Leading Russia: Putin in Perspective

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Russian Corruption and State Weakness in Comparative Post#Communist Perspective

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Abstract and Keywords

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In his first media briefing following his re#election as Russian president, Vladimir Putin claimed that one of the major achievements of his first term of office was that there had

been 'without any doubt' a strengthening of the state. He also claimed that he would continue to fight corruption.¹ In a real sense, the two points are linked. Corruption can be both symptomatic of, and a contributory factor to, a weak state. These two phenomena—corruption and state weakness—and their interaction will be a key theme in this chapter. Putin's own statements and actions will be analysed in the context of Vladimir Shlapentokh's contentions that 'Putin's position on corruption is an enigma for the whole world'; that Putin had essentially done nothing after two years in office to combat corruption; and that the Russian state has actually been *weakened* under the current president.² Given the widespread agreement that the Russian state was very weak in the later Yeltsin era, such a claim is controversial.

A second, related theme is that Putin's approach to corruption reflects the ambiguity of his leadership style, and helps to explain why analysts *still*—in Putin's second term of office—find it difficult to agree on the nature and direction of his leadership. While some, such as Shlapentokh and Lilia Shevtsova, see Putin as weak and indecisive, others see him as authoritarian.³ Perhaps he is neither, but forced by the Russian situation to act in ways that can appear enigmatic, ambiguous, even contradictory. Russia is a society in which there is too little faith in (p. 76) democracy, too little centrist politics, too little culture of compromise, too much faith in strong leaders, too much lawlessness, and an underdeveloped civil society. Attempting to bring order *and* democracy to such a society, at the same time as one is trying to enhance the state's economic performance, legitimacy, and sense of self, would be a major challenge for anyone. Attempting to do that while also being sensitive to the fact that one's efforts are being described as either inadequate or authoritarian is extraordinarily difficult, and should be recognized as such.

Many Russians were relieved and optimistic when Putin was officially elected president in March 2000, believing that at last they had a strong leader who would steer their country away from almost a decade of confusion, humiliation, and false starts. Indeed, many hoped Russia would once again become a strong state; for them, Putin was to be a saviour, and they identified with a comment he made at his inaugural speech in May 2000—'We want our Russia to be a free, prosperous, rich, strong and civilized country, a country of which its citizens are proud and which is respected in the world'.⁴ But other Russians, as well as a number of external observers, feared that the type of leadership Putin appeared to represent, and too much emphasis on a strong state, could return Russia to authoritarianism, possibly even dictatorship.⁵ This chapter locates recent developments in Russian leadership politics within the context of post-Communist leadership and state-building more broadly. It is maintained that those who hoped Putin would turn Russia into a strong state underestimated the scale of the task, while those who believe Putin is inherently authoritarian have underestimated the need for

strong leadership in contemporary Russia. The scale and nature of the tasks Putin still has before him help to explain apparent ambiguities in his leadership.

The argument is structured in four principal parts, most of which include a comparative post#Communist dimension. The first provides a brief comparison with other post#Communist states of two policy areas that have concerned those who fear Russia is deviating from the democratization path, namely Putin's treatment of the mass media and his approach to political parties. Are Russian developments in these areas so different from what is happening in countries now considered to be consolidating democracy?

Second, the reasons for the weakness of the Russian state since the collapse of Communism are examined, and compared with the situation in other post# (p. 77) Communist states. While some aspects of Russia's weakness are unique, others are not unlike the position of other transition countries. For example, all faced severe difficulties in attempting to privatize and marketize economies in the near#absence of indigenous bourgeoisies.

The third main topic is corruption. While others in this volume, notably William Tompson, analyse the oligarchs, the focus here is on corruption in the various state organs, and the extent to which this has contributed to, or is reflective of, the weak state. Putin's declared emphasis on the rule of law is interrogated in the context of the actions he has taken to combat corruption. Once again, his approach and policies are compared with those in other post#Communist states.

Fourth, and building on the previous three sections, a theoretical section examines the connections between coercion, legitimacy and the strength of the state. It is argued that the balance between coercion and legitimacy is not always a zero#sum game. This is followed by the conclusions, in which Shlapentokh's arguments are evaluated, and the difficulties facing Putin emphasized. Putin has been attempting to reconcile differences that are deeper in Russia than in any other post#Communist state, and this should be more widely recognized. The conclusions also advocate a customized, relativistic, and dynamic approach to Russia's transition, rather than one based on Western ideals, expectations, and conditions.

Two Key Policy Areas

Before considering two areas of Putin's leadership that have led to suggestions that he is becoming (or already is) authoritarian, it is necessary to specify how the terms democratic and authoritarian are used in this chapter. Entire books have been written about each concept; here, only brief guidelines can be provided for the purposes of the argument. The minimalist (or Schumpeterian) approach on the distinction is

attractively simple—democracy requires competitive elections and universal suffrage, authoritarianism does not, and is undemocratic.⁶ This is a useful starting point, but is insufficient. Another approach focuses on the balance between coercion and legitimacy. A democratic system will employ *some* coercion, but will focus on the need to maximize the legitimacy of the political arrangements. It does this through testing its own right to rule—not only through elections, but also independent political surveys, free mass media, and granting citizens the right to protest openly. Authoritarianism will typically employ a higher level of coercion and be less concerned with genuine testing of its own legitimacy. Arguably just as important as either of these criteria is the notion of (p. 78) the rule of law. In a democracy, laws provide predictability, as well as a form of citizen equality, since even strong leaders are bound by the rules.⁷ Authoritarian systems override or ignore such rules in an essentially *arbitrary* manner when it suits them; while parliaments might formally ratify changes to rules, they rarely do so independently of the authoritarian leader. Nor do they seriously challenge the leader.

In the real world, many systems do not fit neatly into either of these categories—which are ideal types—and are located somewhere along an axis between them. Hence, a level of subjectivity is involved in categorizing a particular system, in terms both of where to locate it on the axis, and determining the point at which being closer to the democratic end of the spectrum is crossed into being closer to the authoritarian. While some states (consolidated democracies; dictatorships) are clearly located near or at one end of the spectrum or the other, many are in a contested position.

The Mass Media

While minimalist theorists believe that democracy is basically about competitive elections, most analysts maintain that it involves much more. One of the many additional features of a genuine democracy is independent mass media able to conduct their own investigative journalism. During the Yeltsin era, the process of opening up the Russian media that had already commenced under Gorbachev in the final days of Soviet power developed substantially, so that most observers considered the Russian media to be relatively free. But Putin has clamped down on the media, so that they are now under much greater centralized state control than they were in the 1990s.⁸ One way in which this can be demonstrated, and compared with the situation in other post-Communist states, is to consider the Freedom House rankings of media freedom in the post-Communist states in 1994 and 2003; this is done in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1. Freedom House Press Freedom Rankings of Selected Post-Communist States, 1994 and 2003. *Sources:* Based on Freedom House Annual Survey of Press

Freedom Rankings 1994–2002 (online at www.freedomhouse.org/research/pressurvey.htm) and Karin Karlekar, *Freedom of the Press 2003* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 10–11.

In Figure 5.1, countries are scored according to three variables—legal environment, political influences, and economic pressures. Individual countries are assessed by Freedom House on each variable to form a composite score out of 100; the higher the score, the less freedom of the press there is perceived to be. Russia slipped from the ‘partly free’ to the ‘not free’ category in the space of a decade. This was in contrast to most post#Communist states, which either improved their ranking, or else did not descend into a lower overall category (i.e., free, partly free, or not free); of the twenty#seven states listed by Freedom House, only Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine were in a similar position to Russia. Thus, (p. 79) only CIS states have deteriorated over the past decade; no CEE state has been relegated to a worse overall classification.

In fairness, the Freedom House scores for Russia began to slip already in the mid#1990s; but they remained in the lowest category of ‘partly free’ until 2003, when the score slipped substantially (10 per cent) from 60 (2002) to 66. Freedom (p. 80) House justifies this reclassification primarily in terms of three factors.⁹ The first was a formal (i.e. sanctioned by both houses of parliament) tightening of censorship in November 2002, following some critical reporting of the Moscow theatre hostage crisis in October; this was the main reason for the deterioration of the ‘legal environment’ score.¹⁰ In terms of ‘political influence’, the forced closure in January 2002 of the only remaining independent television broadcasting company, TV#6, was a major factor contributing to the worsening image of media freedom. Finally, although the print media are still primarily in private ownership, most are in the hands of a small number of oligarchs. Yet those oligarchs who have in recent years been perceived by the Russian authorities to have challenged Putin—notably Gusinsky and Berezovsky in 2000, Khodorkovsky in 2003—have suffered the consequences. Thus, the remaining oligarchs know that they should not be overly critical of the Putin regime if they are to retain control of their newspapers and magazines. In what in a sense is a version of a *matrioshka* doll, the oligarchs exert pressure on their journalists through the formers’ ownership of the print media, but the oligarchs are in turn subject to political pressure from the Putin regime.

The Putin government has been subjected to international criticism for its tighter control over the mass media, but has sought to justify its position by reference to the special and new situation in Russia. Thus Russian media minister Mikhail Lesin argued in April 2002 at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, that it was inappropriate to expect the Russian media to meet US standards of journalism, and that they were experiencing understandable ‘growing pains’.¹¹

There is no question that several other post-Communist countries have experienced serious problems of state interference in the mass media. Even relatively liberal Hungary has been subject to censorship and interference of a type and scale that is of concern in countries allegedly democratizing.¹² But such examples have for the most part been temporary or less blatant than in (p. 81) Russia.¹³ The countries in which state interference in the media has been significant and sustained are mostly autocracies, in some cases even dictatorships, such as Turkmenistan, Belarus, or Slovakia during the second Meier era (1994–8). If Russia is to avoid being widely perceived as authoritarian, the current state control of the media will have to prove to be more akin to the Hungarian 'blip' than the ongoing Belarusian situation.

The Law on Political Parties¹⁴

When a new law on political parties was passed in Russia in July 2001, a number of commentators interpreted it as another sign of the increasing moves towards authoritarianism or even dictatorship under Putin.¹⁵ After all, the law was overtly intended to reduce the number of political parties in Russia. However, the assumption that this was yet another indication of Putin's desire to return to the days of Russian autocrats or dictators, be they tsars or Communist Party General Secretaries, must be questioned. Putin spent much of his early career in Germany, and speaks fluent German. He is aware of the significance of the Weimar Republic. A major cause of the collapse of that republic was the existence of many small parties in parliament, which rendered it ineffective, as the various tiny groupings squabbled among themselves. Putin has been determined to avoid this, and believed that the Duma was relatively weak in part because of the large number of parties and independent deputies.

The new law has certainly reduced the number of officially registered political parties in Russia. But any suggestion that the new legislation would reduce their numbers to a tiny fraction of their former number is contradicted by the facts. As of August 2003, there had been fifty registrations¹⁶; this compares with almost 190 parties and political organizations before the introduction of the law.¹⁷ In fact, (p. 82) Putin now needs to take the reform one step further if he is serious about enhancing the power of the Duma by reducing its fragmentation. Given the nature of the Russian electoral system, many deputies are formally independents. While the December 2003 elections (the first held under the new party law) resulted in domination by only four parties or blocs—United Russia; the Communist Party of the Russian Federation; the Liberal Democratic Party; and the Motherland Bloc—a number of small parties (The People's Party, Yabloko, and the Union of Right Forces) also secured seats. On their own, these parties have too few seats to play any disruptive role. But a *relatively* large number of independents (76 out of a total of 450 deputies) were also elected. Although their numbers were well down on the 1999 figure of 106 seats, and even though most subsequently aligned themselves

with one or other of the major groupings, the fact that they are not subject to party discipline can exert a fragmenting and negative influence on the work of the Russian lower house. It would make sense—and probably be a good thing for democracy—for the Russians to move to a system that encourages tighter party allegiance and discipline. Democracy should never be confused with anarchy.

Several other post#Communist states have either introduced new laws on political parties in recent years (e.g. Romania, 1996; Poland, 1997; Moldova was considering the draft of a new law in early 2004), or else introduced substantial amendments to existing party laws (e.g. Poland 1998; Bulgaria 1998; Moldova 1998 and 2000).¹⁸ While few of these changes were as radical as the Russian, merely comparing party laws is in any case insufficient for assessing the extent to which particular post#Communist governments have sought to consolidate party systems. Electoral laws should also be examined, since changes to these have in many cases been oriented towards a reduction in the number of parties represented in the legislature.¹⁹ Thus, most CEE states have in recent years introduced threshold requirements for representation in parliament; parties that do not reach this threshold are excluded, even though some citizens have voted for them.²⁰ (p. 83) The recent Russian developments are therefore subject to very differing interpretations, but in themselves do *not* necessarily indicate moves towards authoritarianism. Rather, they can be seen as symptomatic of the problems *many* post#Communist states have faced in attempting to crystallize party systems.²¹

Russia as a Weak State

The Russian state certainly was weak during the Yeltsin era. This manifested itself in numerous ways, but, most fundamentally, in that it was incapable of raising sufficient taxes to function efficiently. This had numerous implications, including that officers of the state were often not paid in full, or sometimes at all, for long periods. This undermined their loyalty to their employer, the state, which in turn resulted both in legitimization problems for the post#Communist Russian state and corruption (see the next section).²²

In the introduction, it was mentioned that some aspects of the weakness of the Russian state under Yeltsin—which Shlapentokh argues has increased under Putin—were essentially unique. One was the increasing fragmentation and regionalization of such a huge country, which is considered elsewhere in this volume. Another was the impact of the identity crisis the country experienced from the early 1990s. This was largely a function of the identity ramifications of the 'quintuple loss'. In the space of approximately two years, Russia lost its outer empire (e.g. Comecon and the Warsaw Pact); its inner empire (the rest of the former USSR); the cold war; its status as a 'superpower'; and its role as the home of socialism and thus as the premier socialist

model. Such a series of losses in so short a time is without precedent; even empires that collapsed rapidly, such as the Ottoman and Habsburg, were not recognized as superpowers, which is a relatively (p. 84) new concept that relates *inter alia* to weapons of mass destruction of a type unknown until the middle of the twentieth century.

Given the sheer scope and rapidity of Russia's losses, it is not surprising that so many Russians experienced a form of identity crisis in the 1990s. Many had not even thought of themselves primarily as Russians until the collapse of the USSR (December 1991), identifying at least as much with the much larger unit, the Soviet Union.²³ Part of the explanation for the strong electoral performance of more extreme parties in recent years relates precisely to this identity crisis; whereas some—particularly older—voters have sought refuge in the one party they believe they know from the past (i.e. the Communist), others have rejected the Communist past, but have supported a leader and party (Zhirinovskiy and the Liberal Democratic Party) that claims to be able to make Russia great again.

The problems of state#building and nation#building have not been peculiar to Russia. Indeed, many post#Communist states have from some perspectives had more severe problems, in that those that were previously part of a federal state have had to establish (or re#establish) new state loyalties and identities, as well as major new institutions, including ministries of foreign affairs and defence, armies, and diplomatic corps. Moreover, all of the post#Communist states faced similar problems in terms of marketizing and privatizing their economies in the near absence of an indigenous capital#owning class (bourgeoisie); while the '*nomenklatura* privatization' appears to have been more widespread and debilitating to the state in Russia than in other countries, it was a common enough problem.

On the other hand, only Serbia lost its de facto dominance of a much larger political unit in a way at all comparable to Russia's situation. But even Serbia did not lose an external empire, an international competition (i.e. the cold war), its role as a superpower, or its role as a model emulated by others. Thus, there were significant ways in which Russia lost far more than any other post#Communist state, and experienced unique state# and nation#building problems. These difficulties were compounded in the mid#to#late 1990s by the poor leadership given by a sick and often inebriated president!

Corruption and Putin's Record

In May 2000, shortly after being officially elected president, Putin publicly repeated the commitment he had made months earlier to the creation of a (p. 85) 'dictatorship of laws' in Russia.²⁴ While some saw this as a thinly#veiled reference to the need for a dictatorship plain and simple, such an assumption should not be made too readily. It is equally feasible that this was part of his model of the strong but democratic Russian

state. Putin himself had already indicated, in an article published in December 1999 (when he was still prime minister), that he was committed to a strong 'democratic, law-governed, effective federal state', and that he had learnt from history that 'all dictatorships and authoritarian systems of government are transient.'²⁵ Moreover, given the evidence on the behaviour of the oligarchs (see Chapter 10 of this volume), and on organized crime from the early 1990s,²⁶ it was appropriate for the incoming leader to commit his government to bringing Russia's lawlessness under control. In this section, we consider one important aspect of this lawlessness, official corruption.

According to the most widely-cited comparative assessment of corruption levels, Transparency International's (TI) annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), Russia is among the most corrupt of the post-Communist states. The 2003 CPI assessed twenty-six CEE and CIS states, out of a total of 133 states of all types; Russia's position among this subgroup was fifteenth (where first position is perceived to be the least corrupt), while it ranked eighty-sixth among all states. Although Russia was considered to be less corrupt than any of the Central Asian CIS states, most of the Transcaucasian ones (apart from Armenia), and Ukraine, it fared worse than all CEE states apart from Serbia and Montenegro, the Republic of Macedonia, and Albania.

Transparency International has been producing the CPI since 1995, but first ranked Russia in 1996 (see Table 5.1).²⁷ Although there are problems of cross-polity comparability of CPI data from one year to the next, a *general* over-time picture of any given state can legitimately be drawn. Since the mid-1990s, Russia has not only fared poorly in comparison with many other post-Communist states, especially CEE ones, but has failed to make *significant* progress in its own corruption score.

Thus it has moved around in a narrow band; its lowest score (2.1) was in 2000, while its best were in 2002 and 2003, when it scored 2.7.²⁸ Being charitable, it (p. 86)

Table 5.1. TI Corruption Scores of Selected Post-Communist States 1995–2003*

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Azerbaijan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1.7	1.5	2.0	2.0	1.8
Belarus	n.a.	n.a.	3.9	3.4	4.1	n.a.	4.8	4.2
Bulgaria	n.a.	n.a.	2.9	3.3	3.5	3.9	4.0	3.9
Czech Rep.	5.37	5.20	4.8	4.6	4.3	3.9	3.7	3.9
Estonia	n.a.	n.a.	5.7	5.7	5.7	5.6	5.6	5.5
Hungary	4.86	5.18	5.0	5.2	5.2	5.3	4.9	4.8

Moldova	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2.6	2.6	3.1	2.1	2.4
Poland	5.57	5.08	4.6	4.2	4.1	4.1	4.0	3.6
Romania	n.a.	3.44	3.0	3.3	2.9	2.8	2.6	2.8
Russia	2.58	2.27	2.4	2.4	2.1	2.3	2.7	2.7
Slovenia	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	6.0	5.5	5.2	6.0	5.9
Ukraine	n.a.	n.a.	2.8	2.5	1.5	2.1	2.4	2.3

*This selection of states is based principally on the availability of over time data (scores).

could thus be argued that, according to these scores, Putin has made a little progress in reducing corruption in Russia. Moreover, while Russia has been improving in the early twenty-first century, countries such as the Czech Republic, Poland, and to a lesser extent Hungary, have been deteriorating. Russia also performs better than several CIS states (although only marginally in many cases, and markedly worse than Belarus). On the other hand, the Russian improvement is modest, and there was no apparent change between 2002 and 2003. In addition, Russia had scored 2.6 in 1996, which makes the improvement look less impressive. Even allowing for the slight progress under Putin and the worsening situation in several Central European states, the latter still emerge as less corrupt than Russia. Finally, given that there are currently only three scores since Putin's first full year in office, it is also too early to be confident of a sustained improving trend.

The TI Index has been criticized on various grounds, including that it is based on perceptions rather than actual experience. In an endeavour to address this issue, researchers from the World Bank have conducted two surveys—in 1999 and 2002—in which owners and managers of enterprises were asked to indicate *inter alia* the percentage of their enterprise's sales or income devoted to bribes (unofficial payments or gifts) to public officials.²⁹ The interviewers used various methods to reassure respondents that they could not be identified. Nevertheless, it is (p. 87) reasonable to infer that some respondents *were* apprehensive about providing answers that might result in prosecution. Given this, the somewhat disturbing data provided should be seen as *minimum* figures. Using this methodology, Russia and the CIS states emerged as more corrupt, on average, than CEE states in both 1999 and 2002. In the earlier year, the mean average payment for CIS states was 3.7 per cent, and for CEE states 2.2 per cent. Russia was below the CIS average, at 2.8 per cent, but still well above the CEE average. The averages in both CIS and CEE states were lower in the 2002 Business Environment and Enterprise Performance Surveys (BEEPS), at 1.97 per cent and 1.27 per cent respectively. Russia once again emerged as less corrupt than the CIS average, though still more corrupt than the CEE average, at 1.37 per cent. But, using this completely different methodology, the trend line in Russia—namely, some improvement

in the early twenty-first century—is the same as in TI's CPIs. It must be emphasized once again, however, that the timeframe is too short to be reasonably confident that the apparent trend will continue.

Critics of these and other cross-polity surveys sometimes argue that a problem with many of them is that they are not directed by domestic agencies. It is therefore worth considering the results of two of the best known surveys of Russian corruption conducted by Russians; while it must be acknowledged that the first was largely funded by an outside agency (the World Bank), the survey is well regarded by many Russian specialists. The report was published by INDEM in May 2002, although it was based on two large-scale surveys—one of citizens, the other of entrepreneurs—conducted in late-1999 and 2001.³⁰ The surveys sought *inter alia* the views of citizens and entrepreneurs on the 'corruptibility' of twenty-nine agencies and groups. Some of these were not state bodies (e.g. the Church and environmentalist organizations), and in this sense would be excluded from consideration by most analysts of corruption; but most were.³¹ In general, the INDEM surveys revealed a high level of agreement in the rankings of various agencies by the two groups. Unsurprisingly, however, entrepreneurs considered themselves much less corrupt than citizens perceived them to be, whereas they considered trade unions far more prone to corruption than citizens did. The other group or agency over which there was some disagreement was the mass media; entrepreneurs considered the media more corruptible than did citizens. But let us consider the large number of areas in which entrepreneurs and citizens were very much in agreement.

(p. 88) According to the INDEM surveys, the most corruptible groups in Russia at the turn of the millennium were the traffic police and political parties.³² These were followed by parliamentarians (members of the Duma), and then police and customs officers. At the other end of the spectrum, the state agencies perceived to be least corruptible were welfare-related offices, organs of national security, and higher courts. These results are rather similar to those produced by another series of Russian mass surveys, those by the Public Opinion Foundation (POF). These were made available on the Web in January 2002, and are particularly useful since they are longitudinal. So far, the results for three surveys on corruption in Russia—July 1998, March 1999, and January 2002—have been made publicly available. One of the most interesting features is that the relative assessment of different groups remained remarkably stable over the three surveys. As with the INDEM findings, 'police, customs and law enforcement agencies' emerge as the most corrupt agencies, closely followed by 'the courts, prosecutors' and 'the traffic police'.³³ Thus, it appears that most Russians consider the law-enforcement and law-adjudicating agencies the most corrupt branches of the state. Perhaps Putin should have called for a dictatorship over the law!

There is a serious legitimacy problem for a state in which most citizens do not have confidence in the agencies that are supposed to uphold the law. These findings also have major implications for the notion of the strong or weak state. For instance, it appears from a survey commissioned by the author and conducted by the leading Russian survey organization VTsIOM in mid-2000 that an overwhelming majority of Russian citizens believed at the time that there was a close connection between organized crime and corrupt officials. When asked how close they believed the connections were between organized crime and official corruption, 43.5 per cent of respondents answered 'very close', while an almost identical percentage, 43.2 per cent, answered 'close'. Thus, according to this survey, almost 87 per cent of Russians perceived there to be a close or very close connection (p. 89) between organized crime and corruption.³⁴ Whether or not such a perception bore much relationship to reality—and this cannot be determined—is not ultimately important; the significant point is that any state in which the citizens hold such beliefs has a serious legitimacy problem.

So does the evidence suggest that Putin has been serious about reducing corruption in Russia—and therefore, by implication, increasing the state's legitimacy? Shlapentokh is quite correct that the Russian authorities under Putin have on occasions turned a blind eye to corruption. Moreover, from some perspectives, the new (acting) president made a bad start, since his very first official act in December 1999 was to issue decree 1763 granting an amnesty to Yeltsin.³⁵ But while this could be seen as having condoned corruption, it could also be interpreted as indicative of Putin's desire for closure—to look forward, rather than to the past. Such a sympathetic interpretation could only be justified if Putin's subsequent actions suggest he has been actively attempting to deal with corruption.

In comparison with Yeltsin, Putin has engaged little in anti-corruption campaigns.³⁶ But this is sensible. Most analysts of corruption agree that anticorruption campaigns are often not merely ineffective, but counterproductive. Such campaigns have to be short, infrequent, and be able to demonstrate tangible results; otherwise, citizens treat them as not merely irrelevant, but indicative of weakness, incompetence, or—arguably worse—mere rhetoric from leaders anxious to deflect attention from their *own* corruption. In short, unless they are clearly exercising a positive effect, anti-corruption campaigns lead to popular cynicism and delegitimation. Putin's approach has been to focus more on improving existing laws or introducing new ones, structural changes, firmer application of the law, and incentives.

New legislation has been introduced under Putin, sometimes rapidly, to close loopholes conducive to corruption; after all, corruption is often in part a function of inadequate or ambiguous legislation. Following criticism from the OECD's Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in June 2001 that Russia still had no (p. 90) anti-money-laundering

laws, legislation was rushed through the Russian parliament in July 2001; this became effective in February 2002. Once the FATF had been persuaded that the new laws were really being implemented, Russia was removed from its 'List of Non-Cooperative Countries and Territories' in October 2002.³⁷ Indeed, Russia's progress in this area was considered sufficient for it to be granted observer status in February 2003, and full membership of the FATF in June 2003.³⁸ Another piece of legislation designed to combat corruption was an August 2002 decree on increasing transparency in the state bureaucracy by providing new and clearer guidelines on integrity and conflict of interest.

Putin has introduced a number of structural changes designed to address the issues of corruption (and its frequent bedmate, organized crime), casting further doubts on Shlapentokh's claim of the do-nothing president. According to the United States' Drug Enforcement Administration, 'Low- and mid-level regional corruption is one of the primary reasons President Putin created Russia's Federal District system in 2000'.³⁹ Another change was to bolster the work of the National Anti-Corruption Committee (NAK), which was first established in 1999, and is a committee of the Duma.⁴⁰ And in November 2003, Putin decreed the formation of a new council to fight corruption. The council comprises the prime minister, the leaders of both houses of parliament, and the heads of the Constitutional, Supreme, and Arbitration courts. Once a year, the general prosecutor is to provide a report to the council, which has then to brief the president. Various commissions for combating corruption (including resolving conflicts of interest) are to work with the council.

Fighting corruption is difficult in all countries. Corruption often has no obvious victims to report it; the unfortunate citizens who are required to pay bribes to obtain goods or services to which they should have free and ready access, for instance, are typically nervous about reporting the corrupt official for fear of being punished themselves for breaking the rules. Where citizens do not fear punishment, they may fear revenge from corrupt officials (or other criminals) if they testify in court. Hence, the introduction of a witness protection scheme—Russia's first—in Moscow in February 2002 was a welcome step in the fight against crime, including corruption.⁴¹

Several post-Communist states with serious corruption problems have considered and in some cases introduced various kinds of amnesty; they include Albania, (p. 91) Kazakhstan, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine. In addition to that granted to his predecessor, Putin offered a form of amnesty to the oligarchs at a July 2000 meeting. Since this does not relate directly to corrupt officials, it will not be explored in detail here.⁴² However, it suggests that Putin is flexible and radical enough to 'think outside the circle' on occasions in attempting to deal with serious problems. The meeting was also of symbolic importance in terms of corruption. Just as the Chinese leadership

reached the conclusion by the 1990s that they could not seriously reduce corruption among 'flies' (lower-ranking officials) unless they made examples of some leading corrupt 'tigers' (senior officials), so Putin's move could be seen on one level as designed to set an example. It is a reasonable assumption that lower-level corrupt officials will think twice about continuing with their antisocial behaviour if they see a new leadership clamping down on more powerful people further up the chain; proposing an amnesty for past actions, but tougher action in the future, could be seen to have sent such a message.

China's determination to make an example of corrupt 'tigers' has resulted in some very severe punishments, including the death penalty. The treatment of senior Russian officials found guilty of corruption during the Putin era has sometimes been harsh in comparison with the Yeltsin era, but not as extreme as in China. In April 2000, for example, Rear Admiral Vladimir Morev was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment for attempting to sell radar equipment for the rather modest sum of approximately \$3,000.⁴³

According to the 'grandfather' of comparative corruption studies, Arnold Heidenheimer, one of the most effective ways of reducing corruption is to increase state officials' salaries to a level where they are much less tempted to be corrupt; he often cites Singapore as an exemplar in this regard.⁴⁴ Putin has recognized the value of this approach, and in April 2004 decreed substantial increases for some 10,000 of Russia's federal state officials, linking this explicitly to his fight against corruption.

Finally, Putin has claimed that some of the major personnel changes he has introduced relate to his fight against corruption. When he named Mikhail Fradkov as his new prime minister in March 2004, for example, the president mentioned that Fradkov's experience in the Security Council and as head of the tax police (2001–3) meant that his new premier had 'thorough experience in fighting corruption'.⁴⁵

(p. 92) Unfortunately, many of the positive steps just outlined have a downside. For example, the August 2002 decree was only advisory, and tougher, follow-up legislation is needed.⁴⁶ The body established in November 2003 was only a consultative organ and first met in January 2004, so it is too early to assess its impact. And the April 2004 increase in salaries was only for approximately 3 per cent of federal officials, mostly senior ones; hence, while it might succeed in reducing corruption in the upper echelons of the state bureaucracy, it could exacerbate the problem at the lower levels if it increases a sense of 'them' and 'us'.⁴⁷

There are other disappointing aspects of Putin's approach to corruption. One is that the 'Public Reception Centres' established by the National Anti-Corruption Committee in 1999, and intended *inter alia* to encourage public whistleblowing against corrupt officials, were shut down by late 2000, allegedly because of inadequate funding.⁴⁸

Another is that the number of officials investigated, prosecuted, and convicted for corruption almost certainly remains very low.⁴⁹ While comprehensive up-to-date Russian statistics on this did not appear to be publicly available at the time of writing, recent data from the Russian Far East may be indicative. In 2003, Russian Interior Minister Boris Gryzlov revealed that 151 cases of bribery were registered in the region in 2001 and 2002, of which twenty resulted in prosecutions, and even fewer in convictions. In fact, only one person was sent to prison as a result of the investigations and court cases!⁵⁰

At first sight, one of the most disappointing aspects of Putin's putative commitment to reducing corruption is that he allegedly resisted a draft bill successfully passed through its first reading in the Duma in early October 2003. The draft was introduced by deputy Nikolay Gonchar, with the approval of the National Anti-Corruption Committee, and was designed to permit legislators to investigate alleged wrongdoings, including corruption, by senior state officials.⁵¹ (p. 93) But once again, this development can be interpreted in quite different ways. Admittedly, many deputies from the pro-Kremlin parties did not vote, since they were absent from parliament that day. It must also be acknowledged that the chances of the bill proceeding to a second reading were greatly reduced by both the October result (i.e. deputies opposed to the bill would likely turn up for a second reading) and then the changed composition of the Duma from the end of 2003. Nevertheless, the fact that it was accepted, against Putin's wishes, by a parliament that, even as it was constituted prior to the December 2003 parliamentary elections, was claimed by some to be too deferential towards Putin, is hardly evidence of an authoritarian regime.

Endorsing the last point is the fact that, although Putin is said to want this bill adopted, the long-awaited and long-debated anti-corruption bill has still to be passed by the Duma. The draft law took eight years to reach its first reading, partly because Yeltsin had publicly criticized an earlier version, produced by a working committee of the Duma's Security Committee, for being too harsh and wide-ranging.⁵² Such criticism sends the wrong message if a leadership is serious about wanting to reduce corruption. Putin did not make such criticisms. The fact that the draft bill passed its first reading in November 2002, but then floundered once again, constitutes another example of the type of delay in adopting important legislation that indicates deep divisions within parliament and frustrates the president. The delay also sends a wrong message about the commitment to fighting corruption. But such frustration for the president hardly testifies to authoritarianism.

How does Putin's record compare with other post-Communist leaders' attempts to combat corruption? As noted, the perceived levels of corruption have been increasing recently in countries such as the Czech Republic and Poland. Several other post-

Communist leaders have made the fight against corruption a top priority; but nearly all have sooner or later been judged to have either failed, or to have been less successful than citizens had hoped. Three prominent examples are former Presidents Stoyanov (Bulgaria), Shevardnadze (Georgia), and Constantinescu (Romania).⁵³ Thus in comparative terms, and despite his mixed record—no really senior corrupt officials are in prison—the fact that Putin may have made modest headway in the fight against corruption in Russia puts him ahead of many of his peers. Given that the problem is in various ways more difficult to control in Russia, *inter alia* because of the sheer scale of the country, this is an achievement of sorts.

(p. 94) Coercion, Legitimacy, and the Strength of the State

The relevance of legitimacy to the issue of the strong state, mentioned earlier, can now be considered. Our initial premise is that power in *any* state is exercised through a mixture of coercion and legitimacy. Quite what a strong state means will vary, according to the relative mix of legitimacy and coercion. In a state in which power is exercised primarily through coercion, a strong state is a repressive one. Conversely, in a relatively legitimate state, strength refers more to effectiveness. Thus a strong state can be either authoritarian or democratic. But it would appear to follow from the point made above about the legitimacy levels in Russia in mid#2000 that, if a strong state exists there, it must be a repressive one.

However, it is crucial to note the caveat 'if a strong state exists'. Yeltsin's Russia was a *weak* state that neglected many of its responsibilities. Its leader was a metaphor for the system he headed; during the 1990s, the president became weaker (and possibly corrupt), in both literal and figurative senses. If this generalized picture is accepted, the important point can be made that the relationship between legitimacy and coercion is *not* necessarily a zero#sum one. It is both theoretically possible and empirically demonstrable that a state can simultaneously enjoy low levels of legitimacy and exercise relatively little coercion.

Once this point about a non zero#sum situation is accepted, the obverse should also be seen as a possibility, albeit as an atypical situation. Thus the legitimacy of a state can in some situations be enhanced by a regime that increases coercion levels. From this perspective, Putin's various measures designed to make the state stronger—whether through administrative centralization,⁵⁴ tighter control of what could be seen as insufficiently responsible media, dealing with the oligarchs, or clamping down on corruption—do not *necessarily* represent authoritarianism. If most citizens want such developments, and have shown in democratic ways that they do, then power is being exercised in a way that can enhance legitimacy.

However, although a state can in certain circumstances simultaneously increase both coercion and its own legitimacy, there are conditions attached if an increase in coercive power is not to be indicative of growing authoritarianism. First, and as suggested at the end of the previous paragraph, there must be some form of genuine popular control of the more coercive regime. At the very least, and in line with minimalist theories of democracy, there must be regular, genuinely competitive elections. In the case of Putin's Russia, parliamentary elections were held on schedule in December 2003. The fact that the party most closely associated with the president won those can be seen as indicative of the popularity of Putin and his approach. The presidential elections held in March 2004 resulted in a landslide win for Putin (more than 70 per cent for him in the first—and hence (p. 95) only—round), but *were* contested.⁵⁵ Hence, using the minimalist approach, the Russian electoral situation does not indicate authoritarianism. But what of our other criteria, arbitrariness and the rule of law? In briefly addressing this issue, it is worth considering developments in other post#Communist CIS states that suggest a concrete indicator for assessing whether or not future Russian developments are likely to result in authoritarianism or a legitimate strong democratic state.

One clear indication that Putin really was becoming more authoritarian and moving away from the rule of law would be if he were to emulate many of the Central Asian leaders in holding a referendum designed to prolong his term of office beyond the second four#year one (i.e. beyond 2008). According to the currently valid (1993) Russian Constitution, a president may only serve a maximum of two full terms of office (akin to US regulations). Any suggestion that Putin is attempting to circumvent this temporal limitation on his presidency should be taken as evidence of an attempt to move Russia to authoritarianism, possibly even dictatorship.⁵⁶ Equally, moves to delay parliamentary elections would, unless justified by a real crisis situation such as war, constitute concrete evidence that Russia was moving away from its current imperfect and incomplete democracy. Attempts to change the constitution so as to further upgrade the position of the presidency would be a third clear indicator.

Let us now consider the *effectiveness* of the Russian state, which can also be an important indicator of 'strength'. It appears that Russian officials are now being paid in full and on time. As noted above, some groups have also received substantial pay increases under Putin.⁵⁷ Thus, to the extent that corruption is sometimes a genuine coping mechanism, this change under Putin is likely to be part of the reason for the apparent improvement in Russia's corruption situation in the early 2000s. However, the *culture* of post#Communist corruption—to borrow a term popularized by Miller, Grødeland, and Koshechkina⁵⁸—had by the early 2000s become well#entrenched in Russia, which helps to explain why the (p. 96) improvement has apparently been modest, and may even have stalled.⁵⁹ Given this, it becomes clearer why Putin has become more draconian in dealing with both the oligarchs and corrupt officials. If an

amnesty (suggestive of an initially soft approach) does not work, it may be appropriate to use tougher measures. Several oligarchs appear not to have adhered to the agreement made between them and the president in July 2000. As for corrupt officials—Putin could well become tougher in his treatment of them if Russia's reputation for corruption does not continue to improve. The president understands that both the domestic and international legitimacy of the Russian state and his regime are affected by perceptions of corruption levels. He also knows that foreign investment can be discouraged—with negative implications for economic growth and eudaemonic legitimation—if a country is widely perceived to be highly corrupt. A responsible leader *should* attempt to reduce corruption.

Conclusions

It should by now be clear that Putin's position on corruption is less enigmatic than Shlapentokh claims; that the president has taken some measures to address the problem; that the Russian state has in many ways been strengthened in the early 2000s; and that there are some encouraging—though not outstanding—results in Russia's fight against corruption. More could and should be done. But given the resistance from powerful vested interests in Russia, Putin has to steer a difficult path between a tougher anti-corruption policy and charges of becoming increasingly authoritarian. This said, clamping down on corrupt officials, or on multimillionaires who have made their fortunes in questionable ways and at the expense of ordinary Russians, should not in itself be perceived as moving towards authoritarianism.

But are there other ways in which Russia is becoming authoritarian? In a recent article, Levitsky and Way argue that there can be *competitive* authoritarianism, and that Putin's Russia constitutes an example of this—while Webster and de Borchgrave liken Russia to the early years of the Fifth French Republic, which they describe as 'democratic authoritarianism'.⁶⁰ Carothers characterizes Russia as close to being in a category he calls 'dominant power politics', in which there (p. 97) are 'most of the basic institutional forms of democracy', but also domination by one political grouping.⁶¹ Such concepts testify to the confusion that exists in interpreting contemporary Russia. They are also incompatible with the minimalist approach to authoritarianism; while this does not in itself disqualify them, given the broader approach adopted here, they are problematical when applied to contemporary Russia. This can be demonstrated by reference to the three criteria spelled out at the beginning of the section on the media and political parties.

The evidence suggests that, while Russia is clearly further from the democratic end of the spectrum than Western states, it has not yet crossed the point at which it is closer to the authoritarian. It still conducts competitive elections at regular and timely

intervals, and suffrage is near#universal. Putin is concerned about legitimacy; and while the level of coercion is much higher than in most Western systems, and the media unquestionably less free (for which Putin deserves to be censured), the latter can and do still criticize the president on occasions, and have been supported by the Constitutional Court as recently as October 2003.⁶² Putin has not yet clearly overridden the constitution on significant issues; and it has been shown in this chapter that, in the fight against corruption, he does not invariably get his own way.

Nor has the president clearly sought to put himself above the rule of law. In fact, Putin currently compares favourably in this regard not only with the clearly dictatorial Lukashenko in Belarus, the Ukrainian leadership in recent times, or even Yeltsin (especially during late 1993), but also some Western leaders, notably Italy's Berlusconi. He is also more concerned than any of these other leaders with both his own and his country's image and acceptance by the rest of the world.

This is not to claim that Russia has a consolidated democracy; that would be not merely naive, but wrong. Rather, it is to argue two points. First, Russia currently remains marginally closer to the democratic end of the spectrum than to the authoritarian. Second, it would be less confusing if we were to use a simple axis between democratic and authoritarian ideal types, along which individual countries can be located (and shifted, as changes occur), rather than continue to attempt to devise new labels—some of which are oxymoronic—to describe putative groupings of changing and different individual countries.

What further elements of Putin's rule encourage commentators to argue that Russia is moving towards authoritarianism, or is already there? In a December 2003 issue, the *Economist* analysed the results of the recent Russian parliamentary elections in terms of 'the slow death of democracy'.⁶³ Such language is punchy and sells, but is not necessarily accurate. The article maintained that some of the 2003 parliamentary election results were manipulated in various ways, and may have been fraudulent. But the main point was that 'the centre' was in decline in Russian parliamentary politics, which it considered ominous.

(p. 98) In an oft#cited observation, Barrington Moore argued in the 1960s that democracy would not take root in societies lacking a bourgeoisie.⁶⁴ Putin realizes that if democracy and the rule of law are to establish firm and deep roots in Russia, the country needs to develop a solid and respectable middle class (bourgeoisie). At present, this class is still far too small, leading Richard Rose to describe Russia as an 'hourglass' society, and possibly explaining in part the decline of the centre that so concerned the *Economist*. There remains too much of a 'them#and#us' attitude, in which there exist plenty of horizontal linkages and networks, but all too few vertical ones.⁶⁵ The poor electoral performance of parties that would normally be expected to represent

democracy-oriented middle-class groups is one indication of Russia's unusual social structure.

Thus, there is little doubt that, from the perspective of democratization, the poor showing of parties such as Yabloko and SPS in the 2003 elections was a concern. However, it should be noted that research conducted by John Dryzek, Tatyana Rogovskaya, and this author in 1996–7—to cite just one source—suggested that democracy in Russia was *already* in trouble, long before Putin became leader.⁶⁶ There were already too many losers in the new order, who resented the small elite of significant winners, and associated 'democracy' with injustice.⁶⁷ The winners were seen as having essentially bought up the state—or, to use the term preferred by the World Bank, engaged in 'state capture'.⁶⁸ This point casts Putin's leadership and approach in a different light, and leads us away from overly deterministic analyses that see authoritarianism or even dictatorship as the most likely outcome of recent developments under Putin.

If a population is cynical, and civil society underdeveloped,⁶⁹ a strong leader backed by an effective state can help to increase a new system's institutionalization (p. 99) and legitimacy, which can have positive knock-on effects for civil society, and hence democracy in its more meaningful (non-minimalist) sense. Although it should be fairly obvious, two basic points about post-Communist civil society are often overlooked. One is that it takes time for civil society to emerge following decades of authoritarian Communist rule. The other is that the pace of this emergence will depend partly on how well the particular post-Communist society is functioning, in terms both of introducing new institutions and of facilitating legislation, and the economy. If either of these—let alone both of them—falters, the development of civil society is likely to be much slower and more troubled. In the 1990s, under Yeltsin, both *did* falter, and Russian civil society's development *was* troubled. This was the legacy with which Putin has had to deal. In order to overcome it, Putin needed to strengthen the state and grow the economy; the former requires the latter. But the stronger state also needs to ensure that it and society—not oligarchs, corrupt officials, or criminals—benefit from that growth.

Whilst this is not the place to examine the details, it is worth noting that Putin has taken significant steps to stimulate the economy. These include the introduction of a land reform (clearer laws on land ownership are likely to stimulate investment), and both reducing and simplifying personal and corporate taxation. His simplification of the tax laws may be criticized from various perspectives, including the socially regressive effects of a flat rate personal income tax system.⁷⁰ On the other hand, their introduction has three likely ramifications that are potentially beneficial for strengthening the state and increasing its legitimacy. One is that tax collection becomes easier, so that state revenues should increase.⁷¹ Second, the simplified system substantially narrows the

scope for officials to exercise individual discretion, which in turn reduces opportunities for corruption; assuming this results in lower perceived levels of corruption, state legitimacy should be enhanced. Finally, the prosperity of 'middle Russia' should increase, thus contributing to the rise of a bourgeoisie that could help to consolidate democracy. The Russian economy has been growing under Putin;⁷² while much of this can be attributed to luck, given Russia's huge oil reserves and the high price of oil on international markets in recent years, reforms like those just mentioned (p. 100) should stand Russia in better stead once oil prices drop. This should contribute to the strengthening of the state in a positive sense (i.e. making it more effective and legitimate).

In a recent comparative study of democratization and the consolidation of democracy, Przeworski and Limongi subjected classical modernization theory to empirical, cross-polity longitudinal testing. In a nutshell, they were able to demonstrate persuasively that, while attempts at establishing democracy can occur at very different levels of economic development, the likelihood that such attempts will succeed in the long term is highly correlated with the per capita GDP.⁷³ If, despite its unique features, Russia more or less accords with the pattern identified by Przeworski and Limongi, then Putin's goal of doubling Russia's 2000 GNP by 2010 might be more important to the future of Russian democracy than the treatment of the media. But if there is to be any hope of reaching that goal, the state will have to be more effective—stronger—and less corrupt.

Along with focusing on the strong state and economy, Putin needed to develop a greater sense of identity and pride among Russians, given the trauma of the unique quintuple loss. The *Economist* article cited above expressed concern that the percentage of deputies who are members of parties that 'usually or always' support the Kremlin (i.e. the president) was much higher in the newly elected Duma than in previous post-Communist Russian elections. But the results can be interpreted from a very different perspective. The overwhelming victories of the United Russia party and Putin respectively in the December 2003 and March 2004 elections may give cause for optimism that Russians are beginning to cohere better, and politics is becoming less polarized, than at any time since the collapse of the USSR. *Other things being equal*, a less fragmented society will make Russia more conducive to the consolidation of democracy.

It should by now be clear that the weak state and corruption are in a dialectical, symbiotic relationship. Dealing with either should impact upon the other. Policies designed to strengthen the state and/or reduce corruption will be seen by some as symptomatic of nascent authoritarianism. But it should be acknowledged that systems that are led by strong leaders are not necessarily authoritarian, even if the leader himself or herself displays authoritarian personality traits (the United Kingdom under Thatcher

(2) Vladimir Shlapentokh, 'Russia's acquiescence to corruption makes the state machine inept', *Communist and Post#Communist Studies*, 36/2 (2003), 159, 160.

(3) Ibid.; Lilia Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003), *passim* and esp. 141–3 and 172–3. Reflecting Putin's own ambiguity, Shevtsova *also* sees him as authoritarian (ibid. 4, 221). The concepts of democracy and authoritarianism are considered later in the chapter.

(4) The full speech is available in English at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/monitoring/media_reports/739432.stm (reaccessed March 2004).

(5) For an example of a previous optimist about Russia's democratization prospects changing his position in light of developments under Putin, see Michael McFaul, 'Vladimir Putin's Grand Strategy...for Anti#Democratic Regime Change in Russia', *Weekly Standard*, 9/10 (17 November 2003). On the need for a strong state in Russia, but also the possible dangers under certain circumstances, see e.g. Stephen Holmes, 'What Russia Teaches Us Now: How Weak States Threaten Freedom', *American Prospect*, 8/33 (1997), 30–9; Leslie Holmes, 'The Democratic State or State Democracy? Problems of Post#Communist Transition', *Jean Monnet Chair Papers*, 48 (Florence: European University Institute, 1998); Thomas Remington, 'Russia and the "Strong State" Ideal', *East European Constitutional Review* (hereafter *EECR*), 9/1–2 (2000), 65–9.

(6) See, for instance, Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 7–13.

(7) For a controversial analysis of the links between democracy and the rule of law, see Joseph Maravall and Adam Przeworski (eds.), *Democracy and the Rule of Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

(8) For an early claim that Putin was tightening his grip on the media, see Oleg Panfilov, 'Glasnost under Siege: Putin and the Media—No Love Lost', *EECR*, 9/1–2 (2000), 60–4.

(9) Karin Karlekar, *Freedom of the Press 2003* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 129.

(10) The legislation basically forbade the media from questioning actions taken by the Russian state against terrorism. Under pressure from several newspaper editors, Putin eventually vetoed the legislation; but this occurred too late to impact upon the Freedom House ranking. Additional legislation restricting the media—this time, in connection with election campaigns—was passed in June 2003; but it was subsequently vetoed

by the Russian Constitutional Court (S. Glasser, 'Russian Court Throws Out Election Coverage Restrictions', *Washington Post*, 30 October 2003).

(11) *RFE/RL Newslines*, 10 April 2002.

(12) However, it should be noted that the Hungarian Constitutional Court has passed down various rulings that have limited the government's capacity to control the media—see e.g. *EECR*, 4/3 (1995), 11; 4/4 (1995), 14; 8/4 (1999), 22–3; 9/1–2 (2000), 18–19; and Laszlo Sólyom and Georg Brunner, *Constitutional Judiciary in a New Democracy: The Hungarian Constitutional Court* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), esp. 239–45. The 1996 Law on Radio and Television sought to reduce political interference; but subsequent developments revealed several loopholes in the legislation.

(13) In 2002, there were charges that proposed amendments to the media law in Poland were designed to strengthen government control over broadcast media; but the government's claim that the amendments were intended to avoid excessive concentration of media ownership was at least as plausible—see *EECR*, 11–12/4 and 1 (2002–3), 39–40. For evidence of concern that Bulgarian journalists were being excessively muzzled when attempting to investigate and publish claims of corruption, see *Sofia Echo*, 27 June 2003.

(15) See S. Lunev in *NewsMax.com*, 6 June 2001—online at <http://www.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2001/6/6/182452.shtml> (reaccessed March 2004). The new law is available in English online at http://www.democracy.ru/english/library/laws/parties_fz95_eng.

(16) *Novosti* online—17 August 2003; accessed August 2003. This figure had already been reached by January 2003—see the article by Alexander Sadchikov in *Izvestiya*, 31 January 2003; also *Pravda*, 29 January 2003.

(17) A. Ivanchenko, 'New Legislation on Parties' in Yuri Senokosov and John Lloyd (eds.), *Russia on Russia Issue 5: Administrative and State Reforms in Russia* (Moscow and London: Moscow School of Political Studies and the Social Market Foundation, 2001), 33. For an analysis of Russia's parties in the late 1990s, see I. N. Barygin (ed.), *Politicheskie partii, dvizheniya i organizatsii sovremennoi Rossii na rubezhe vekov* (St Petersburg: Izd. Mikhailova V. A., 1999).

(18) Useful starting points for details on parties and party configurations in CEE are Paul Lewis, *Political Parties in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2000); Paul Lewis (ed.), *Party Development and Democratic Change in Post-Communist Europe: The First Decade* (London: Cass, 2001); and Janusz Bugajski,

Political Parties of Eastern Europe: a Guide to Politics in the Post#Communist Era (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002).

(19) The Russian electoral law of 20 November 2002 (175#F3) raised the threshold for representation for parties elected on a proportional representation basis to the 5% of Duma seats in the nationwide multi-member constituency from its current 5% to 7%. Once again, however, various aspects of the change warn against drawing the overly hasty conclusion that it constituted further evidence of a move towards authoritarianism. First, even the liberal Yabloko deputies voted in favour of the change. Second, some deputies had called for a much higher threshold of 12.5%. Third, the law also stipulates that at least four parties must be represented in parliament, even if one or more do(es) not reach the 7% 'cut#off' point. Finally, the 7% requirement in the law was not to become effective until 2007, to allow small parties time to negotiate with others about possible mergers. See *EECR*, 11–12/4 and 1 (2002–3), 44–5.

(20) Thresholds are mostly between 3% and 5%, but can be much higher for coalitions in some countries (up to 20% in the Czech Republic), depending on the number of parties in them.

(21) See Leslie Holmes, 'Towards a Stabilisation of Party Systems in the Post#Communist Countries?', *European Review*, 6/2 (1998), 239–54. For an argument that Russia had a 'pseudo multi#party system' and a 'feckless and destructive parliament' under Yeltsin, see Vladimir Ryzhkov, 'Lessons of the Nineteen#Nineties' in Edward Skidelsky and Yuri Senokosov (eds.), *Russia on Russia Issue 3: Russia under Putin* (London: Social Market Foundation, 2000), 14. That other countries, even parliamentary and mixed ones, are still experiencing severe problems in consolidating party systems can be seen in the Polish and Bulgarian cases. In the former, the party that won the 1997 election did not gain a single seat in the October 2001 election. In the latter, the 2001 election was won by a 'party' (*formally*, it was not even a party, but a movement!) that was only months old and headed by Bulgaria's former king.

(22) For a fascinating analysis of why so relatively few Russians protested against the fact they were not being properly paid in the 1990s, see Debra Javeline, *Protest and the Politics of Blame: The Russian Response to Unpaid Wages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003). A major reason appears to have been that many unpaid or underpaid Russians did not know whom to blame for their sorry condition. While this might be seen as advantageous to political elites, the surveys which form the core of Javeline's study reveal a widespread mistrust of the state, and cynicism that it could do anything much to improve the situation. In short, it constitutes further evidence of the low level of popular legitimacy experienced by the Russian state in the 1990s, as well as its perceived weakness.

(23) John Dunlop, 'Russia: In Search of an Identity' in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds.), *New States, New Politics: Building the Post#Soviet Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 29. More generally on Russians' post#Soviet identity problems, see Vera Tolz, *Russia* (London: Arnold, 2001), esp. 235–73.

(24) Putin had already used the term in a speech to officials from the Ministry of Justice at the end of January—*EECR*, 9/1–2 (2000), 37. Putin is aware that the term is unpopular in many quarters (see his 'state of the nation' speech to the Federal Assembly, 8 July 2000), but believes that it is an appropriate term for what he advocates.

(25) Cited in Remington (n. 5), 65.

(26) On Russian organized crime, see e.g. Phil Williams (ed.), *Russian Organized Crime: The New Threat?* (London: Cass, 1997); Federico Varese, *The Russian Mafia: Private Protection in a New Market Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Vadim Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs: The Use of Force in the Making of Russian Capitalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

(27) Only one post#Communist state—Hungary—was ranked in 1995, and that year has been omitted from Table 5.1.

(28) The CPI is scaled 1–10, in which 1 represents the highest level of corruption, and 10 the lowest. Russia's score thus places it clearly among the highly corrupt countries.

(29) These are the Business Environment and Enterprise Performance Surveys, or BEEPS. The 1999–2000 results can be found online at <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/beeps/>, while the 2002 results (BEEPS II) are at <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/beeps2002/>. In March 2004, a full#length analysis of the two sets of results was published—see Cheryl Gray, Joel Hellman, and Randi Ryterman, *Anticorruption in Transition 2: Corruption in Enterprise#State Interactions in Europe and Central Asia 1999–2002* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2004).

(30) Georgy Satarov (ed.), *Diagnostika Rossiiskoi korruptsii: sotsiologicheskii analiz* (Moscow: INDEM Foundation, 2002) (available online at http://64.49.225.236/rc_survey.htm#Russia; accessed January 2003).

(31) I have deliberately omitted consideration here of the meaning of the term corruption, since it is contested and highly problematic. It would thus have detracted too much from the principal focus of this section. Suffice it to say that, for all its problems, the conventional definition—private abuse of public office—is used here. It can be noted that TI used a very similar definition until 2000, but then broadened their approach to include improper behaviour within the private sector (except in CPIs).

(32) It is worth noting here that when TI introduced a new cross#polity (that is also intended to become longitudinal) analysis of corruption in 2003—the TI Global Corruption Barometer—there was a remarkably consistent pattern across most of the forty-seven countries (of all types, and in all continents) surveyed. Thus, in almost three-quarters of them (33 out of a total of 44; the question was apparently not posed in three others), the agency in which the highest percentage of citizens most wanted to eliminate corruption was political parties. On this issue, Russia was in line with the majority of states. In four of the other post#Communist states surveyed (Bosnia and Hercegovina, Republic of Macedonia, Poland, and Romania), citizens likewise ranked political parties top of their wish#list for eliminating corruption; in Croatia, parties were ranked third behind medical services and courts, while in Georgia they were ranked fourth behind medical services, courts, and the police. The second and third choices on the Russian respondents' wish#list were the police and medical services. The full results are available online at www.transparency.org/surveys/barometer/dnld/barometer2003_release.en.pdf.

(33) The POF results can be found at <http://english.fom.ru/virtual/frames> and were accessed by the author in January 2003. Unfortunately, political parties were not included in the POF surveys as a discrete category.

(34) The omnibus survey was conducted by VTsIOM in July 2000; N was 1000, of a nationally#representative sample. Given the comparative nature of this chapter, readers may be interested to know that the aggregate Russian figure of nearly 87% compared poorly with Bulgarian, Hungarian and Polish results for surveys conducted at about the same time; respectively, these were c. 56% (N = 1870, conducted by Vitosha), c. 60% (N = 1526, conducted by Táarki), and c. 54% (N = 1066, conducted by CBOS). All results here are based on inclusion of the 'don't know' category.

(35) Many have linked the timing of Yeltsin's resignation and Putin's first decree to the Mabetex corruption scandal surrounding Yeltsin and his daughters. See e.g. *Economist*, 8 January 2000, 17.

(36) Although Luc Duhamel maintains that the last anti#corruption campaign in Russia was launched in 1982 ('The Last Campaign Against Corruption in Soviet Moscow', *Europe#Asia Studies*, 56/2 (2004), 187), Ariel Cohen has noted that Yeltsin launched no fewer than seven anti#crime campaigns, targeting both corruption and organized crime, between 1991 and mid#1994 alone—see his 'Crime Without Punishment', *Journal of Democracy*, 6/2 (1995), 40. The POF surveys referenced in n. 33 indicate that Russian citizens also see campaigns as being of little use in fighting corruption.

(37) Russia was in fact not far behind several other post-Communist states in terms of legislation targeting money-laundering. For instance, Poland and Slovakia only passed such legislation in October 2000 (*TI Newsletter*, March 2001, 9).

(38) Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2003* (Washington, DC: US Department of State, 2004), online at <http://www.state.gov/g/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2003/vol2/html/29931.htm>.

(39) Drug Enforcement Administration, 'Heroin Trafficking in Russia's Troubled East', *Drug Intelligence Brief*, October 2003, 7.

(40) *Izvestiya*, 6 October 2000.

(41) Russian television, cited in *RFE/RL CCW*, 28 February 2002.

(42) See the chapter in this volume by Tompson. For conflicting views on the July 2000 meeting, see E. Dikun, 'The Kremlin changes the Oligarchs' Diapers....For which they thank the President', *Prism* (online), 6/8 (31 August 2000); D. Jensen, 'Russia: Analysis of Putin's Meeting with Tycoons', *RFE/RL*, 28 July 2000; S. Lambroschini, 'Russia: Oligarch Meeting Offers Few Results', *RFE/RL*, 28 July 2000; and Alexander Tsipko, 'Will Putin Confiscate the Oligarchs' Property?', *Prism* (online), 6/8 (31 August 2000).

(43) *Vladivostok News*, 19 May 2000.

(44) A. Heidenheimer, 'Introduction' in Duc Trang (ed.), *Corruption and Democracy* (Budapest: Institute for Constitutional and Legislative Policy, 1994), 18.

(45) *Interfax*, 1 March 2004.

(46) However, knowledge of what happens elsewhere is relevant in assessing this decree. Thus, what has been seen as the first set of international recommendations on fighting corruption, those produced by the OECD in 1994 to combat bribery, was only advisory too. It took several years to progress this to a stage where its successor document became binding (February 1999), and even longer before the legislatures of a majority of signatory states ratified it. Hence, Putin is not alone in finding it difficult to push through effective anti-corruption legislation quickly.

(47) This is not the *only* possible effect. A 'cleaner' senior bureaucracy could set a positive example to those working at lower levels. Only time will tell which of the two scenarios eventuates.

(48) *Izvestiya*, 6 October 2000. It is possible that there were other reasons, however. One is that the centres were less effective than had been hoped for; international

experience suggests that many citizens fear the repercussions of open whistleblowing, preferring the 'safety' of anonymous actions.

(49) For evidence to this effect from the Yeltsin era, see V. Luneev, *Prestupnost' XX Veka: Mirovie, regional'nye i rossiiskie tendentsii* (Moscow: Norma, 1997), 277–8.

(50) Cited in B. Lintner, 'Spreading Tentacles', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 166/39 (2 October 2003), 56. Once again, however, Putin's lack of success here needs to be contextualized; most Western states also find it very difficult to prosecute officials for corruption, largely because of the problems involved in obtaining hard evidence of wrongdoing.

(51) See Yelena Rudneva's article in *gazeta.ru*, 8 October 2003 (online at http://www.eng.yabloko.ru/Publ/2003/I#NET/031008_gazeta_ru.html).

(52) Vitaly Nomokonov, 'On Strategies for Combating Corruption in Russia', *Demokratizatsiya*, 8/1 (2000), 126–8.

(53) The public disappointment may have been particularly inappropriate in the Bulgarian case. As suggested by the Bulgarian scores in Table 5.1, the country has been making steady progress in recent years. This has been recognized by the World Bank, which has praised Bulgaria (as well as Latvia and, perhaps more surprisingly, Romania) for its anti-corruption measures.

(54) See the chapter in this volume by Melvin; also Cameron Ross, 'Putin's Federal Reforms and the Consolidation of Federalism in Russia: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back!', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 36/1 (2003), 29–47.

(55) Admittedly, none of the other candidates running for the presidency had a particularly high political profile. In this sense, Putin faced little real competition. But there is a cause and effect issue here. It appears that most potential higher profile candidates decided that they stood little chance of defeating the popular Putin, so opted not to run against him. Putin surely cannot be blamed for this, especially as he did not in any meaningful sense campaign for himself.

(56) In early February 2004, a number of Russian deputies openly suggested that the term of the Russian presidency be extended to seven years (see *Russia Journal* online, 6 February 2004); this proposal had apparently first been mooted in late 2003. Putin's initial reaction was to reject it, claiming that such a move would be controversial and thus destabilizing to Russia. It remains to be seen whether or not the president's reaction was a cleverly staged ploy—i.e. that he was hoping that pressure would mount

for such a constitutional change, so that he could benefit from such an extension of his powers without appearing to have promoted it himself.

(57) In November 2001, the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs announced a pay rise for traffic police officers. However, there was a sting in the tail; the rise was to be funded largely by reducing the number of officers by 15–20% (*RFE/RL*, 28 November 2001). Perhaps Lenin's notion of 'better fewer, but better' was considered apposite here!

(58) William Miller, Åse Grødeland, and Tatyana Koshechkina, *A Culture of Corruption: Coping with Government in Post#Communist Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001).

(59) Both Shlapentokh (n. 2), esp. 152–3, and Shevtsova (n. 3), 8, argue that Russians now consider corruption 'normal'. But this term needs to be problematized. There is an important normative distinction between being genuinely indifferent to something on the one hand, and, on the other, learning to live with it because of a feeling of helplessness to do anything about it.

(60) S. Levitsky and L. Way, 'The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism', *Journal of Democracy*, 13/2 (2002), 52; William Webster and Arnand de Borchgrave, 'Foreword' in W. Webster (ed.), *Russian Organized Crime and Corruption: Putin's Challenge* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2000), xiv–xv. For another comparison between Putin and De Gaulle, but that also emphasizes the limitations of this, see Shevtsova (n. 3), 172.

(61) Thomas Carothers, 'The End of the Transition Paradigm', *Journal of Democracy*, 13/1 (2002), 11–13.

(62) While the practical significance of this should not be exaggerated, its *symbolism* was important.

(63) 'Putin's Way', *Economist*, 13 December 2003, 22–4.

(64) Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 418.

(65) Richard Rose, 'Russia as an Hour#Glass Society: A Constitution without Citizens', *EECR*, 4/3 (1995), 34–42.

(66) John Dryzek and Leslie Holmes, *Post#Communist Democratization: Political Discourses across Thirteen Countries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), esp. 92–113.

(67) Whilst this was also true of many other countries analysed for the book detailed in the previous footnote, there was one important difference between them and Russia. This was that there was at least one group of respondents—one discourse—in most countries who still believed in and were committed to the *concept* of democracy; their disappointment was with their politicians' poor implementation of the concept, rather than with the idea itself. But Russians did not, in general, appear to recognize this distinction.

(68) On this see Joel Hellman, Geraint Jones, and Daniel Kaufmann, 'Seize the State, Seize the Day: State Capture, Corruption, and Influence in Transition', *World Bank Policy Research Working Papers*, 2444 (2000); see also V. Ganey, 'The Dorian Gray effect: winners as state breakers in postcommunism', *Communist and Post#Communist Studies*, 34/1 (2001), 1–25. Weber's notion of a respectable business class acting as a check on states has little resonance in contemporary Russia.

(69) On the sorry state of civil society in most post#Communist states, including Russia, see Marc Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post#Communist Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). In his May 2004 inauguration speech, Putin made the development of civil society a key objective of his second term; the full speech is available in English in *Johnson's Russia List*, No.8199, 7 May 2004.

(70) Flat income tax rates—which Russia introduced with effect from January 2001—can increase Gini coefficients, or the gap between rich and poor, unless compensatory measures are taken by the state. For evidence that the Russian coefficient *has* increased since 2001, see *RIA Novosti*, 30 April 2004, cited in *Johnson's Russia List*, No.8191, 1 May 2004.

(71) The 2002 figure on tax returns suggested that some progress had been made—but also just how far the Russian tax authorities still needed to go (even allowing for those on low incomes); only some 3 million personal tax declarations were lodged, out of an adult population of more than 120 million—see <http://www.newsru.com/finance/20feb2003/declare.html> (I am grateful to Donald Bowser for having alerted me to this source.)

(72) GDP growth rate was 10.0% in 2000 (following what many saw as an impressive rate of 6.4% in Yeltsin's last year in office, 1999), 5.0% in 2001, 4.3% in 2002, and 7.1% in 2003. The dips in 2001 and 2002 look less concerning when it is recalled that the global economy generally suffered in the aftermath of 9/11.

(73) Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, 'Modernization: Theories and Facts', *World Politics*, 49/2 (1997), 155–83. See too Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, Jose Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions*

and Material Well#Being in the World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

(74) The Russian political system is often described as 'super#presidential'. But it was Yeltsin, not Putin, who established this system.

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