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### State-society relations in contemporary Russia: new forms of political and social contention

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## State–society relations in contemporary Russia: new forms of political and social contention<sup>†</sup>

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Much existing analysis of Russian state–society relations focuses on public, active forms of contention such as the “opposition” and protest movements. There is need for a more holistic perspective which adds study of a range of overt, “co-opted”, and hidden forms of interaction to this focus on public contention. A theoretical and empirical basis for understanding state–society relations in today’s Russia involves broadening the concept of “contentious politics” to include models of “consentful” as well as “dissentful” contention. A diffused model of contentious politics can situate claim-making along the axes of consentful and dissentful motivations, and compliant and contentious behaviours.

**Keywords:** Russia; contentious politics; protest; opposition; civil society

Prior to the contested 2011–2012 elections in Russia, many commentators held the view that Russian society did not pose an existential threat to the country’s political status quo (Gel’man 2013, 6). While sporadic protests had occurred before 2011, they had been largely confined to specific geographic areas and tended to focus on relatively narrow issues (Evans 2012; Koesel and Bunce 2012, 412). Indeed it is no exaggeration to say that the vibrant street protests after the elections caught most analysts by surprise (Volkov 2012, 55). Since then, there has been a compensatory focus on new forms of opposition and public protest, evidence of instability within the Putin regime and a (partial) movement away from the perception of the Russian state as an efficiently operating presidential *vertikal* (e.g. Monaghan 2012; Greene 2013; Judah 2013).

Much of the existing analysis, however, continues to focus on public, active forms of contention such as the “opposition” and social, issue-based movements that mobilise public protest (e.g. Koesel and Bunce 2012; Robertson 2013; White 2013; Ross 2015). These accounts provide a vitally important perspective on the interactions between state and society in contemporary Russia. However, as Evans (2012, 234) notes, “We should not expect that the study of groups in Russia that carry out public protests against the decisions of those in authority can give us a comprehensive understanding of Russian civil society”. Chebankova (2015, 244) agrees,

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arguing that researchers “tend to confine their analysis to the visible side of mobilisation, thus ignoring its latent dimensions”.

This special issue therefore joins a growing body of works that seek to switch the analytical lens more fully from state-centric analyses focusing on the mechanics of the Putinite presidential system towards the emergent Russian politics “from below”. Such analyses (e.g. Beznosova and Sundstrom 2009; Chebankova 2009; Robertson 2010; Gladarev and Lonkila 2013) make several common arguments: (a) there has long been greater political contention in post-Soviet Russia than many acknowledge; (b) such contention is often more marked at local level than in the cities of Moscow and St Petersburg, but has received insufficient attention and (c) the 2011–2012 protests are therefore less a pivotal point than part of a complex interaction of continuity and change.

What our special issue adds to these approaches is a more holistic perspective with a detailed focus on the overt-latent dimension. We add study of a range of overt, “co-opted” and hidden forms of interaction to the existing focus on public contention. Specifically, the special issue provides a theoretical and empirical basis for understanding state–society relations in today’s Russia by broadening the concept of “contentious politics” to include models of “consentful” as well as “dissentful” contention. It is argued that while civil society is conceptually useful, the term is often burdened by normative assumptions that can seek to over-emphasise clear distinctions between state and society. In the Russian context this is counter-productive as it dismisses a wide range of important state-sponsored and state-sanctioned activities that typify state–society relations. At the same time, contentious politics, while less normative in its approach, suffers from an inordinate focus on overt forms of political mobilisation. While this has facilitated a number of important studies, it misses a wide spectrum of activities that cannot be easily categorised as openly contentious. Instead, building upon models of “consentful contention”, we offer a diffused model of contentious politics that can situate claim-making along the axes of consentful and dissentful motivations, and compliant and contentious behaviours.

The papers of this collection therefore point to the far more complex and nuanced ways that political contention is enacted in the Russian context, both public and more opaque. The frameworks employed throughout the various case studies draw attention not just to how and why political contention occurs in contemporary Russia (which is the focus of most existing research), but also how and why such contention either does *not* occur, or occurs in a way that is sanctioned or modified by the Russian authorities. The papers shed light on the institutionalisation of political claim-making and how, in many instances, the regime is able to move *political contention* into the less threatening realm of *social* or *officially sanctioned contention*. Based on empirical case studies, the special issue outlines a theoretical framework that can be used to study not only political contention but also the absence/complexity of such manifestations within semi-authoritarian regimes.

### Beyond civil society

While the literature and the debates on Russian civil society have generally been productive (for example Evans, Henry, and Lisa 2006; Uhlin 2006; Chebankova 2013), the term civil society itself is rendered less useful by competing normative and conceptual associations, in particular the teleological democratisation approach associated with mainstream Western usage of the term (Henry and Sundstrom 2006, 4). As Matt Killingsworth (2007, 74–75) argues, the term is often “underpinned by an almost Fukuyamaesque triumphalism”, with an “implicit assumption that the establishment of a flourishing civil society is a given”.

Within this democratisation approach, civil society is often defined in terms of its separateness from the activities of the state, as an “arena” (Cohen and Arato 1992) for public participation in political life outside of direct state control. Functioning democracy, for its part, is defined in

strictly liberal terms, rejecting corporatist models of state management. Additionally, one key function of civil society is its ability to facilitate the “transition” from authoritarian to democratic forms of governance. The transition experience of countries in South America in the 1980s provided clear examples of the value of civic activism. As numerous scholars have contended, bottom-up mobilisation proved to be a key component in democratic transitions in the region (see Evans [2011]; for a rebuttal of these positions, see Encarnación [2003]).

Certainly there is much merit to this idea that a vibrant civil society, separate from the state, can be a vital component of democratisation. However, a major problem with this approach, in the context of post-communist transformation, is the presumption that post-communist states have all been transitioning (or have transitioned) to more democratic forms of governance. For example, Anders Uhlin (2006, 35) explicitly utilises a transition framework in order to study civil society in Russia and the Baltic states, but notes that civil society plays fundamentally different roles in different transition periods; changing from “a countervailing force against an authoritarian regime” to “a mixture of state-supporting and countervailing functions”. In the general literature on civil society there has therefore been a “civil society backlash” (Encarnación 2006, 357), as analysts contest the idea of simple, direct connections between “a growth in associational life and democratization” (Lewis 2013, 327).

As regards Russia, the study of civil society through this prism of transition is particularly problematic because most commentators would now agree with Alfred Evans (2011, 40), that “if Russia did enter a transition to democracy, that transition was not successful”. The consensus view of Russia is that it is now a relatively stable “electoral” or “competitive” authoritarian regime, in which limited (“managed” or “licensed”) political contention plays an important legitimating and information function, but is deprived of any real autonomous, countervailing ability (e.g. Robertson 2010; Ross 2011; Gill 2012).

The evident absence of transitional dynamics is one of the main reasons why the concept of civil society, notwithstanding its general usefulness, is conceptually deficient in understanding social movements in Russia today. In addition, there are some general deficiencies with the term that particularly apply to Russia. The focus on transition capability often leads to a narrow empirical focus (e.g. on pro-democracy/pro-Western NGOs or social movements). At its worst, this leads to a caricatured view of Russia, whereby researchers’ distaste for Putin can lead to exaggerated claims about Russia’s roll-back of democracy relying purely on anecdotal evidence, and ignoring substantive positive developments, particularly at the local level (Javeline and Lindemann-Komarova 2010).

In addition, it is “uncivil society”, that is, undemocratic or anti-Western movements (such as Russia’s vibrant radical nationalist realm) that are often the most authentic social movements, in terms of genuine public support and mass organisations (e.g. Kopecký and Mudde 2003). Analysts of the Middle East, for example, have recently begun to broaden definitions of civil society to include non-liberal actors, including Islamic ones (Khatib 2013; Lewis 2013).

Moreover, the civil society concept is especially deficient in understanding how a regime such as Vladimir Putin’s reacts to, and attempts to interact with, bottom-up social movements. Such efforts are usually conceptualised (if at all) as state co-option of civil society (Aron 2013). Admittedly, a number of scholars have developed complex models of civil society that have factored in the role of the state (Kubik 2007). Nevertheless, civil society’s narrow focus generally fails to direct sufficient attention towards state-sponsored activities that go beyond mere co-option and can provide channels for the performance of sanctioned contention. Unlike the transitioning countries of South America in the 1980s, the Soviet successor states had to deal with the particular legacy of state/society entwinement that characterised the Soviet period. According to some (e.g. Ljubownikow, Crotty, and Rodgers 2013), this legacy has involved integration of social organisations into “vertical power” arrangements, whereby their role is to monitor and control society,

instead of doing so to the state. The presence of an increasing number of “marionette” organisations (Cook and Vinogradova 2006, 34) which mimic “real” civil society groups is the clearest example of this legacy in the post-Soviet era.

Other analysts, however, posit a more complex legacy. For instance, for McFaul and Tryger (2004, 139), the main result of the Soviet past in Russia today is that it remains very difficult to distinguish distinct political and civic spaces. A particularly pertinent example is Russia’s GONGOs (government-organised non-governmental organisations). Julie Hemment (2012) argues that one of Russia’s main GONGOs, the pro-Kremlin *Nashi* movement, which is often characterised as a form of official indoctrination of youth akin to the Soviet *komsomol* or an “ersatz social movement” (Robertson 2010, 28), actually plays (albeit only fitfully) a role in promoting more civic forms of social activity (such as volunteer work, and environmental and anti-corruption campaigns). Accordingly, *Nashi* paradoxically resembles some of the internationally sponsored NGOs that preceded it, and which it ostensibly opposes. Atwal and Bacon (2012, 265) concur that “*Nashi* does have some of the traits of a civil society organisation that might be seen to promote gradual democratisation”.

There is thus a need to move beyond civil society’s narrow empirical focus and theoretical confines. We outline an expanded model of (consentful) contention that is less normative, and which has a broader empirical sweep. This allows us, we argue, to account for a much wider variance in regime type and state/society interactions. It should be noted that our intention is not to reject the term “civil society” *in toto*, and the often-valuable insights much of this literature brings (indeed it is used by White and Bindman in this collection). However, we argue that, if it is used it should be employed as follows: (1) as a concept that can be used within the frameworks of contentious politics. It remains useful where the focus remains on overt political contention and institutionalised public state–society relations (i.e. as structured forms of what we describe below as “consentful” and “dissentful” contention); (2) in a non-normative fashion, where civil society’s role in democratisation needs to be proved, not assumed, and the role of “uncivil” society and other forms of contention is taken equally into account. Nevertheless, we would argue that the model of consentful contention outlined below can cover the terrain of civil society *and more*, and in particular helps focus on the non-institutionalised, informal and complex realms of claim-making that cannot be encompassed by a neat state/political society/civil society trichotomy.

### Contentious politics

As an analytical tool and conceptual approach, “contentious politics” differs from civil society in a number of fundamental ways. While clearly demonstrating conceptual overlap with civil society, contentious politics is most commonly applied as an approach that studies bottom-up movements and events that are specifically directed towards (most commonly against) incumbent political authorities. Tilly (1995, 2001), later working in collaboration with McAdam and Tarrow (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001), was influential in formulating a “process-mechanism” approach that could be applied to the study of contentious politics (see also Tarrow 2012, 21–26). While acknowledging that most collective action occurs outside politics, these authors were interested in actions that specifically affect government policies and interests. Tilly and Tarrow therefore define contentious politics as the space where politics, contention and collective action intersect:

Contentious politics involves interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else’s interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties. (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 4)

The process-mechanism approach outlines the interaction of *mechanisms* (events that change relations among specified sets of elements) and *processes* (frequently occurring combinations of mechanisms) (Tilly 1995, 2001). This approach allowed scholars to examine and document how various changes in opportunity structures (mechanisms) were able to facilitate participation in collective action (processes). Focusing on cognitive, relational and environmental mechanisms,<sup>1</sup> Tilly provided a relatively coherent empirical framework to study political contention whereby public moments of political contention could be catalogued and analysed systematically.

The process-mechanism approach has been subject to its fair share of criticism, not least for the vague and sweeping manner that mechanisms are all too easily introduced to explain any event (Norkus 2005). Nevertheless, this approach has been effectively employed to examine numerous examples of contention in many geographical locations. For example, in the former Soviet space this framework has been successfully applied by Beissinger (2011). Beissinger examined the causal mechanisms that enabled millions of Ukrainians to participate in protests during the “Orange Revolution” of 2004. This focus is particularly useful in understanding the short-term dynamics that enabled protest organisers to create horizontal links between diverse groups of participants, and to use the organisational structures of election campaigning in order to bring people onto the streets, thereby facilitating a bandwagoning effect.

While this approach is particularly applicable to the study of specific moments of contention, it has arguably been less successful in cataloguing the ostensible *absence* of contention in certain polities. It is perfectly feasible to document and study public events such as industrial strike action or public protests. In places such as Russia, however, an equally important question to consider is how we might explain the relative *lack* of overt political mobilisation. This is especially true when taking into account the regime type currently found in Russia.

The literature on social movements and contention increasingly suggests that regime type and state capability are both potentially key factors in determining the frequency, form and depth of political contention (Tilly 2004; Boudreau 2005; Davenport 2007; Robertson 2010). It is this conceptual focus that makes contentious politics so useful in researching bottom-up movements and mobilisation in contemporary Russia. Instead of viewing social movements as part of a wider struggle for democratisation, contentious politics can be viewed through the prism of political claim-making within a specific (transitioning or non-transitioning) political regime. Additionally, it allows for a complex analysis of reciprocal state/society interactions.

This is not to say that democratisation has been neglected by social movement theorists. On the contrary, democratisation has often been a key concept for analyses of structural changes in political opportunities (e.g. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). Nevertheless, even with this focus, bottom-up activism is not seen solely as a mechanism leading to democratisation. In many respects this structural approach is an inversion of the civil society tradition; instead of examining the potential for civil society to effect political change and to lay the basis for democratisation, focus is placed on how changes to state capacity and opportunity affect social mobilisation.

Most social movement theorists agree that in open polities where opportunities for engagement with state authorities are high, the likelihood for social mobilisation is relatively low (Smith and Fetner 2010, 16). This is because actors have less need to mobilise and have incentives to utilise existing channels for political debate and redress. On the other hand, in polities where political opportunities are greatly restricted through the enactment of highly authoritarian policies, the chances for mobilisation are effectively repressed. As a result, it is regimes that lie between these two poles that face the greatest potential for social unrest and oppositional activism.

Graeme Robertson, in his excellent study of political protest in Russia, builds upon the literature on contentious politics and sets out a model specific to hybrid regimes. He defines regime hybridity as a situation wherein “some legitimate and public political competition coexists with an organizational and institutional playing field that renders this competition unfair”



(Robertson 2010, 6). Additionally Robertson notes that it is important to distinguish between stable hybrid regimes and transitioning/collapsing ones (24). Although Russia has exhibited increasing trends towards state repression (particularly since 2012), as an electoral authoritarian system (see David White's contribution to this collection) it is clearly a "hybrid regime" in Robertson's definition. Therefore we might expect more political contention than in either relatively more open, or relatively more closed, political systems.

Robertson demonstrates the feasibility of examining specific protests or strikes in order to apply a retrospective analysis of the causal factors that lay beneath the surface of these events. He also uses a structural framework to examine how the state represses contention according to three key variables: organisational ecology, mobilisation strategies and elite competition (24–35). Nevertheless, Robertson's approach, while largely eschewing the term civil society, continues the focus on open political claim-making that is characteristic of the concept. Contention is therefore defined in terms of overt political acts of dissent. This focus is clearly useful in understanding the role of the state in controlling and co-opting overt contentious politics. However, it also potentially misses out some of the more complex ways that contention is enacted in the context of Russia's stable hybrid regime.

### Forms of contention: from dissentful to consensual

A useful development in the literature on contentious politics, and one that allows the researcher to examine in more detail the *lack* rather than the *existence* of overt contention, is the emergence of the concept of "consensual contention". For Jeremy Straughn (2005, 1611), social action varies along behavioural and motivational axes. He notes that "standpoints" (motivations) can range from consensual to dissentful and that behaviour varies from compliant to contentious. Within this grid, consensual contention represents the moment when behaviour is contentious but motivations are consensual. In other words, consensual contention describes a contentious act wherein the political claim is not directed against the authorities *per se*. Using the case study of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Straughn documents how contentious claims were often presented to the authorities that were framed in terms of the dominant state ideology. For Straughn, consensual contention was enacted in the GDR when individuals presented political claims to the authorities by utilising official channels and adopting "the persona of a dutiful citizen" (1601).

This form of contention differs from "dissentful contention" (contention with anti-regime motivation), "consensual compliance" (compliance backed by firm ideological motivation) and "dissentful compliance" (begrudging compliance that lacks ideological motivation). Within the context of contemporary Russia and contentious politics within Russia, these categories open up important avenues for investigation. With the relative absence of sustained, visible forms of dissentful contention (with the principal exception of the 2011/2012 protests as described in White's article in this volume), the current literature suggests that the Russian public generally displays either consensual or dissentful compliance. That is, it is often assumed that when people lack strong motivations regarding the political system they do not take any contentious action because they are repressed, and when they have such motivations they inevitably comply with the authorities. Accordingly, in the aftermath of the 2011/2012 protests, commentators have paid a great deal of attention to the legislative measures adopted by the Putin regime enacted to quash popular protest. These measures have included a clampdown on foreign financing of NGOs (Lavinski 2013), measures to curb freedom of speech and the right to public assembly (Lanskoy and Suthers 2013, 77–81) and the redirection of popular discontent towards foreign entities (Toepfl 2011). In other words, fitting with the above-mentioned structural tradition, it has been common to focus on repressive methods that have reduced political opportunity structures (e.g. Koesel and Bunce 2012).



In these analyses, the co-option of society by the Russian state is not always ignored. It is, however, under-conceptualised and assumed to be an aspect of state control that enforces either consentful or dissentful compliance (e.g. Horvath 2012). For instance, Ljubownikow, Crotty, and Rodgers (2013) outline a “Russian-style” model of civil society (“civil society *po-russki*”), designed to create spaces of representation that do not clash with state interests, but which, in fact, directly feed into state aims and programmes. While their assessment is fruitful, especially their linkage between Soviet repertoires of state–society relations and present forms of civic engagement, they do not fully capture the (consentfully) contentious elements within this model. Instead they note that “in a Russian-style civil society, [third sector organisations] absorb and negate civil society’s potential and in return are rewarded by the state with cooperation” (163). Julie Hemment’s aforementioned study of the *Nashi* movement (2012) offers a fresh perspective by applying an anthropological approach. Hemment is able to contextualise Russia’s supposedly “virtual democracy” within popular dissatisfaction with externally imposed, neo-liberal models of political and social organisation. This approach is able to critique normative and simplified conceptualisations that depict Russian-style civil society as bad and undemocratic. Nonetheless Hemment still outlines a model of civil society “in the service of the state” (245).

Our central argument is not that it is wrong to study the structural co-option of Russian civil society, or the repression of contention. Structural accounts have proven very useful in aiding our understanding of Russian politics. Robertson, for example, provides a balanced analysis of how the Russian authorities have been “at the cutting edge of contemporary authoritarian regime design” (2009, 547), and have been able to repress political opposition through the enactment of hard and soft repression. This soft repression entails channelling political participation into officially sanctioned avenues. Certainly Robertson’s account, and the broader literature (cf. Balzer 2003), suggests that Russian society has been, to a certain degree, co-opted or “managed”, leading to either consentful or dissentful compliance. Even for Hemment, who acknowledges *Nashi*’s important social function, society is co-opted by ensuring that social activism is maintained within strictly defined state limits. While these trends are evident in today’s Russia, our argument is that we also need to take account of instances where contention is less visible and not always directed explicitly against the state.

In this volume, for example, Catherine Owen elaborates upon the framework of consentful contention to explain how the Russian authorities have been able to utilise Public Monitoring Commissions to provide officially sanctioned channels for political claim-making. A key distinction made by Owen is that, whereas it is customary to treat contentious politics within a state/society binary, consentful acts of contention can be located within state/semi-state structures. In other words, individuals can make contentious political claims without posing an existential threat to the state authorities. In this way, the claims, though small, are difficult for the authorities to ignore, and are often successful as a result.

What the consentful contention model adds to previous analyses is that it focuses on how even co-option is a nuanced, changing phenomenon, that is not simply a form of state control. In fact it allows a certain level of challenge and contention. However, the balance between co-option, control and contention varies over space, social sector and time. In addition, while there is indeed an undeniable degree of co-option, the Russian authorities have also displayed a level of sophistication that is too often overlooked by structural analyses. The Putin regime has not only repressed or diverted contention. In addition to repressive measures, the Russian authorities have also purposefully created mechanisms that facilitate certain, state-approved forms of domestic, sanctioned contention. The role of such forms of contention is certainly open to debate. For instance Gilbert and Balzer (2012, 367) argue for complex analyses that place “Putin’s programme in a context of ‘authoritarian upgrading’: the regime seeks public involvement in funding and providing public goods while limiting political claims”. Crotty (2009) sees social

organisations of three types, either grass-roots organisations apolitical and invisible to the state, policy organisations dependent on foreign funding and often lacking strong societal links and marionette organisations whose role is confined to consultancy work or being adjuncts of the state. Thus, where NGOs are (rarely) involved in approved dialogue with the state, it is usually in highly subservient positions as “putative” representatives of civil society rather than active participants.

Other analyses are more optimistic about the possibilities of officially sanctioned contention. Using examples from other authoritarian countries, Lewis (2013, 326) argues that where state and civil society groups have shared goals, this can produce a “productive symbiosis”, wherein the state is a potential ally and rich source of resources. In their study of Russian women’s crisis centres, Johnson and Saarinen (2011) argue that, at their best, such organisations have a collaborative relationship with local officials, holding them accountable to addressing gender violence. Similarly, Jakobson and Sanovich (2010, 296) argue that “third sector” organisations may be made vulnerable by co-operation with the state, but can conversely use such co-operation as “a sphere in which varied not-for-profit activities coexist”.

A way of bridging these divergent understandings is by focussing on the role of claim-making as central to mechanisms of state-sanctioned contention. Laura Henry notes that Russian citizens have a number of outlets for making direct petitions and complaints to the Russian authorities. These include the State Duma, the Public Chamber, the President’s Council on Human Rights and the Prosecutor General’s Office (Henry 2012, 246). Drawing on Soviet experience, these institutions simultaneously provide procedural means to air grievances, while also fulfilling the important function of providing timely feedback to the regime. Following Johnston and Mueller (2001), we may refer to these procedures as “unobtrusive practices of contention” which were visible even in the Soviet era (Henry 2012, 244–245). These officially sanctioned mechanisms necessarily blur the lines between the state/society dichotomy detailed above and give further credence to the idea that we should set aside liberal notions of a clear division between these two poles.

Instead, we should treat “Civil society *po-russki*” as a dualistic concept (Kulmala 2011, 58). That is to say that Putin’s version of civil society is used both to repress forms of civil society organisation directed against the state and to mobilise society and societal participation. Catherine Owen, in this volume, notes that this results in the liminality of many forms of contention in Russia – practices “are not always situated clearly on either side of the state-society boundary or, if they are, they neither fully endorse nor fully reject the political status quo”. Similarly, David White’s contribution argues that the boundaries between political society and civil society are “blurred” and mutable: often contested, as often symbiotic. Nevertheless, despite what Owen calls the “grey area” between state and society, some clearer patterns do emerge. Specifically, Russian-style civil society is deliberately geared towards the provision of social goods and services. Eleanor Bindman and Anna Tarasenko, in this volume, discuss how the Russian state plays, and indeed is expected to play, a leading role in social welfare provision for Russian citizens. This means that, as Kulmala (2011) argues, a number of civil society organisations benefit greatly from cooperation with state institutions. For Bindman, a crucial distinction is made between economic and social rights on the one hand and civic and political rights on the other. Just as in Soviet times, the Russian authorities prioritise social and economic rights and are willing to sponsor NGOs that are deemed to be working towards these goals. As Bindman points out, while commentators from outside Russia have largely focused on human rights NGOs, in Russia these represent only a small proportion of the NGO community.

Clearly then, in the Russian context, it is important to consider not only the distinction between state and society but also the distinction between social and political forms of activism – in other words, activities that the authorities frame as legitimate or illegitimate (see Bindman’s contribution).

In this respect Russia fundamentally differs from the GDR or other “Leninist regimes” (Johnston and Mueller 2001) where the consentful contention model has previously been utilised. True, a lot of activity is similar. A major form of consentful contention, then as now, consists in appealing to authorities to adhere to their own legislation, for instance in the prison or electoral realms (Owen and White’s contributions), or in the sphere of social provision (Bindman, Tarasenko and Turbine’s contributions).

Yet in Leninist regimes the state was underpinned by a concrete ideology, which, according to Straughn, allowed citizens to present claims to the authorities and justify them in terms of the overriding communist ideals. With the lack of a clearly defined state ideology today, it is important for the Russian authorities to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable contentious claims. As the papers of this volume attest, this has generally resulted in a situation whereby social claims are acceptable but political ones are not, despite their equal constitutional status. In particular, White’s contribution shows how the street rather than the legislature has become the “natural habitat” for “dissentful contention”, with the onus thus put on (as yet rudimentary) attempts to co-ordinate a hitherto “un-organised civil society” which has exceedingly poor links to the intra-systemic “political society”. With similarities to the Soviet era, it is generally more productive for citizens to avoid dissentful contention altogether and utilise the possibility of presenting claims while simultaneously maintaining “the persona of a dutiful citizen” (Straughn 2005, 1601). For instance, Bindman shows that, whereas the relationship between human rights NGOs and the state is often antagonistically dissentfully contentious, for the “social” NGOs the relationship is “complex, nuanced and mutually constitutive”, usually varying between consentful contention (pressing the authorities to honour their constitutional commitments as a “social state”) and consentful compliance (not critiquing the “social state” repertoire but recognising that co-operation with the state is the most effective way to “get things done”).

Of course, it is inevitably difficult always to maintain a clear distinction between social and political claims. As Vikki Turbine’s contribution argues, whereas many feminist claims were once treated as politically neutral social demands, they are now considered fundamentally as political claims. This can be attributed to Putin’s increasingly hostile rhetoric and actions against “western” forms of intervention in Russian society (underpinned by what Turbine refers to as the regime’s emphasis on a “heteronormative brand of patriotism”). Political and social concepts that are explicitly linked with “western” or liberal forms of political organisation are therefore increasingly targeted as anti-regime. This is borne out by recent legislative measures directed against western-financed NGOs (Lavinski, 2013) and support for same-sex relationships (Wilkinson, 2013). In effect this means that, in the absence of an overarching state ideology, the current regime establishes increasingly clear boundaries between “legitimate” (patriotic) and “non-legitimate” (western, unpatriotic) claims. This helps citizens to understand the areas that would require dissentful, rather than consentful, contention in order to present a claim. As Turbine documents, the response of many Russian women has traditionally been not to challenge the consensus at all. As a result, while many women are keen to make social claims, they commonly avoid wider feminist claims which would require more dissentful forms of contention. Consentful compliance and, to a lesser extent, consentful contention, therefore pre-dominate, and human rights specific to women are generally regarded as a “non-topic”. Given the example made of the Pussy Riot group by the Putin regime, the prohibition on non-legitimate activities may act to reinforce such compliance.

Anna Tarasenko’s contribution, analysing regional welfare reforms, reveals other interesting complexities. Like Bindman, she argues that the regime’s constitutionally defined status as a “social state” is partially belied by continuing aspects of neo-liberal social policy. In the St Petersburg case that she analyses, neo-liberal reforms are used both to empower civil society (by

encouraging NGOs' role in service provision) and to depoliticise it (by emphasising regional and individual responsibility). However, unlike the consentful organisations highlighted by Bindman, she argues that this clash between statist and neo-liberal conceptions of welfare has the potential to be a major locus for contention. In St Petersburg at least, this results in a variety of strategies for social NGOs. On the one hand, in keeping with neo-liberal logic, certain private organisations become the primary service providers for social activities formerly provided by the state. In such instances, Tarasenko argues that contention is largely prevented as the state manages to channel the political issue of responsibility for social service provision into managerial tasks and to provide such organisations with ongoing incentives for compliant relations with the state via regular funding competitions.

On the other hand, the Russian state preserves a number of paternalistic features that were characteristic of the Soviet welfare system. As a result, there is still space for strategies of consentful contention for a number of social NGOs. Many such organisations still benefit disproportionately from state funding and support and in return do not challenge state policy *per se*. Instead, their contention is focussed on how policy is implemented in reality, and as such they aim to shape the authorities' social agenda. As with many other aspects of contentious politics noted throughout this volume, the result is not devoid of tensions, but results in a largely symbiotic situation: the state manages to implement potentially unpopular reforms, while certain social NGOs continue to lobby for the amelioration of these reforms.

In summary, our volume aims to address the need for wider study of Russian societal participation in Russian political life than offered by conventional civil society approaches. Contrary to many analyses, simple dichotomies between state/society, co-optation/autonomy, repression/protest, etc. are far from clear-cut in today's Russia. By analysing social movements and social participation using the analytical lenses of consentful contention, dissentful contention, dissentful compliance and consentful compliance, we are able to produce more nuanced analyses of contemporary, political society–civil society relationships. As detailed above, the nature of contentious politics in Russia varies widely across a number of axes. The most important factors identified include the site of contention relative to the state (e.g. whether contention occurs in national or regional state bodies, or is fully or partially intra- or extra-institutional as is the Russian opposition). Also relevant are regime norms, which set the general boundaries of legitimate political contestation, but which vary greatly depending on the locus and topic of contention.

Finally, the strategies of civil society organisations themselves, their representativeness and the degree to which they can (or want to) achieve a symbiosis of their aspirations with some or all regime norms, much affect the success of their actions. The papers of this volume bring together many of these issues and study various forms of contention in the Russian context. The articles in this collection have diverse foci, ranging from civil society actors (Bindman), women's human rights (Turbine), Public Monitoring Commissions (Owen), overt political protest (White) and welfare reform (Tarasenko). Ultimately, none of these contributions fundamentally challenge the prevalent view of an essentially authoritarian Russian state with a claim to set social norms, and managed political contention from above. Nevertheless, they all add greatly to our understanding of the diverse ways that individuals and groups aim to use this authoritarian framework for their own interests from below, often clandestinely, but often successfully, and in which politically contentious claims are suppressed, co-opted, but sometimes even explicitly encouraged by the Russian state.

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## Note

1. Tilly defined environmental mechanisms as “externally generated influences on conditions affecting social life”, cognitive mechanisms as “alterations of individual and collective perception” and relational mechanisms as “connections among people, groups, and interpersonal networks” (Tilly 2001, 24).

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