- The role of media in reflecting social class divisions
Political Participation and Civil Society in Russia

3:26-4:20 Nashi

- Putin’s Little Boys AKA Nashi: A youth movement created in 2005. It is a pro-Putin movement that describes itself as being “democratic, anti-fascist and anti-oligarchic capitalist movements.” It is believed to be a counter to Ukraine's Orange Revolution.

- NGOs are very restricted, as Russia forces them to register as foreign agents. This gives the government the right to inspect and shut down NGOs. At least three have been shut down since 2012.

- The Other Russia- A loose movement opposed to Putin. Presents itself as the strongest opponent to the government, however it is still a minor force, as the media paints them as extremists, which gives them little support from the public.
Challenges to Russian Civil Society

- Russian nationalism and the restriction of non-Orthodox Christian religious groups
- Aggressive governmental opposition of civic groups that are openly critical of the government
  - Government determines through legislature which types of organizations can exist and imposes limitations on freedom of speech
- Obstruction of the freedom of expression and media control/nationalization by state
- Tools to control civil society:
  - tax code
  - police harassment and arrest
  - process of registering with the authorities
Comparison

- Civil society and political participation in Russia is hindered by oppressive legislature.
- NGOs are targeted by the Russian government.
  - as opposed to the collaboration of NGOs (quangos) and the government in the development of policy in the United Kingdom
- The biased and state-owned media acts as an obstacle to civil society by limiting expression. Russia media lacks diversity and is evidently oriented towards supporting those in power.
  - This in direct contrast with the United Kingdom, where television stations are regulated as to not sell advertisements to political parties, causes, and/or politicians.
Video: Freedom in Russia

- Armed Russian police raid homes of anti-Putin activists
Freedom in Russia

- Previously during the Soviet era, private meetings to discuss anything remotely political could have resulted in prison time or exile.
- Now, twenty years after the collapse, there are a lot of organizations and activist groups for women, human rights, social work, environmental campaigns, etc. A large growth in the amount of organizations was seen in the years that Dmitri Medvedev was president. With Putin back, there is more fear about this.
- In 2006, Putin introduced an NGO law where activists and non-governmental organizations encountered endless amounts of red tape.
- They are also denounced by Putin as traitors.
Freedom in Russia, cont.

- Some activists feel that their work is marginal because the government does not treat them as equals that have valid ideas.
- There have been cases where activists have been killed (journalists, human rights activists) as well as arrested and tortured by the police.
- Generally, people do not feel free to express their opinion, especially if they are critics of the government. There is a lack of free speech among media outlets as many are hesitant or fearful to say the wrong things. Radio and television stations are under tight control.
The role of patron-client networks

- **patron-client networks** - when goods and services are given for the exchange of political support and/or loyalty.
- Most prominent in the Soviet Union within the government bureaucracy aka *nomenklatura*.
- Used in order to consolidate power.
- Leaders at all levels in the *nomenklatura* would give resources and promotions to those who were loyal to the Communist party.
- Top down system
- Developed a governmental system based on loyalty not merit.
Modern Russia

- Patron client networks are still used especially during Putin’s presidency.
- Loyal supporters in the legislature and the United Russia Party based on patron client system.
- **insider privatization** - private profitable companies are run by Putin’s supporters.
- All local governors appointed by Putin.
- **asymmetrical federalism**: some republics have more power and resources than others because they support Putin.
- Overall there is an exchange: loyalty $\leftrightarrow$ power/resources.
- “A common complaint is that Mr. Putin’s rule hollowed out the country’s institutions, so that even major deals hinge on personal relationships with the country’s leaders.” - NY Times
Pluralism in Russia

Classical pluralism is the view that politics and decision making are located mostly in the framework of government, but that many non-governmental groups use their resources to exert influence.

- NGOs are oppressed by the Russian government and cannot exert influence on the Russian government, therefore there is no genuine pluralism.
- this causes the governments power to be unchecked by the people and centralized
- this breeds corruption: gov does not answer to local or the populations interest but issues gov policies in mind with centralizing power and benefitting the bureaucracy and patron-client relationship.
- causes no economic growth or creation of wealth since there is no competition and therefore no need for innovation or development
An **Interest Group** refers to virtually any voluntary association that seeks to publicly promote and create advantages for their cause.

As already discussed...

**The Oligarchs!**
Russian Oligarchs

- During the 1990s, once Boris Yeltsin took office, the oligarchs emerged as well connected entrepreneurs who started from nearly nothing and got rich through participation in the market via connections to the corrupt, but elected, government of Russia during the state's transition to a market based economy.

- These rich moguls have influence on politics, the economy, and the government.

- *The Guardian* described the oligarchs as "about as popular with your average Russian as a man idly burning bundles of £50s outside an orphanage".
Russian Mafia

- A larger and even more shadowy influence than the oligarchs is known as the "mafia," but this interest group controls much more than underworld crime. Like the oligarchs, they gained control during the chaotic time after the Revolution of 1991, and they control local businesses, natural resources, and banks. They thrive on payoffs from businesses ("protection money"), money laundering, and deals that they make with Russian government officials, including members of the former KGB. They have murdered bankers, journalists, businessmen, and members of the Duma.
Statism

- Statism is the belief that the state should control either economic or social policy, or both, to some degree.
- Putin’s Russia does not quite measure up to such grandiose, albeit destructive, illusions, but it has many of the associated trimmings, including an intense re-centralization of power and the creation of an oligarchic political and financial elite with interlocking branches.
- Putin has a ridiculous amount of power, and control over the economy and politics of Russia. eg. Changed Duma voting system into PR
How dare you question the legitimacy of our presentation?

140% of this is original work.

Long live the Empire.
Sources

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In Soviet Russia...

Sexy isn't back...

it was never authorized to leave.