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Putin's Invisible Hand: Why are GONGOs Increasingly Resurfacing under the Putin Administration?

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Why are GONGOs Increasingly Resurfacing Under the Putin Administration?
By
Sydnee A. Merritt

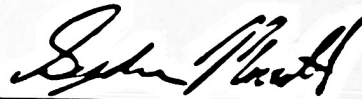
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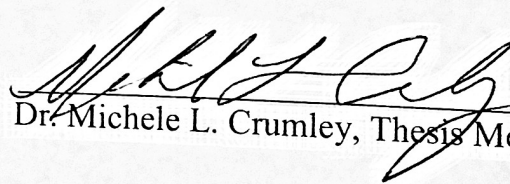
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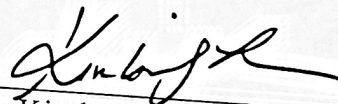
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Abstract

Government Organized Non-Governmental Organizations (GONGOs), once common during the Soviet-era, are now increasingly resurfacing under the Putin administration. Once completely abolished from Russia, these deceitful organizations are accompanying various new laws signed by President Putin in the Russian Federation. While Russia does not claim to be a liberal democracy with a free civil society and Putin has described his state as a “managed democracy,” the puzzle still remains why the Putin administration is secretly using organizations to fulfill government ploys. This thesis will analyze the types of GONGOs along with new laws and policies signed into effect under the Putin and Medvedev Administration. I conclude this thesis by partially confirming my hypothesis that president Putin is rationally choosing to create these organizations in an effort to consolidate his power and promote Russian culture.

Acknowledgments

I would first and foremost like to thank my thesis mentor, Dr. Michele Crumley, for her part in the completion of this thesis. For the past two-years, Dr. Crumley has been my go-to person for all things Russia. She has been an incredible professor, mentor, and encourager during my time at East Tennessee State University and I want to publicly thank her for her time and support. My

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Introduction

The oppression of people across the globe by their own governments, while unfortunate, is not a revolutionary concept. Basic freedoms are blatantly denied by leaders, while civil society in these countries is virtually non-existent. During the Soviet-era spanning from 1921-1991, Russia would be the poster-child for the authoritarian country just described.¹ Soviet-era Russia would fit the mold of modern day authoritarian governments such as China, North Korea, Central African Republic, etc. However, Russia in the post-communist era cannot so easily be generically labeled.

Government interference is an essential part of authoritarian states, and this interference is rarely denied by the government. After the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, Government Organized Non-Governmental Organizations (GONGOs) ceased to exist as the emergence of informal groups and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) dominated civil society following Glasnost. However, President Vladimir Putin's first-term saw the return and rapid increase of GONGOs. These organizations are used commonly in authoritarian states across the world, but the citizens are usually aware of their presence. Russia is a unique case to study as most, if not all, of these organizations are perceived to be genuine NGOs by the Russian citizens and other organizations across the globe.

The majority of leaders of authoritarian states have no problem openly oppressing the civil society of their country. These leaders would outlaw NGOs in an instance and not bother

¹ Serge Schmemmann, "*END OF THE SOVIET UNION; The Soviet State, Born of a Dream, Dies,*" The New York Times, 1991, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/26/world/end-of-the-soviet-union-the-soviet-state-born-of-a-dream-dies.html>

attempting to conceal their organizations. The increase in GONGOs throughout Putin's presidency, along with the policy changes and further restrictions on NGOs, has made it abundantly clear that Russia is not the democracy their leaders claim it to be. This raises the question, why are GONGOs increasingly resurfacing under the Putin administration? To answer this question, other questions will have to be addressed and potentially answered to get to the core of Russia's resurgence of GONGOs. Why is the Putin Administration's approach different from the other authoritarian countries? Why would the President of Russia be creating false NGOs to pass-off as grass-root NGOs when he could just oppress all forms of civil society? As an undeclared authoritarian country, this thesis will dissect the aspects that make Russia different from other authoritarian governments with GONGOs. Specifically, the aspects being the period Russia had without GONGOs, the return of these deceitful organizations, and the rapid increase throughout the terms of President Putin.

Before beginning the research, I hypothesize that President Putin is making a rational choice by disguising these organizations amongst civil society. With the policy changes that accompany the reemergence of GONGOs in Putin's Administration, it appears that there are specific areas of civil society that the President has aimed at suppressing. As the newly founded civil society was still young and weak when Putin began his first term in office, I hypothesize that the Russian loyalist who grew up in Soviet Russia as a faithful employee of the KGB began to see the emerging civil society begin to support and focus on the ideas of foreign states rather than Russian society. President Putin saw this as a threat to his power over the Russian people and began infiltrating civil society with GONGOs aimed at promoting the Russian language, youth, history, and above all, himself.

This thesis and its conclusion are important for several reasons. From the recent abolishment of the Soviet Union, Russia does not have a strong foundation. Therefore the presence of government organizations portraying themselves as grass-root organizations could be detrimental to the already unstable civil-society. Also, GONGOs are deceitful organizations that are intended to go unnoticed as they perform in whichever way they were designed to. Anytime a government is manipulating its own civil-society and deceiving foreign bodies, it is cause for concern. By analyzing the purpose of these organizations along with what is causing their rapid increase, further research can be done and more attention can be brought to this tool of governments. The more attention brought on to these organizations, the harder it will be for them to go unnoticed in communities.

Moreover, the title of my thesis, “Putin’s Invisible Hand” is a nod to Adam Smith’s “The Wealth of Nations” in which he described the phenomenon of people acting in their own self-interest benefiting the market for everyone as an “invisible hand.”² While my thesis does not focus on the market or economics, I am analyzing policies and effects of Vladimir Putin’s self-interested actions that impact his entire nation. Putin concealing his true intentions behind the cloak of a “managed democracy” is how his hand in the matter is said to be “invisible.”

Literature Review

Since Non-Governmental Organizations and their manipulation by leaders is the focus of this thesis, definitions for this term and others will be discussed. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are defined as, “...any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is

² Adam Smith, 1723-1790, *The Wealth of Nations* / Adam Smith ; Introduction by Robert Reich ; Edited, with Notes, Marginal Summary, and Enlarged Index by Edwin Cannan. New York :Modern Library, 2000.

organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of service and humanitarian functions, bring citizen concerns to Governments, advocate and monitor policies and encourage political participation through provision of information.”³ When in their purest form, these organizations are exactly what their name implies, they are organizations with no government interference. The U.S. Department of State’s website claims, “The United States firmly believes that a robust civil society – independent of state control or government involvement- is necessary for democracy to thrive. From the earliest days of U.S. history, civil society organizations have played a key role in protecting human rights and advancing human progress.”⁴ Non-Governmental Organizations and liberal democracies go hand-in-hand; the existence of one, is evidence of the other.

As oxymoronic as the name suggests, government organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) are NGOs that the government has either established or is funding to carry out their own political aims. Non-democracies use these organizations as tools to quell authentic civil society and act as agents for the government. Repressive regimes often use these GONGOs to lobby international institutions claiming they are representing the people of the nation, all the while being vicarious agents of the regime itself.⁵ Moreover, it is apparent that these GONGOs cripple democratic systems as they infiltrate NGOs and keep the name while altering the content, thereby creating a false-sense of societal representation.⁶ Human rights are severely restricted and sidelined as the government becomes the representative of the people and

³ “DEFINITION OF NGOs”, <http://www.ngo.org/ngoinfo/define.html>

⁴ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, “Non-Governmental Organizations in the United States”, U.S. Department of State, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/non-governmental-organizations-ngos-in-the-united-states/>

⁵ Moisés Naim, "Missing Links: What Is a Gongo?" *Foreign Policy*, no. 160 (2007): 95-96.

⁶ Paul Goble, "Russia: Analysis From Washington -- The Return Of GONGOs And The Fate Of Civil Society," *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, April 09, 2008, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1094072.html>.

they get to decide which rights the society will be entitled to. A prominent example of an active GONGO that misrepresents civil society is the All-China Women's Federation in China. A GONGO that monopolizes all representation of Chinese women without the influence of actual Chinese women.⁷ An anomaly such as this poses the concern that the rights of women in China could not possibly be sufficiently represented, and therefore are being suppressed by the Chinese Communist Party. Government organizations like the All-China Women's Federation can be found across the globe in authoritarian regimes and in the Russian Federation.

Just as there are different purposes for GONGOs, there are different types as well; propaganda, militant, and developmental. Propaganda GONGOs are used by the government to promote the government's agenda through nationalism. These organizations are usually small and are bought or formed when the nation is facing foreign scrutiny. Possibly the most prominent, and certainly the most out-loud, of the GONGOs is the militant. These organizations are used by the government to counter protests that are aimed at the government and suppress any aspects of civil society that promote democracy. Developmental GONGOs are the silent but deadly organizations that have a more discrete purpose than militant GONGOS. These organizations are formed for the sole purpose of intercepting funds from Western governments that would otherwise go to the country's NGOs. By taking this money, the government is not only developing their own economy, but is also gives the GONGOs international access to NGO conferences.⁸

⁷ Chen Jie, "The NGO Community in China," *ChinaPerspectives*, 2006, <https://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/3083>

⁸ Chris Carothers, "GONGOs: Tools of Autocratic Misdirection," Master's thesis, Harvard University, 2015. 10-11.

With the abundance of GONGOs, the last of the true NGOs cannot compete as they don't have the funding or support of the government. GONGOs also intercept funds from foreign entities and get to be a part of their board discussions which countries believe are promoting democracy when really, they are only supporting the repressive government.

Furthermore, since my hypothesis requires knowledge of Vladimir Putin's background, a brief time-line of his life will be provided to fully capture his character. Born in 1952, Putin became interested at a very young age in spy movies, intelligence, and Judo. According to Putin, he was single-minded and determined to be a part of the Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopanosti (KGB) which was the Committee for State Security of the Soviet era. At the age of 16, Putin was told by officials of the KGB to attend law school if he wanted to work for them, and so he did. From 1975 to 1991, Vladimir worked for the KGB in many capacities including foreign intelligence as a member of the GDR in Dresden. Putin never officially left the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. When the Party dissolved, Putin kept his Party card in a drawer. In 1996 Putin and his family moved to Moscow where he was briefly the first-ever civilian director of the FSB which was the replacement of the KGB.⁹

On August 9, 1999, Putin was named Prime Minister by Boris Yeltsin despite few people knowing anything about him. His position as Prime Minister would be short lived as on New Year's Eve night Yeltsin began a resignation speech. By midnight of January 1, 2000, Putin would be the president of Russia. On March 26, 2000 he would be officially elected president.¹⁰

⁹ Natalie Gevorkyan, Natalya Timakova, and Andrei Kolesnikov, *First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia's President Vladimir Putin*, Public Affairs Reports, 2000.

¹⁰ Masha Gessen, *The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin*, Riverhead Books, 2012

Vladimir Putin inherited an unstable country trying to find its footing after a dual transition to democracy and a market economy. Not only was the economy in shambles from Yeltsin's shock-therapy, but national symbols were still yet to be confirmed. Discussions had ensued during Yeltsin's presidency, however a decision for the new state seal was not made until December of 2000 when Putin had his parliament vote in the two-headed-eagle seal. The Soviet anthem was another symbol to be redone. Beginning in 1943, what started as the Soviet anthem had many transformations and edits until a group of Russian Olympic athletes complained to Putin that the lack of an anthem made their wins seem lesser than in fall of 2000.¹¹

From 2000 to 2008, Putin served as president of the Russian Federation and by the Constitution, he was prohibited from running for a third term in a row. From 2008-2012, Dmitry Medvedev would serve as president while Putin guided his decisions through his position as prime minister. For example, in 2008 Medvedev signed a law that extended the constitutional term limit for a president from four-years to six-years beginning with the next president. In 2012, Medvedev would step aside for Putin to take his place back in the presidency. In 2018, Putin was re-elected again extending his presidency until 2024, given that there are no other constitutional changes.¹²

A driving force behind this thesis is based on the statements of the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin. Throughout his nearly twenty-year influence over Russia, Putin has described

¹¹ Masha Gessen, 2012

¹² Andrew Kramer, 'For Putin's 4th Term, More a Coronation Than an Inauguration,' The New York Times, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/07/world/europe/putin-inauguration-russia-president.html>

the Russian government as a “managed” or “directed” democracy.¹³ In the words of an unidentified Russian political consultant, “Democracy is where the authorities arrange elections. Managed democracy is where the authorities arrange the elections and the result.”¹⁴ Just as the government intervention in organizations was not hidden during the Soviet-era, neither were the fixed elections. Vain rituals of forcing the public to vote for the Communist Party member chosen to run that term are being reflected in modern day elections in Russia. Along with GONGOs, the Russian elections are giving an impression of being fair and free all the while professional political operatives are being paid, “...not to defeat opposition candidates in a competitive setting, but rather to organize a system that creates the illusion of competition while squelching it in reality.”¹⁵

Since one of the major components of Russia’s puzzle is the period between 1991 and 1999 when GONGOs were non-existent in society, we will look at a brief timeline of the events preceding this era. General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Union from 1985-1991 was Mikhail Gorbachev. In 1986 he gave a speech in which he announced and began the period of Glasnost or “openness.”¹⁶ Gorbachev has commented on modern Russian policies saying, “When Vladimir Putin became president, he inherited chaos. ... I can’t imagine how one could act under the ‘textbook of democracy’ in these conditions to find a way out of an almost catastrophic situation. ... The president of the country had no other choice but to take decisive

¹³ Andrew Wilson, “Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet,” *Foreign Affairs*, December 2005, Worldhttps://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/capsule-review/2005-11-01/virtual-politics-faking-democracy-post-soviet-world

¹⁴ Neil Buckley, “Putin’s ‘managed democracy’,” *Financial Times*, June 2006, https://www.ft.com/content/39682de4-053d-11db-9b9e-0000779e2340

¹⁵ “Validating Autocracy through the Ballot” Freedom House, Chapter 1: Elections, https://freedomhouse.org/report/modern-authoritarianism-elections

¹⁶ Mikhail Gorbachev, “Mikhail Gorbachev”, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/author/mikhail-gorbachev

actions.”¹⁷ This new found freedom of expression under Glasnost for the Russian people gave way to the end of the Soviet Union in 1991.

On December 25, 1991, Gorbachev resigned as president of the Soviet Union and the USSR was officially abolished. By January of 1992, Yeltsin had liberalized prices and trade that sent Russian citizens to the streets trading goods. On the one-year anniversary of the August coup, Yeltsin announced that in accordance with a new mass privatization program, each citizen would be given the opportunity to participate in an auction in which they would be given a voucher worth ten-thousand rubles. By January of 1993, inflation was at nearly 30 percent. In 1994, the political side of Russia was looking relatively strong as the new constitution was passed. However, the gap separating the rich and the poor had grown drastically. And on October 12, also known as Black Tuesday, the ruble crashed. Switching positions in 1995, the Ruble stabilized whereas the Duma voted no-confidence in the government twice. In 1996, Yeltsin was re-elected despite his health issues and served until 1999.¹⁸

Methodology

While the rapid increase in the creation of GONGOs in Russia under the Putin Administration is the central idea of this thesis, it is important that other discrepancies in Russia’s “managed democracy” are discussed. Discrepancies being aspects and characteristics of civil society that would not be found amongst liberal democracies. My hypothesis of why

¹⁷ “The Biggest Takeaways From Former Soviet Leader Gorbachev's New Book,” The Moscow Times, October 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/10/29/the-biggest-takeaways-from-former-soviet-leader-gorbachevs-new-book-a67955>

¹⁸ Rose Brady, *Kapitalizm: Russia's Struggle to Free Its Economy*, Yale University Press, 1999, Accessed April 27, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1np9k0.

GONGOs are increasingly resurfacing under the Putin Administration cannot be confirmed or denied if we do not know the goal of these organizations. While the actual reasoning can only be confirmed by the President of Russia and his administration, by analyzing policies, laws, and other legislative acts during President Putin's terms we can form a more solid interpretation of these organizations.

All laws, legislative acts, speeches, and government acts from Putin's first term in 2000 to his current term will be eligible for inclusion in this analysis. The only exception to this rule will be the analysis of legislative acts during the 2008-2012 term of Dmitry Medvedev. This term will be included in my research as Medvedev was less than influential on his own and was hand-picked by Putin to be his replacement. Since Medvedev's term was hardly more than a constitutional safe-guard that allowed Putin to remain in control as Prime Minister, the acts and events during this term will be included to ensure a solid, well-rounded analysis that will provide insight into the resurgence of GONGOs under the Putin Administration.¹⁹

Limitations

Researching organizations that are designed by their government to blend in as normal non-governmental organizations without any sort of government intervention comes with obvious obstacles. The only GONGOs we can analyze and discuss are those that have already been outed in Russian society as agents of the government. Through the course of this research we can make inferences based on patterns of organizations that have been revealed as GONGOs, but there is really no way to know the depths of this issue. We can see that GONGOs are

¹⁹ Associated Press, "Vladimir Putin Says an Unlimited Presidential Term in Russia Would Be 'Very Disturbing,'" TIME, January 19, 2020, <https://time.com/5767885/putin-russia-unlimited-presidential-term/>

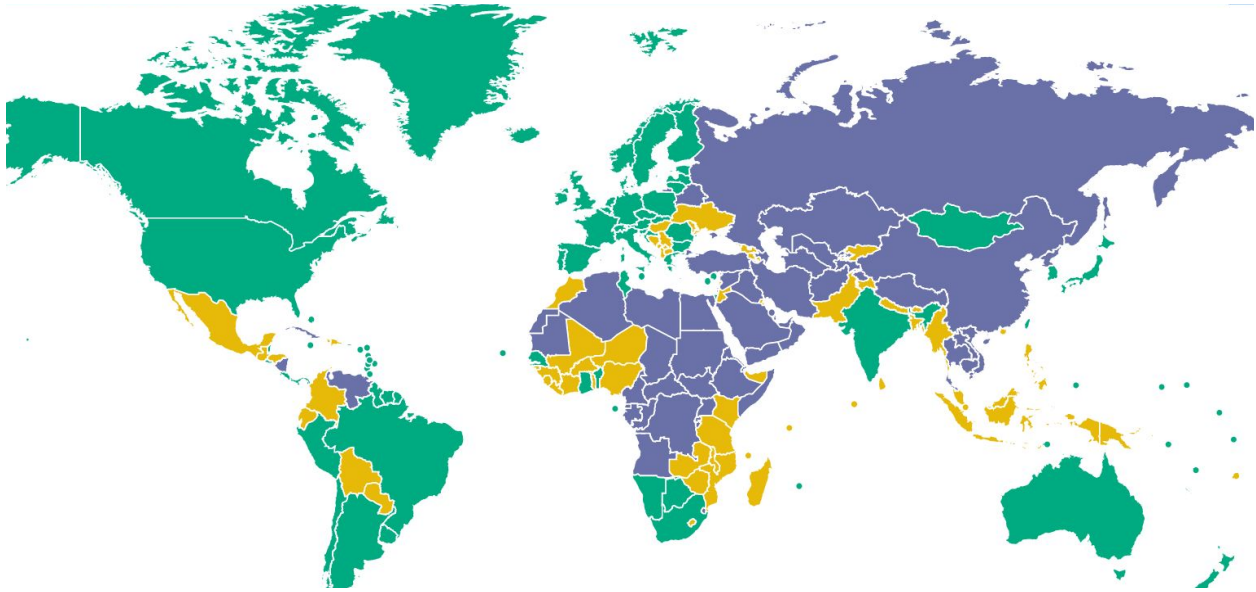
increasing, but these organizations do not register as government agents and that alone limits the research. As more GONGOs are exposed, more research can be done to analyze the impact, goals, and theories behind their emergence.

Another limitation of this research is found in my central hypothesis. To say that the actions and results coming out of a country's current administration is completely reliant on the rational choice of the head of that government is impossible. Only President Putin himself could say if his creation of these organizations is based on his rational choice. He is the only one that could confirm that his actions in creating GONGOs, repressing freedoms of expression, and his other forms of government intervention are based on his personal life-experiences that led him to rationally choose this form of governing. While we cannot know for certain, we can take what we know from his background and current actions and use those to form a general answer to why GONGOs are increasingly resurfacing under his administration.

Analysis

Below is a map from the Freedom in the World 2019 website which uses an algorithm to assign colors to states based on an assessment of civil liberties and political freedoms.²⁰ By analyzing this color-coordinated report, it can be seen that Russia is marked with the same purple color as the “not free” countries.

²⁰ Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2019”,
<https://freedomhouse.org/explore-the-map?type=fiw&year=2020>



This map along with Putin’s claims of a “managed democracy” are enough to conclude that Russia is not a normal case. However, this thesis is analyzing the methods by which the current administration is abusing to construct this power, rather than the name to be given to their government. Putin’s claims along with this map are just some of the red-flags that are present that reveal a deeper issue. This section will analyze the types of GONGOs along with other acts by President Putin that will either further our understanding of his administration's control over Russia, or will answer why GONGOs are increasingly resurfacing under the Putin Administration.

Since this thesis is analyzing the reemergence of GONGOs in Russia under the Putin Administration, a select few of these deceptive organizations will be fleshed out in this section. It is important to note the goal behind each of these organizations is the promotion of Russian culture. The Russkiy Mir Foundation is one example of a GONGO that promotes Russian

culture, as the main goal of this organization is to preserve the Russian language around the world. This organization was created when Vladimir Putin signed a decree and then stated, “In my view, we need to support the initiative put forward by Russian linguists to create a National Russian Language Foundation, the main aim of which will be to develop the Russian language at home, support Russian language study programmes abroad and generally promote Russian language and literature around the world.”²¹ This organization, along with The Gorchakov Fund, is funded by the Russian Federation federal budget.

This attempt by the Putin administration to preserve culture does not stop with “Russians,” but extends to “sootchestvennikii” or “compatriots” which consists of both ethnic Russians and Russian citizens.²² The GONGO named The Foundation for Supporting and Protecting the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad is an example of a government funded “NGO” that supports and promotes the interests of compatriots across the globe. While established in 2011, this organization has been involved in over two-hundred projects in forty-two countries and “...24 Centres for the Legal Support of Compatriots in 18 countries” as of 2015.²³ Since this organization, along with others, was created during the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev, it is important to note that although Vladimir Putin was not in office, Medvedev was hand-picked by Putin to be his prime minister and likewise Putin served as prime

²¹ "ABOUT RUSSKIY MIR FOUNDATION," Р У С С К И Й М И Р , 2016, Accessed December 04, 2018, <https://ruskiymir.ru/en/fund/index.php>.

²² Vera Zakem, Paul Saunders, and Daniel Antoun, “Mobilizing Compatriots: Russia's Strategy, Tactics, and Influence in the Former Soviet Union,” CNA Corporation, November 2015, https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/DOP-2015-U-011689-1Rev.pdf, 17-18.

²³ Christian, “RUSSIAN GONGOS AND NGOS,” AALEP, October 07, 2016, <http://www.aalep.eu/russian-gongos-and-ngos>

minister to during Medvedev's administration. These organizations are still important to consider in our research because Putin still had a strong-hold on the government during these years.

Possibly the most known GONGO in Russia is a federally funded youth movement entitled, "NASHI." This government organization is filled with less-fortunate youth that are given empty promises of government advancement in return for their glorification of President Putin and public displays of xenophobia.²⁴ This group was followed by many others (ex. StopKham, All-Russian Popular Front) and is designed by Putin to adjoin the state and civil society. NASHI was especially useful to Putin in 2008 when they participated in the blocking of Mikhail Kasyanov's attempts to run for president.²⁵ By incentivizing organizations through federal funds that promote the ideas of the state, and hindering those that accept foreign funds and pursue their own interest, Putin is slowly creating a society of social groups designed to accommodate the state rather than the other way around.²⁶ The nationalist ideas of this movement are made evident by their website which has restricted viewing access to anyone without a Russian IP address, and thereby blocking all non-Russians from accessing the content of their organization.

Creating deceitful organizations is not the only way that the Putin Administration has been actively repressing civil society. Government intervention in actual NGOs has also dramatically increased in the past few years. New laws such as the "Foreign Agents Law" and the "Dima Yakovlev Law" are prime examples of President Putin attempting to restrict freedoms of expression by the Russian people. In 2012 after several anti-government protests and

²⁴ Stephen K. Wegren, ed. *Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain. Sixth ed.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015, pg. 107.

²⁵ Neil Buckley, June 2006

²⁶ Stephen K. Wegren, ed. 2015

demonstrations by the Russian people, Putin attributed this civil disobedience to Western influence, media, and money coming into the country via NGOs.

The original foreign agents law that was passed in 2012 required organizations receiving money from foreign organizations to register as “foreign agents.” While this bill stigmatized organizations and created struggles for Russian journalists, the current administration was not finished. On December 16th, 2019 the “Foreign Agents Law ” was part of an amendment signed into the Administrative Violations Code by President Putin. This new law states, “...individuals who violate the law more than twice in a 12-month period will have to pay a fine of up to 10,000 rubles (\$159) for the first violation, and up to 100,000 rubles (\$1,590) or 15 days in jail for repeat violations. Organizations will be obliged to pay a penalty of up to 1 million rubles (\$15,900) for the first violation, and up to 5 million rubles (\$79,500) for subsequent violations of the law.”²⁷

These foreign agent laws impact every citizen of Russia whether they are a part of a corporation, an NGO or simply just an individual posting on Facebook.²⁸ GONGOs are receiving government support and funding to promote the ideas of the nation’s elite, while the actual civil society of Russia is deteriorating under these laws and statutes. The already fragile non-governmental organizations are being forced to shut down because their only source of

²⁷ RFE/RL, “Putin Signs Amendments Allowing Large Fines For 'Foreign Agents' Law Violations,” RadionFreeEurope Radio Liberty, December 16, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-signs-amendments-allowing-large-fines-for-foreign-agents-law-violations-/30328601.html>

²⁸ Anton Troianovski, “In Russia, an Updated Law With New Restrictions on Freedom of Speech,” The New York Times, December 2nd, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/02/world/europe/russia-foreign-agents-law.html>

funding has been restricted. Receiving funds from foreign actors has adverse effects that these organizations simply cannot afford; the exact result the Russian government wanted.

Another legislative act from the Russian State Duma under the Putin Administration which demonstrates the pattern of nationalism is the Dima Yakovlev Law. In December of 2012, Putin signed the bill which banned American families from adopting Russian children. This law was heavily protested by Americans and Russians alike as it was seen as more of a punishment for Russian orphans than for Americans. Putin's Administration claimed that this bill was to protect the Russian orphans after an incident in 2008 in which a Russian orphan died from a heart stroke in the car after being adopted by an American family. The child, Dima Yakovlev, is the namesake for the bill. Across the world individuals protested this law as the statistics show that the death rate for adopted Russian children in the U.S. was 0.3, whereas the Russian child death rate was more than twice that amount.²⁹ While something as minuscule as who can adopt a Russian orphan sounds trivial and inconsequential in the grand scheme of things, these legislative acts are small revelations that further develop my analysis into the increase of GONGOs under the Putin Administration.

From 1991 to 1999 the Russian Federation was led by Boris Yeltsin. Many have said that democracy was brought to Russia single-handedly by Yeltsin when he won Russia's first Presidential elections in June 1991. His "shock therapy" policies implemented in 1992 eliminated the savings of nearly every Russian citizen as hyperinflation swept the nation as a result. While GONGOs were not prevalent during this timeframe, the economic policies under the Yeltsin

²⁹ Mary Zelenova, "Invisible Children: Russia's Dima Yakovlev Law," NATO Association of Canada, February 1st, 2017, <http://natoassociation.ca/invisible-children-russias-dima-yakovlev-law/>

administration did contribute to the “weakness” of grassroots NGOs mentioned earlier. With hardly enough money to keep their own families alive, financially supporting an organization was out of the picture. This scenario would set the foundation of NGOs requiring government assistance to survive thereby leading to the eventual emergence of GONGOs.³⁰

As discussed earlier, Putin’s inheritance of an unstable nation made his tight grasp easy to obtain. With nearly every aspect of the political and economic systems up-in-the-air, Putin had a power that few leaders are so easily given. On May 13, 2000, Putin began putting out decrees that would “strengthen vertical power.”³¹ Most of these decrees consisted of elected parliament members being replaced by appointed members. This form of control allowed Putin to keep his people in positions of power, while eliminating opposing ideas. Before Putin’s re-election in 2004, he placed a law into effect which made becoming a presidential candidate extensively more difficult. Many organizations, in and out of Russia, documented violations that occurred during the actual election which increasingly tilted the scales in favor of Putin’s candidacy.³²

Putin’s stronghold on Russia could have been from the weak foundation left by Yeltsin, however it could also be a result of the historical patriarchal system Russian’s have relied on for centuries. Leaders are not just figure heads in Russia, rather they are all-encompassing idols that are seen as masters, caregivers, teachers, and fathers. The monarchist Vasili Breev described this idolist patriarchy saying, “The people need a hero, a saint — General Skobelev, Feodor Kuzmich, Ivan the Terrible — they are all alike to them. And the more remote, the more vague, the less accessible the hero, the more freedom for the imagination ... There must be a ‘Once upon

³⁰ Yeltsin-Father of Democracy? <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/yeltsin-father-democracy/>

³¹ Masha Gessen, 2012.

³² Masha Gessen, 2012.

a time there lived' about it — something of the fairy tale. Not a God in heaven, but here, on our dismal earth. Someone of great wisdom and monstrous power.”³³

The Stalin leader style of consolidating power and rallying support came from propaganda pieces that depict Stalin as a military hero who protects the Soviet Union from the enemy. Putin could simply be reforming propaganda from the Soviet Union into more strategic tools such as GONGOs. Instead of posters that portray Putin as the good guy fighting the enemy, the Putin administration has organizations that seem to be controlled by regular civilians, when in reality they are operated by the government. A poster showing Stalin winning against Germany, or an organization that plasters Putin's name all over town in support of his laws and seemingly never-ending presidential terms. President Putin was raised in the Soviet era and could have seen the vacuum created when the Soviet Union fell and he is now attempting to fill it.

Conclusion

Finally, this section will combine the elements of our analysis and will present a conclusion that either confirms or denies my hypothesis. Looking at the creation of GONGOs as Putin's rational choice as a way of consolidating power and promoting Russian culture, several decisions, events, and decrees made by Putin can support this hypothesis. Every GONGO (that this thesis analyzed and is recognised as a GONGO under the Russian Federation) is a way of rebuking foreign entities, as well as promoting Putin's power and/or Russian culture.

³³ Vasilii Breev, as quoted by Gor'kii in Michael Cherniavsky, *Tsar and people: studies in Russian myths*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1961, p. 221.

The idea that Russia's historical reliance on a patriarchal figure has led to the emergence of GONGOs reemerging under the Putin administration should not be ignored. Perhaps GONGOs are increasing at alarming rates in Russia because the propaganda is not enough in today's time. While GONGOs are a more sophisticated version of posters and statues, these deceitful organizations are being revealed more and more every day. The more that are revealed, the more that will need to be created to keep up. However, once foreign entities become too skeptical of Russian NGOs, the entire civil-society could lose trust in any form of the Russian government leading to full declaration of an authoritarian system.

Just recently in March 2020, Russia's upper house of Parliament approved an amendment to the Russian constitution which would reset the presidential terms if Putin chooses to run again in 2024. President Putin endorsed this amendment change which would allow him to potentially stay in power until 2036.³⁴ Putin's endorsement of this constitutional amendment makes his motives fairly clear. Putin has no interest in stepping down, instead he fully intends on staying in power as long as he can. With his approval rating at an all time low of 39 percent, it can be expected that more GONGOs will arise to rally support during election periods.³⁵

While this thesis contains no segment in which an interview with president Putin takes place, it can be concluded from the analysis of GONGOs, policies, laws, and other events occurring under the Putin administration that my hypothesis can be confirmed, at least partially.

³⁴ Anton Troianovski, "A New 'Emperor': Russia Girds for 16 More Years of Putin," The New York Times, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/world/europe/russia-putin.html>

³⁵ Tom Balmforth, "Russia's trust in Putin falls to six-year low despite high approval rating: pollster," Reuters, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-trust/russias-trust-in-putin-falls-to-six-year-low-despite-high-approval-rating-pollster-idUSKBN2062GQ>

Everyone of Putin's decisions analyzed in this thesis can be attributed to some form of power consolidation resulting. It can be concluded from the above analysis that GONGOs are increasingly resurfacing under the Putin Administration because the current administration is using them as tools that can be likened to propaganda during the Soviet-era. From organizations that promote Russian culture and language, to pro-Putin movement groups, to laws that fine organizations for accepting foreign funds. All of the outcomes that ensue from these happenings can only be attributed to a rational choice by the man who benefits from them the most.

This thesis only scratches the surface of research to be done on GONGOs in Russia. As more GONGOs are revealed in the coming years, and as new laws, policies, and world events occur, a new hypothesis could be confirmed. With the current constitutional amendment on the table and potentially another 16 years of Putin's reign, the amount of data and information that can be added to this thesis is insurmountable.

Furthermore, the current research on GONGOs globally is limited. Further research could analyze GONGOs in other states separately, or could compare and contrast GONGOs in Russia. Perhaps new information on this topic could be unveiled when looking at other state's GONGOs. Also, further comparison could identify the potential of Russia becoming fully authoritarian within the next few years. All of these potential research ideas would work to better capture an idea of what is really happening behind the scenes in the Russian Federation's government.

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