Russian Culture at the Crossroads

Paradoxes of Postcommunist Consciousness

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There has hardly been a stretch in Russian history more saturated with sweeping changes than the period between 1988 and 1995. Packed into this exceedingly brief historical era were the rise of “perestroika” and the fall of its illustrious leader, Mikhail Gorbachev; the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence in its place of fifteen independent states; the August 1991 communist putsch and the democrats’ triumphant ascension to power; the proliferation of virulent ethnic conflicts and the recognition of the abiding need for cooperation; the bloody October 1993 confrontation between the executive and legislative powers and the surprising strength that the nationalist and communist forces showed in the first multiparty parliamentary elections in postcommunist Russia. Then, of course, there was the war in Chechnia. As people watched their political elites reshuffled and familiar institutions crumble, they could not help feeling alternatively elated, confused, and disillusioned. No sooner were hopes for a democratic renewal raised than they were dashed by unexpected hardships, which made some feel nostalgic for the lost security of the communist system.

As we try to take stock of these changes and assess their impact on Russian political culture, we should realize that the institutional transformations tell us only half the story. Hidden behind the visible structural dislocations are less apparent and often confusing trends in public consciousness. To appraise the state of public mind in today’s Russia, we need to draw on public opinion surveys. In particular, we shall draw on the data collected by the National Center for Public Opinion Research, which has been tracking political developments in the former Soviet Union since the early years of perestroika.¹

Among the changes that have shaken Soviet society in recent years, none is more important than the breakdown of the Communist party’s monopoly on power. The one-party state might be history now, but the political tradition in which it was rooted is not. This tradition predates the Soviet Union and extends much further into Russian history. Thus,
today's reformers have to grapple not only with the totalitarian institutions built in the communist era but also with the authoritarian practices that have existed in Russia for centuries. Far from being destroyed, the old totalitarian structures and authoritarian mentalities have demonstrated a remarkable capacity for social mimicry and adaptability. Undemocratic political sensibilities are manifest in the institutions of mass communications, and old stereotypes continue to dominate public opinion. Reasons for the persistence of the old attitudes should be sought in the Russian political tradition, in the nation's civic culture, which was retained and amplified by the Soviet regime. Authoritarianism sustained by both violence and pervasive paternalism, a nearly universal disregard for legal norms and procedures, and an intolerance toward dissent are among the most salient features of Russian civic culture. On the one hand, this culture breeds widespread fear, obedience, and sycophancy; on the other, it encourages rebellion and contempt for any authorities or law among the Russians. We must bear in mind this political heritage when we contemplate the most recent upheavals in Russian history. At the same time, we should not gloss over real, if contradictory and painful, changes that Russian civic culture has undergone in recent years.

"Political participation," "political support," and "public trust," worn-out cliches though they are, have acquired decidedly new meaning since democratic reforms began to transform Russia. Just a few years ago, "participation" and "support" were arbitrarily invoked by the Communist party whenever it wished to turn on the mechanisms of "double-think" and "unanimity." Now people in Russia have an opportunity to stake out their own political position and develop a conscious attitude toward politicians, parties, and social events, including the option of withdrawing their trust altogether. The traditional preference for unanimity remains strong and the choices practically available to the individual are quite limited, but the very fact that there is a choice in political matters is undeniable.

We can isolate three stages in the nation's political development since 1985. The first stage coincides with Gorbachev's perestroika and is distinguished by the half-hearted efforts to reform the Soviet system from above and from within by using the leverage provided by the system itself. Systematic opinion surveys that began in earnest in this period point to the growing prestige of Gorbachev and his politics, the expansion of glasnost in the public domain, and the rising hopes (especially among the intelligentsia) for liberal reform. The key question that roused the public at this point was: Who is to blame? This is a question familiar to several generations of Russian reformist intellectuals who have searched for ways to apportion blame for the nation's sorry state. The list of suspects submitted in the late 1980s included communist political leaders charged with distorting the "true" socialist model. All critics—from the top party brass to extreme Russian nationalists to liberal dissidents—singly out Stalin as the major culprit. This was a neat way to exonerate oneself from responsibility and to spare the system's fundamental political institutions from serious criticism. Research findings from this period support this view. In 1988, 13 percent of Soviet citizens named Stalin and his legacy as the main cause of the country's problems. This figure grew to 35 percent in 1989. Similarly, Gorbachev's popularity among his compatriots peaked in 1988 at 51 percent, and interest and trust in the mass media crested in 1989. After that, perestroika ran out of steam, the Soviet leader's popularity plummeted, and radical reform ideas gained in prominence.

The second stage in Russia's political transformation raised another question: Who can you trust? In 1990, Boris Yeltsin took center stage as the new man of the year, first as a proponent of a more radical approach to perestroika and later as a radical democratic reformer. Political forces shaping public opinion underwent significant transformation in this period. The reform alliance that gave perestroika its initial thrust and helped to legitimize it faded from the public scene. The public lost interest in the critical press and its endless exposes of past abuses. Faced with a rising tide of militant nationalism, looming prospects of authoritarianism, and the imminent breakdown of the Soviet Union, reform intellectuals retreated in disarray. The high point of this second stage was the August 1991 putsch, when Communist party apparatchiks made a desperate attempt to reclaim power, and the following radical counterputsch engineered by Yeltsin and his democratic supporters. The Soviet period of Russian history officially ended here, but some of its key institutions and mentalities have persisted. Our polls show that Yeltsin's popularity peaked in July 1990, when he was elected to chair the Russian Parliament. This finding suggests that Yeltsin appealed to the people first and foremost as a radical opposition leader.

As the public began to lose interest in political debunking and stories of Stalinist excesses, the new stage of Russia's political transformation commenced. This third stage, which dated back to early 1992, raised another question well known to reform-minded Russian intellectuals: What is to be done? The answer was sought not so much in unearthing new enemies and plotting new revolutions as in freeing prices from state control, encouraging private enterprise, and granting more autonomy to regional authorities. The liberal policies pursued at this stage tended to be idealistic, impractical, and sometimes downright irrational. Liberalism and state reforms clearly parted company. Meanwhile, the populace shunned ideology and gave the sacramental formula, "What is to be done?" a pragmatic reading, doing what it could to muddle through everyday life.

Such a turn of events was particularly painful for the authoritarian society. Ever since Russia embarked on the course of modernization some 150 years ago, it had relied exclusively on authoritarian means to move
the country forward. Perestroika and postperestroika reformers acted in the same tradition, seeking to impose reforms from above. By the end of 1992, support for political institutions and leaders had hit a new low. Spurred by the exliberal scandal-mongering oppositional press, public consciousness turned against all politicians and reforms. Perestroika intellectuals grew increasingly angry, aggressive, and divisive. No national leader or political group seemed capable of commanding authority and providing moral guidance. But then again, state resources for ramming social reforms down society’s throat were exhausted—a fact that political leaders had a hard time digesting.

This is not to say that the people deserted their reform leaders altogether. They still could lend their support to Yeltsin at a critical juncture, as they did during the April 1993 national referendum and once again for a short period only—during the October 1993 showdown between the president and the Parliament. But their skepticism about Yeltsin’s program remained palpable; they resented the high inflation and unemployment fostered by reform policies. Public consciousness became thoroughly deideologized, and the absence of credible political programs or leaders did not seem to alarm Russian citizens.

Like most societies trying to shake their totalitarian legacy, today’s Russia is propelled forward not by a coherent reform program but by the confluence of events, circumstances, and unexpected crises necessitating ad hoc solutions and improvisations. Throughout this seemingly haphazard development, however, one can detect a trend toward the structuralization of society—a trend especially important in a country that suppressed independent interest groups in the past. In the political sphere, new parties began to emerge, which formed a nucleus for future pluralistic politics. Economic interest groups grew conscious of their particular agenda and sought to consolidate their influence through various organizational outlets. In the area of norms and values, society emancipated itself from the patronage of the state, which had mandated values for its citizens. Universal human values and negotiated norms of everyday life emerged as alternative sources of legitimation in society. Opinion surveys from this period give further substance to this generalization. Let us take a closer look at the process of political differentiation as captured in our findings.

The National Center for Public Opinion Research has tracked public attitudes toward political life in Russia for several years. As Table 11.1 shows, the participatory spirit essential to democracy has been slow to emerge. There has been a marked drop in the number of “veterans” as well as “newcomers” to politics. The percentage of those who are disappointed with or have lost interest in politics is increasing. At the same time, fewer individuals find the political process closed to them. It is not so much the inaccessibility of politics that presents a challenge to Russian democracy as the lack of sustained interest in political matters. Further details can be gleaned from the age distribution of the respondents. At the early stages of political reforms in Russia, those reporting a high level of political participation were primarily individuals aged forty to fifty. Toward the end of the period in question, politically active individuals were primarily those fifty-five years and older. That is to say, respondents reporting high political participation tended to be older. By contrast, individuals who had lost their interest in or were disappointed with politics were often young, followed by the middle-aged group. Those who felt that they exerted no influence on politics were also likely to be young and, toward the end of the period, middle-aged.

A few words on such terms as “politics,” “public life,” and “political participation,” as well as “the fate of your nation” are in order here. The meaning of these terms underwent considerable change between 1988 and 1992. During the Soviet era, “politics” meant something official and imposed from above on the common citizen. It included obligatory meetings and officially sanctioned demonstrations declaring unanimous support for the government, plus the Young Communist League’s pseudo-popular initiatives. In the early glasnost era, between 1987 and 1988, public consciousness was agitated and politicized. This was especially apparent among the young people and the “generation of the sixties”—dissident intellectuals whose formative years coincided with Khrushchev’s thaw. Political clubs and seminars sprang up throughout the country, with participants making daring speeches and proposing novel political schemes. The circle of people united in these groups was fairly narrow, but their influence grew rapidly, spurred in part by the liberal press. This liberal “club culture” operated with the approval of Communist party reformers, who tried to steer the debate into “constructive channels” and keep reforms within the basic framework of the Soviet system of government. Later on, mass political movements would begin to gather force, bringing in their wake semi-open elections and ethnic conflicts. The political process could

<table>
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<th>TABLE 11.1 The Dynamics of Public Opinion 1 (percentage of total answers)</th>
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<td>I have always participated in public life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Now I have a real opportunity to participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is still no real opportunity to participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lately, I have lost interest in public life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have no interest in politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The most important question today is the fate of our nation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Vsesoiuznyi Tsentr po Izucheniiu Obshchestvennogo Mneniia.
no longer be controlled from one center, yet it did not acquire the stable features of a multiparty system. With the Communist party exiting center stage after August 1991, a political vacuum ensued and has not been filled since. After all, the Communist party was not a political structure but a state monopoly structure; the absence of viable political institutions and organizations simply became more apparent after the Communist party’s sudden collapse.

Totalitarian societies tend to confer “political” status on each and every problem facing the nation, yet they remain profoundly apolitical, not just because the masses of people are politically disenfranchised but because no real political interests are allowed to crystallize and acquire stable organizational form. Where everything is declared to be political, especially every initiative undertaken by the extant powers, nothing qualifies as a genuinely political event. Politics, the state, the constitution, elections—all these phenomena are robbed of their political content, while public and private life, as well as ideology and economics, are radically conflated.

To be sure, a purely totalitarian society has hardly ever existed. Any concrete historical polity has to compromise its principles for the sake of efficiency, and Soviet society was no exception to this rule. The “period of stagnation” in Soviet history was filled with such compromises and inconsistencies and can be seen as the practical limit of adaptability that a totalitarian society could reach in its efforts to appear normal and civilized (hence the ironic label: “Stalinism with a human face”). The dissolution of totalitarian structures spurs the differentiation of public and private spheres, of political, economic, social, cultural, and other institutions that hitherto had merged. To judge from the available data, this process of differentiation is now under way, albeit moving sluggishly, and it is marred by many contradictions.

Perestroika stimulated the politicization of Russian society, but it failed to create a viable political structure. We can see this era as the period of primary politicization or political agitation. (I deliberately avoid talking about any “awakening” or “renaissance” because these terms imply that some dormant political structures were waiting to be reigned—a wrong assumption in the case of post-Soviet society.) During this stage, the party-state apparatus continued to hold the monopoly on power and to impede the formation of independent political parties and groups. The pyramid of power had the Communist party at the top, and free elections were not possible.

The first sign of change was a shift in public attitudes toward the traditional power structures, which was accompanied by a weakening of the totalitarian monolith. Soviet citizens might have laughed at their leaders in the privacy of their homes, but they obeyed the authorities in public. In the post-Soviet era, the powers no longer had to be taken seriously, and as more and more people effectively ignored government orders, the powers lost their effectiveness. The attitude toward politics was now composed of two elements: passive identification with certain leaders (which did not differ much from the old Soviet attitude) and political agitation (or mobilization) whipped up by perestroika reforms. Both elements were doomed to disappear once real political structures began to take shape. Mass politicization inevitably led to disappointment in the quasi-politics that marked the transitional period between totalitarianism and democracy. All the changes that perestroika brought about in the political domain—elections, parties, demonstrations—bore the mark of their origins and remained essentially quasi-political and unstable. Sooner or later, the primary politicization of society would have to give way to the formation of a civic culture and genuine political structures that reflected diverse political interests and made a multiparty, pluralistic polity possible. There were signs that such structures had begun to form after 1989, but these were very early and distressingly weak portents.

If stable and working political structures are so hard to come by in Russian politics today, it is because the political interests that these structures are supposed to represent are still largely nascent and inchoate. Nor is there a viable political milieu—a middle class—where such interests would have a chance to crystallize. Not only are coherent political platforms missing from Russia’s political scene; the political slogans, concepts, and ideas around which stable political groupings could form remain barely audible. There is no dearth of new political headings and noisy statements, but what exactly they stand for in terms of specific policies is very hard to fathom. When a political party or group declared itself in the old Parliament, it was usually a by-product of the latest schism in parliamentary politics and not an indication that the party expressed the interests of a certain constituency and intended to press for electoral victory.

Current public opinion surveys show that the political divisions do not so much reflect the political differentiation in the country as they reveal the latest swing in the popularity of a particular leader or group. As long as society remains organized around the structures of power—popular or not—it will not know genuine pluralism and political consolidation.

The current difficulties with building a viable political culture in Russia have one unsettling consequence: disenchantment with democracy and a paucity of legitimate political structures. The bridge that was supposed to link old and new Russia stretches only half way, not reaching the other side. Politics in the transitional period has bred discontent, provoked frequent crises, and obscured the criteria by which one could judge the progress toward democracy. Especially distraught and disappointed are
those circles that succumbed to the initial euphoria and developed unrealistically hopefuls for imminent reforms. I am talking about the country's reform-minded political elites and liberal postdissident intellectuals, including emigré circles, which exerted a certain influence on politics in the transitional period. If you look at rank-and-file individuals, those normally reached by pollsters, you find a far greater stability in mood over the period under study. One could even speak about certain sociopsychological types of responses to the political turmoil, which seem quite independent of the nature of events. Instructive in this respect are the answers to the following survey question: Which mood was most common last year among the people you know? (see Table 11.2).

Why did the leaders who came to prominence on the wave of perestroika fail to retain power? Quite apart from their personal dispositions, they were selected for a deconstructive role. They helped tear down the old political institutions, but they proved inept when it came to the constructive task of building up new political structures. This deconstructive thrust of the early perestroika reformers reflected the gap between the "can-do" self-image they communicated to their followers and their far more limited practical skills and personal abilities. These leaders were sold on the idea that Soviet socialism could be rejuvenated, that they were the movers and shakers behind the reforms, that they could cleanse "true Leninism" of Stalinist distortions and return the country to the pristine sources of communist ideology. All innovations that sprang to life during the Gorbachev era—the opening up of the mass media, elections featuring alternative candidates, campaigns against corruption and bureaucratic excesses—were animated by the idea of reclaiming the revolutionary past, with the party apparatus posing as the prime engine for this renewal. The 1989-90 national election campaign was dominated by leaders who were brought to power with the Communist party's tacit or open approval and who were looking to the past rather than the future for their programmatic statements. When the totalitarian structures crumbled, however, they were entirely unprepared to offer constructive policies and assume the mantle of leadership. Not even dissident intellectuals, with a few notable exceptions, were free from the liberal Soviet mentality of renewal and restoration. All reforms were to be imposed from above by wise leaders drawn from the educated stratum of intellectuals.

Meanwhile, the foundations of Soviet socialism and the international empire it fostered collapsed much faster than anybody thought possible. As soon as it became clear that hopes for a smooth transition to freedom and prosperity were widely exaggerated, the old-style leaders and their institutions came under attack. Very quickly they turned from facilitators into stumbling blocks impeding reforms. The reformist alliance, which included party reformers, the liberal democratic intelligentsia, and nationalist forces, fell apart. Each group formed its own power center, however poorly organized, and each was distinguished by vociferous attacks on the state and the executive power. The key divide between political forces at the time was the line between the radical pragmatic reformers who gathered around the executive power and various oppositional currents. Among the most salient manifestations of this division was the confrontation between the presidential and parliamentary branches of power that came to a head in 1993.

Those leaders who failed to transcend their perestroika-from-above illusions disappeared from the political scene. Such was the fate of party reformers and intellectuals gathered around Gorbachev. Others joined newly founded factions and groups. Gorbachev's demise could be attributed to the rise of Yeltsin, who presented himself to the nation as a more radical reformer. But the drop in popularity that Yeltsin's government suffered in 1993 suggested that the country was ready for a new form of leadership and political organization.

The Soviet Union has always been a "mobilized society," that is, a society based on political activism organized from above and controlled by the hierarchy of state power. The political regimes that governed Russia throughout much of its history relied on force, propaganda, and centralized control to keep the country moving. Unorganized and undifferentiated masses of people were to be brought into action and compelled toward the goal set forth by the higher authorities. Intellectual and moral resources were mobilized in the same way as any other, with the intelligentsia enlisted to do the authorities' bidding. Mobilization is the only form in which a totalitarian society can exist. By contrast, civil society is possible only when interest groups and autonomous civic structures are allowed to flourish and individual interests have a chance to be articulated and communicated to others. To be sure, mobilized and civil societies are but ideal types that approximate reality in all its richness and possibilities. Yet, these are useful models that help us to understand the nature of political processes in the transitional period.

| TABLE 11.2 The dynamics of Public Opinion 2 (percentage of total answers) |
|-----------------------------|-----------|---------|---------|
| Hope | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 |
| 13 | 20 | 17 |
| Confusion | 23 | 27 | 24 |
| Despair | 28 | 27 | 18 |
| Confidence | 6 | 6 | 5 |

Source: Vsesoiuznyi Tsentr po Izucheniiu Obshchestvennogo Mnения.
Both the theory and practice of a mobilized society implied that the political masses are passive and pliable, that power mechanisms must be employed to push them in the right direction. Characteristically, Bolsheviks favored such terms as “levers,” “transmission belts,” and “cogs,” which underscored their philosophical commitment to the mobilizational ethics of government. The despotism and coercion endemic to the Russian political tradition might account for the ruthlessness with which the Bolsheviks set out to realize their mechanical model of mobilizational politics. This model had three principal components: omnipotent authority; subservient people; and since the middle of the nineteenth century, the intelligentsia. In recent years, the role of direct coercion and fear-fostering propaganda has diminished. The “transmission belts,” to use Lenin’s favorite expression, have been loosened. But the Russian polity has not fully shaken the mobilizational structures and certainly not the old mobilizational mentality. This is evident in the fact that agitation and apathy—the two states most common in a mobilizational society—are characteristic of post-Soviet society, where emotional excitement and moral tension are typically followed by periods of depression and apathetic apathy.

The mobilizational thrust of recent Russian reforms was apparent in the Gorbachev era, and it was especially evident in the propaganda technology used by the elites. Mobilizational mechanisms weakened afterward, but they were still working during the August 1991 putsch and the April 1993 national referendum. In both cases, society was mobilized in the face of attempts to restore the old regime, even though most people had lost their early enthusiasm for reforms. Still, this was mobilizational activism and not the kind of steady participatory practice that undergirds democratic politics. Except for the nationalistic and ethnic movements that unite the constituency around the idea of the opposition to the center and local sovereignty, alternative forms of political participation remain in a rudimentary stage. The path from a mobilizational political culture to a participatory civil society is yet to be charted in the post-Soviet era.

If we take a closer look at Russian political elites, we can see that their evolution mirrors the problems facing the society that seeks to shed the old and build a new civic culture. Soviet society had two kinds of elites: a power elite and a cultural elite (the intelligentsia). Both suffered a serious setback in the current political crisis. Following the tradition of the Russian intelligentsia, Soviet intellectuals sought to modernize the state and its citizens. They provided intellectual and moral legitimation to the authorities and at the same time served, albeit to a lesser degree, as the critics of the system. The Soviet intelligentsia owed the state its ideological, political, and economic autonomy, which is why it aimed primarily at the liberal rationalization of the regime. Perestroika spurred the intelligentsia’s illusions that a wise reformer, drawing expert advice, could revamp Russian society. Glasnost encouraged intellectuals to believe that they would be the experts called upon to provide the high-brow theoretical rationale for the reforms. Yet, intellectuals hardly qualified for this role, since few of them possessed expert knowledge adequate to the task at hand. That is not to gainsay the key, indeed crucial, role that the intelligentsia played in stirring public opinion and mobilizing society in the early perestroika years. But that was the intelligentsia’s swan song. The crisis of perestroika in 1990–91 led to disillusionment among intellectuals, who, along with other national elites, were given to profound pessimism about the country’s future. The triangular structure of power that had carried the Russian polity through more than a century—power—people—intelligentsia—had collapsed.

Highly instructive in this respect is the fate of glasnost. Perestroika’s major and most enduring accomplishment, glasnost lost its luster in the post-perestroika period. The freedom of speech, the freedom to publish and assemble, is still in place, but its role as a central factor in public life is diminishing. The uncensored word has lost its capacity to rouse the imagination and spur the public on to action. The public takes glasnost for granted, or else views it with suspicion. This is probably the way it should be in a normal democratic society, where glasnost serves informational, aesthetic, and other functions. But Russian society today is hardly a functional democracy, and the indifference to free speech is a symptom of the underlying crisis.

As the democratic process continues, the Russian intelligentsia is likely to lose its traditional mobilizing role and turn into an educated cultural and technical elite. Intellectuals are bound to become specialists, that is, if Russian society evolves into a participatory democracy. If it follows a different type of development, the intelligentsia will continue to vacillate between despair and patriotic messianism. In any event, there is no return to the traditional triangular power structure.

For the first time in Soviet history, perestroika transformed Russian politicians from larger-than-life figures exemplifying a particular cause into flesh and blood individuals with clearly visible strengths and all too apparent weaknesses. Mikhail Gorbachev, Dmitry Ligachev, Andrei Sakharov, Boris Yeltsin (and, I should add, Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and several other Western politicians) were concrete individuals who could not hide behind carefully polished images, who thrust themselves into the public eye by virtue of their willingness to take a stand, to venture a personal and sometimes unpopular opinion. The negative side of this development was the personalization of politics. Political divisions were defined as personal confrontations between Gorbachev and Ligachev, Sakharov and Gorbachev, Gorbachev and...
Yeltsin, and so forth. However, in the postperestroika years, all politicians suffered in public opinion, their popularity taking a dramatic plunge. Here are the ratings that the two most prominent Russian politicians were given in a series of polls identifying the man of the year (see Table 11.3). The 1992 figures show that barely one-sixth of all those polled gave their vote to the man of the year. Three times as many votes went to Yeltsin during the April 1993 referendum, but this figure reflected the mobilizational agitation that preceded this referendum. Once the political strain subsided, the leaders lost their appeal in the public eye. Now we have clear signs that politics are getting more and more depersonalized, that leadership structure and legitimation patterns are undergoing systemic change.

Soviet society produced not so much political leaders as party bosses whose legitimacy derived from their allegiance to the party cause and personal connections to the higher strata of power. A popular image was important to the party bosses, who cultivated it assiduously through propaganda and mass media (Stalin's cult of personality is most revealing in this respect). But their "personal charisma" did not precede their ascent to power; rather, it devolved on them after they entrenched themselves in the power structure.

Gorbachev and Yeltsin are the last two Soviet-style leaders in contemporary Russian politics, although their ascents to power followed different paths. Gorbachev received his leadership mantle from the Communist party. He tried to legitimize his power as the president elected by the Parliament, but his efforts proved a failure. Yeltsin came to national prominence as a party maverick and an opposition leader. Later on, he was chosen by popular vote to be the president of the Russian Federation. He assumed real power after the August 1991 putsch and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Along with the mantle of leadership, he inherited the "secondary charisma" that belonged to and protected anyone who controlled the state machinery. In 1993, with the state machinery sputtering, Yeltsin's popularity ratings began to slide.

The crisis of power that unfolded in late 1993 dramatized the crisis of the old political culture and all its peculiar modes of legitimation, support mobilization, and political leadership. To grasp the meaning of the bloody confrontation between the president and the Parliament we need to go back to earlier sociopolitical developments, beginning with the collapse of party-state hegemony. These tragic events are but a stage in the ongoing political and constitutional crisis that will, in all likelihood, continue for months and years. The 1993 summer opinion surveys show the public clamoring for law and order as a counterbalance to the mounting chaos and anarchy. To a society that never lived under a genuine constitution and frequently spurned the rule of law, dictatorial means seemed a fair price to pay for instituting an order. When confronted with a choice between authoritarian rule by President Yeltsin and a military dictatorship by excommunists, the first choice—government by presidential dictate—was given a clear preference. The populace still saw Yeltsin as the best hope for political and economic reforms. Yeltsin's decision to dissolve and later to storm Parliament should be seen against the backdrop of this popular support for strong actions designed to restore order without turning back the wheel of history. Our data show that in the beginning of October, the majority (52 percent) of the Russian population generally supported Yeltsin's decision to do away with the old Parliament, while 24 percent of the respondents opposed his action. Yeltsin's decision drew particularly strong approval from college-educated people (61 percent supported and 20 percent disapproved of the action), whereas less well-educated respondents, those without a high school diploma, showed the least enthusiasm for the radical course of action (44 percent approved and 28 percent disapproved of Yeltsin's decision). Nobody anticipated that the confrontation between the president and the Parliament would take a bloody turn, and most likely nobody wanted the showdown to go that far, but the configuration of political forces and public opinion in the nation directed the course of events. Public opinion in Russia took the side of the president and generally approved his use of force, in part because it followed the bloodbath provoked by the militant supporters of Parliament. According to the findings gathered in mid-October 1993 by the National Center for Public Opinion Research, 20 percent of the respondents stated that Yeltsin's recourse to force was timely and 35 percent believed that he waited too long to clamp down on his opponents. The majority of those polled declared that Yeltsin had the right to dissolve Parliament. This judgment, which was not entirely consistent with the constitution, showed that the population was willing to disregard the legal niceties in the face of a severe political crisis. However, the mood in the country soon changed once again. Yeltsin's ratings slipped in November 1993, which led to the defeat of his allies in the December 12 parliamentary election.

Subsequent events—the December 1993 parliamentary elections—showed that Yeltsin might have been too hasty suspending the constitution. Disillusionment with the democratic process, pervasive economic

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**TABLE 11.3 The Dynamics of Public Opinion 3 (percentage of total vote)**

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<tr>
<td>Mikhail Gorbachev</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>Boris Yeltsin</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>17</td>
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</table>

*Source: Vsesoiuznyi Tsentr po Izucheniiu Obshchestvennogo Mnenia.*
hardship, and reformers' failure to coordinate their efforts translated into a surprising show of strength by the ultranationalists led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky. As our findings show, Zhirinovsky, the head of the mislabeled Liberal Democratic party, drew his support chiefly from the lower middle class. Those who voted for him were people with a below-average education, employed in sectors of the economy vulnerable to unemployment, concerned about the crime situation, and humiliated by Russia's loss of superpower status. The traditional Soviet working class voted for radical nationalists, but older and retired people were most prominent among Communist party supporters. Nearly a third of those who gave their voice to Zhirinovsky waited until election day to make up their mind. Few voters knew much about Zhirinovsky and his party; most chose this venue as a way to dramatize their displeasure with the reforms and their negative impact on standards of living. The vote for Zhirinovsky was mainly a vote against the establishment. Some of his supporters indicated that they regretted their vote, so he might be a temporary phenomenon on the Russian political scene. It is certainly too early to tell. What seems perfectly clear now is that dismantling the old Russian and Soviet political tradition and replacing it with a viable democratic civic culture will be a long and arduous process.

Notes

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Conclusion: Toward a Post-Soviet Society

FREDERICK STARR

Is it too early to speak of “postcommunist consciousness” in Russia? Little time has passed since the fall of communism, and the cultural outlook of a people changes only slowly. At the same time, over the scant half-decade since the emergence of a new state called Russia the defining issues of that country have already passed through several distinct phases, according to Yuri Levada.

For these reasons, the authors represented in this volume have shown a commendable tentativeness and caution in identifying the consciousness of postcommunist Russia. The implied conclusion is itself important, namely, that the deeper values informing Russian culture today are by no means clear. Lacking a crystal ball, several of the authors have confined themselves to identifying the “objective” circumstances affecting culture that are bound to prevail for a while.

Thus, Daniil Dondurei is surely right to indicate that patronage of the arts has already undergone a transformation, with the state’s dominance having been replaced by more diverse and market-based sources of support. Something similar has occurred in intellectual life as a whole, where, as Dmitri Shalin shows, the very concept of a generalized intellectual is giving way to a more function-based notion that leaves the highly educated part of the population more focused on specific sets of modern skills and the highly diverse settings in which they are employed, as opposed to their membership in a guild of “mental workers.”

Using a term that gained wide currency in Eastern Europe beginning with Poland in the early 1980s and Russia by 1988, Yuri Levada speaks of an emerging “civic culture.” This refers to a condition in which the state is reduced to the status of one important organization among many in society, in which a plethora of other organizational forms buffer and mediate individuals’ relations to government, and in which rights against the state protect equally individuals, voluntary associations, and their prop-