

# Introduction: Democracy, Gender and Citizenship in Post-communist Russia

One of the great innovations of the twentieth century was the expansion of the modern welfare state. Social welfare policies may include the provision of old-age pensions, unemployment benefits, universal education, and child care support. While states varied a great deal in the kinds of programmes that they established, the notion of the provider state was associated with the peace and prosperity of the post-World War II era. Historically, the expansion of the welfare state was closely linked to the notion of increased democratic participation.<sup>1</sup> In the West, political inclusion of citizens led to demands for state measures to promote social equality.<sup>2</sup> In the twenty-first century, citizen groups increasingly demand not just a 'safety net' to tide them over in times of hardship, but also proactive forms of social inclusion. These supports include assistance for the integration of ethnic and religious minorities, equal access for gays and lesbians, and accommodation for people with disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

The legitimacy of a regime, and the survival of leaders, may depend on the adequacy of the programmes that it provides to serve citizens' needs. Today, a crisis of social welfare can cause mass social protest, can destabilize a regime, topple a ruling government, or lead to a constitutional challenge. Following the financial crisis of 2008, countries such as Ireland and Greece experienced political crises when they adopted strict financial austerity programs, under pressure from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund. The protests against the stabilization packages focussed primarily on the negative impact that spending cuts would have on existing welfare state programmes.<sup>4</sup> In January 2011, the Egyptian president fell when citizens went to the streets to hold the regime responsible for unchecked inflation. Subsequent to the Egyptian events, a wave of unrest in the Middle East and North Africa has renewed the debate, raised by Samuel Huntington in the 1960s,<sup>5</sup>

about the political risks that a state incurs when low living standards, increasing education, and unemployment coincide.<sup>6</sup> Social welfare measures sometimes follow outbreaks of riots, when governments seek to pacify populations by improving living standards.<sup>7</sup> A major social policy change (such as U.S. President Barack Obama's health care initiative) can evoke discontent in some members of society. In the United States, backlash against the health care reform arguably contributed to the growth of the extreme right 'Tea Party' movement.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, major expansions of social welfare programs can greatly increase a government's popularity. President Lula de Silva in Brazil became known as one of the most successful politicians in Brazil's history after achieving a reform which substantially increased social benefits for low-income citizens.<sup>9</sup>

Conversely, the *absence* of social welfare reform can be politically costly, if citizens hold governments responsible for a failure to act. In 2003, China came under international scrutiny when the unusually contagious severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) virus began to spread around the globe; critics questioned whether China's closed political system had affected its ability to share information about the disease in a timely way.<sup>10</sup> In France in 2003, when a large number of senior citizens died during a summer heat wave, the ensuing public debate prompted an official inquiry in the French parliament.<sup>11</sup> Forty years ago, Ted Robert Gurr argued that when citizens perceive 'relative deprivation' – if they fear that their standard of living is declining while other groups are doing well – then the likelihood of revolution increases.<sup>12</sup> Yet although considerable research has been done on the impact of democracy on social welfare systems (as will be discussed below), we still have a great deal to learn about the impact of social welfare crises on democratic consolidation.

Russia provides an excellent case for an examination of the causal links between social welfare, social discontent, and regime change. Russia was the centre of the twentieth century's most influential social revolution, in 1917. V.I. Lenin's Bolshevik Party rose to power on the crest of mass discontent with the autocratic Tsarist regime, under which most Russians lived in dire poverty. Lenin's new Soviet order promised a more equitable and humane state social welfare system, although it took many decades for it to even begin to deliver on its promises. From 1987 to 1999, Russia experienced 12 years of democratization, initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev, the General Secretary of Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In the late 1980s, Gorbachev's perestroika reforms faltered, in part because of worsening living standards and subnational

republics' demands for greater autonomy, including the ability to social welfare measures suited to their own particular needs.<sup>13</sup>

After the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991, Russia's post-communist market reform process proved to be shaky, but the basic principles of liberal democracy were generally upheld during President Boris Yeltsin's presidency. The country's social welfare system, already weakened in the Soviet Union's final years, emerged as a casualty of the country's economic crisis and the intensifying political polarization of the 1990s. Yet few experts have pointed to social welfare as an issue directly contributing to Russia's democratic reversal. In 2000, Vladimir Putin coasted to victory as post-communist Russia's second elected president, owing his electoral success in part to the claim to have restored the predictable delivery and regular indexation of social benefits and pensions. The political system became more restrictive under Putin's presidency (2000–2008). However, in 2005, Putin found confidence in his own regime shaken when thousands of Russians took to the streets to protest an unpopular 'monetization' reform, which replaced many service-based social benefits with cash payments. In 2006, Putin introduced a costly pronatalist policy reform, which shifted the emphasis of social policy from individualism to promoting a patriotic ideal of motherhood, a policy innovation which had profound implications for the politics of gender relations.

Why did democracy falter in Russia from 2000 onwards after over ten years of pluralism? Why did Russia's social welfare reforms veer abruptly from neo-liberalism to state-imposed nationalism? How did these shifts affect the gender equality once claimed by socialism? These three questions are intricately related: the question of post-communist social welfare is at the forefront of our understanding of democracy. This study examines the role of social welfare in the Russian political discourse on democratization, from 1990 to the present. Social welfare and democratization are sequentially linked; the social welfare crisis preceded the decline of liberal, electoral democracy. It will be hypothesized that debate on social welfare actually contributed to the unravelling of democracy, revealing the limitations of liberalism and the failures of the state.

## Russian democratization

Western scholars have pondered the setbacks that have occurred in Russian democracy since the accession of Vladimir Putin to power in 1999–2000. Experts present various reasons for the democratic reversal, among them Putin's personal lack of sympathy for liberalism;<sup>14</sup> a natural

resource-based economy with a narrow economic elite;<sup>15</sup> and a broad-based disenchantment with the West.<sup>16</sup> Some analysts have pointed to the mistakes and divisions in the democratic camp as forces fragmenting democracy.<sup>17</sup> Others argue that democracy is poorly suited to a weak state under conditions of economic decline; Vladimir Popov, for example, argued that a strengthened Russian state enabled a degree of economic recovery to take place.<sup>18</sup> One prominent argument posited that Putin, and the political party United Russia, sought to legitimize increased authoritarianism by claiming that a more controlled state would improve living standards.<sup>19</sup> Did Putin's methods create a stronger state, better able to rule in the interests of citizens? The question provoked a strong debate.

Russia can be described as a 'hybrid regime', somewhere between democracy and authoritarianism. Hybrid regimes have recently been recognized as a political category in their own right.<sup>20</sup> These hybrid regimes may be described as sites of incomplete democratization.<sup>21</sup> Yet we still have much to learn about why hybrid regimes are so varied, and why an individual hybrid regime adopts the particular configuration that it does. Furthermore, although it is quite widely accepted that Putin successfully harnessed popular disillusionment with the post-communist transition,<sup>22</sup> we still know very little about how this process unfolded over time.

This study will examine political discourse on social welfare in order to reveal the way in which the post-communist political arena gradually came to downplay liberal ideals and embrace nationalist ones. Social welfare policies, insofar as they redistribute resources and provide basic services to all citizens, require a strong state. Therefore, social welfare can reveal a great deal about a state's ability to respond to change. Although a substantial body of scholarly work has pointed to the institutional weaknesses of the Russian post-communist state,<sup>23</sup> democratization and state failure tend to be examined as separate subjects. As Martin Horak argued, the literature on democratic transition has not sufficiently linked democratization with the quality of post-communist reforms. Horak asserted that we should include effective and inclusive policymaking among our criteria for successful democratic consolidation.<sup>24</sup> Social welfare is an appropriate choice of focus for examining the relationship between these variables, because social welfare connects notions of citizenship and policy outcomes.

### **Citizens, social welfare, and the state**

States vary substantially in the degree and type of welfare programs that they provide.<sup>25</sup> Welfare states have been a key subject of feminist

research. Policies that take women's needs into account, such as affordable day care and generous maternity leaves, enable women to participate in society as full citizens. On the other hand, when policies are oriented towards a single full-time wage earner (who is assumed to be a male supporting his family), women can be left at a disadvantage.<sup>26</sup> As Mary Daly and Katherine Rake argue, when evaluating social welfare systems, we should look for not just how reforms have affected women, but whether reforms change relationships between men and women, and the degree of leverage that women have in spousal relationships.<sup>27</sup> Despite the variation in states' abilities to realize gender equality, the postwar order in the West enabled the formation of a rough consensus that universal social welfare benefits can promote equal opportunity, can provide security in hard times, and can create a more productive workforce.

Yet just as the welfare state gained legitimacy in the West, capitalism undermined its assumptions. Globalization, and the influence of free-market liberal ideas, have created strong pressures on states to limit spending, including on social welfare. Recent social welfare reforms may involve spending cuts designed to enhance international competitiveness and to promote a neo-conservative ideological agenda.<sup>28</sup> In the 1990s, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank promoted the 'Washington consensus' model of a state with fewer commitments to social welfare.<sup>29</sup> However, neo-liberal reforms cannot be reduced to simple economics; their success depends on consensus-building and inclusive processes.<sup>30</sup> As Paul Pierson argues, historically the expansion of social welfare programs were presented as advances in human rights. Therefore, social welfare cutbacks tend to provoke a strong backlash from civil society.<sup>31</sup>

As post-communist countries embraced liberal market reforms and gained funding from international institutions, they faced the pressure to cut back communist-era programs that were considered excessively costly.<sup>32</sup> As early as 1991, Adam Przeworski argued that social welfare was a potential stumbling block for transitional regimes, as the hardships associated with market reform could provoke discontent with democratic leadership.<sup>33</sup> There was a move to reduce universal, inclusive programs and replace them with means-tested programmes available only to the poorest people. Cutbacks in parental leave benefits and child care support often particularly affected working women.<sup>34</sup> Socially conservative governments, in countries such as Poland and Hungary, pursued policies based on a traditional view of the family, where men would earn income and women stay at home. In some countries, the renewed authority of religious institutions (such as the Catholic Church

in Poland) contributed to dramatic reversals of abortion rights.<sup>35</sup> Reformers' policies were not necessarily well received by the population. Some scholars argued that citizen discontent with declining living standards contributed to the electoral decline of market reformers in some countries.<sup>36</sup>

Like the East European countries, Russia inherited a cumbersome and strained social welfare system, and faced financial pressures to cut social welfare spending.<sup>37</sup> Linda Cook's 2007 study of Russian social welfare reform argued that contending political interests inhibited the adoption of cohesive reforms. Another scholar, Michele Rivkin-Fish, explored the way in which politics have affected reproductive rights in Russia.<sup>38</sup> But relatively little scholarly work has examined how the *details* of particular social welfare situations influenced the *content* of ideas about democracy as a whole. Mitchell Orenstein's work on comparative pension reform posited that the global diffusion of ideas had an impact on social welfare reform outcomes. His study was innovative in linking social welfare to norms and principles.<sup>39</sup> Still, much of the literature treats social welfare as a dependent variable influenced by institutional processes. By contrast, this study argues that social welfare policies can serve as an independent variable that influences not just electoral outcomes or institutions, but the very ways in which democracy is perceived and discussed. Russia's post-communist welfare state did not show a clear pattern of contraction. It embraced some aspects of international social welfare reform models, but has overall asserted the need for a uniquely Russian social safety net.<sup>40</sup> This search for authenticity rejects Western influences on policy, and assigns a key role to women and the family in restoring the power of the Russian nation.

## **Gender and social welfare under capitalism and socialism**

As feminist international relations scholars have documented, globalization is a double-edged sword for women. On the one hand, it can enable women's movements to form supportive networks of activists and can provide opportunities to participate in international institutions that promote gender equality. On the other hand, the increased competitiveness of capitalism can create pressures to cut social spending, and the opening of borders can facilitate forms of exploitation such as human trafficking.<sup>41</sup> For post-communist countries, the tensions between these opposing forces can be particularly acute. Communist systems insulated themselves from Western influences, but with the collapse of communism, these societies suddenly were opened to international contact at a

time of severe economic crisis. As Jacqui True argues, women's interests in some post-communist states were adversely affected when the expansion of global capitalism occurred simultaneously with a conservative backlash against the gender equality of the communist period.<sup>42</sup>

As the traditional caregivers of the family, women faced particular challenges and obstacles. Soon after the collapse of communism, a growing literature began to document a decline in the status of women in East European and former Soviet countries. Authors variously pointed to declines in female representation, difficulties faced by women in the labour market, and moves away from social supports for working mothers.<sup>43</sup> In varying degrees, since communism collapsed, some of the East European countries have adopted social welfare reforms that have particularly affected women, such as means-tested social assistance programs, changes to maternity and parental leave, and higher pension ages. Institutions such as the World Bank have encouraged post-communist countries to reform their social welfare systems, in ways that affect access to daycares, single mothers' benefits, and parental leaves.<sup>44</sup> In short, neo-liberal economic reforms, crumbling social welfare systems, and the unequal access to new opportunities often left women with more responsibilities at the same time that their access to resources and employment became more precarious.

Experts on post-communist Russia charted similar trends in the early stages of the transition from communism.<sup>45</sup> Within Russia, political leaders and analysts have often noted a correlation between declining women's participation and a deteriorating social safety net.<sup>46</sup> In employment, evidence suggested that women as a whole were facing lower employment and pay rates than men, and that pregnant women and mothers were becoming more vulnerable to job discrimination.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) became very active in Russia after the USSR's collapse, particularly in the arena of self-help and charitable organizations that filled a need because of the deteriorating social safety net.<sup>48</sup> Women's movements and NGOs provide an avenue for women to improve their position. Some scholars posit that these organizations have helped to advance the position of women, in gradual and modest ways.<sup>49</sup> Other scholars consider them too weak and isolated to be able to challenge prevailing trends. Julie Hemment argued that Russian women's NGOs have focused primarily on self-improvement, rather than on making demands on the state.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom argued that women's NGOs in Russia, while they are in sync with the Western funding organizations on which they depend, have minimal influence on society.<sup>51</sup>

While all of these literatures are valuable in explaining the impact of the transition on women, they have focussed primarily on either political actors or on state policies. In a different tradition, scholars such as Peggy Watson, Jacqui True, and Daina Stukuls attempted to link changing political discourses with negative outcomes for women.<sup>52</sup> One of the most relevant works of scholarly literature on the subject is Susan Gal and Gail Kligman's 2000 monograph, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*. Gal and Kligman's work played an extremely important role in influencing subsequent scholarly endeavours in two ways: first, their work called for the importance of political factors in determining the influence of policy changes that affected women. Women in post-communist countries did not become disadvantaged simply because of economic changes, but also because of conservative politics. Moreover, the authors pointed out, post-communist countries experiences showed marked diversity and variation of experience.<sup>53</sup> Second, their work opened up debate on the causal roles that gender politics played in influencing the political arena as a whole. Significantly, they observed that discussions about family policies and abortion were often metaphors that politicians used to depict their visions of the future of the nation.<sup>54</sup> This grasp of the significance of temporality is key to the understanding of gendered discourse. In Russia, for example, pronatalist policies were aimed at strengthening and sustaining the nation through increasing the population.

Gal and Kligman's greatest contribution was as a call for a holistic research agenda, calling for empirically based studies which engaged the concept of discourse. In this light they opened the door to allow for an understanding of unique or contrasting cases. This study provides a detailed examination of the case of Russia, but it departs from Gal and Kligman's analysis in a number of ways. In the first place, this monograph outlines a systematic methodology to link discourse programmatically with political outcomes. In the second place, it asserts that while social welfare was related to the political arena in a general sense, it also had a direct impact on the very path of democratization itself. Where Gal and Kligman's work focussed on those Central European states that had a generally Western-oriented gaze, in Russia gender was a prominent theme of an attempt to return to a more autarkic, inward-looking form of politics. Finally, because of this study's significant attention to the evolution of politics after 2000, we have the opportunity to examine how the intersection of gender, welfare, and democracy responded to events in the international environment (such as Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution' of 2004, or the global recession of 2008).

Discourse analysis will also provide insight into the *complexity* of gender relations in the post-communist context. Russia's transition from communism has been hard on men as well as women. Some scholars have noted how some women, especially among those living in rural and remote areas, have become primary breadwinners in communities where a significant portion of the male population has become affected by drink and despair.<sup>55</sup> Others note that many women became successful entrepreneurs, especially in the informal sector, and that their spouses came to depend on this income.<sup>56</sup> In some countries (and especially Russia), demographic and medical literature has documented well the high toll that the transition has taken on young and middle-aged men, as manifested in rates of alcohol abuse, stress-related disease, suicide, and involvement in violence.<sup>57</sup> Recent statistics showed that Russian men have higher rates of absenteeism from work due to illness (almost ten days a year) than women.<sup>58</sup> Research suggests that many men feel displaced when they cannot support their families. Far from being the primary breadwinners, some men contribute less than their wives to the household budget, and feel a sense of shame.<sup>59</sup> The plight of men since the collapse of communism influenced the parallel debates on democracy and social welfare. Thus, Russia has followed a particular kind of path dependency in gender relations.

## Methodology

The methodology used in this study draws on two approaches: discourse analysis and constructivism. A discourse approach recognizes that the language used, and the way in which ideas are organized on a subject, are an inherent part of politics. The ideas of Michel Foucault and others pioneered the analysis of the historical interaction of the expression of thought and the development of political arrangements.<sup>60</sup> Ideas about political change are communicated and interpreted within a pre-existing context of understandings about political life.<sup>61</sup> The present study builds upon the existing foundation of discourse-based approaches to Russian area studies. Scholars such as Joachim Zweynert and Michael Urban have charted the ways in which political disputes reflect layers of divergent assumptions and values.<sup>62</sup> Those who have applied a discourse approach to Russian politics have tended to look at subtle shifts in elite support for various ideas.<sup>63</sup> By contrast, this study tracks direct linkages between discourses and policies.

Constructivist approaches examine the process by which ideas evolve and gain political influence.<sup>64</sup> Its proponents have attempted

to explain changes in consensus, rather than to explain backlashes or disagreements.<sup>65</sup> Constructivism tends to follow particular intellectual trajectories of defined groups within a setting, over decades, in order to demonstrate how those groups' ideas become influential in a particular outcome. The reform of the welfare state is a theme that has attracted attention from constructivist scholars, for several reasons. First, ideas are deeply embedded in the whole concept of the welfare state: indeed, the welfare state is itself a set of normative assumptions.<sup>66</sup> The welfare state assumes that government can and should redistribute resources in order to promote greater equality among the citizenry. Therefore, any attempt by a political leadership to alter these government programmes radically will inevitably raise questions about that leadership's commitment to long-established values. Second, reform of the welfare state has been one of the most controversial and visible reform efforts undertaken by advanced industrial states since the 1980s. Welfare state cutbacks have often been associated with privatization and de-regulation, and linked discursively to an underlying rationale of strengthening capitalism.<sup>67</sup> Finally, welfare state reform is an obvious area of scholarly interest because it has been very much associated with the ascendance of neoliberalism,<sup>68</sup> a set of ideas which provoked critique from within the constructivist school of political studies.

Through studies in welfare state reform, scholars have contributed important insights to the role that ideas play in politics. As Vivien Schmidt points out, welfare state reform has provoked much scholarly attention because of its inherent empirical interest: many states have attempted it, but the results of their policymaking efforts are very mixed. She argues consequently that the effective use of ideas and discourses are a key variable that contribute to the successful implementation of welfare reform. Narratives that incorporate parsimonious diagnoses of existing problems with proposed solutions are important assets in achieving policy transformations, especially when these narratives appeal to established values.<sup>69</sup> By arguing (possibly spuriously) that welfare state programmes have heavy net costs and discourage individual initiative, leaders may seek to convince voters to accept welfare reforms which may reduce some citizens' access to benefits.<sup>70</sup> But how can the individual citizen be convinced that such reforms will benefit him or her in the long run? It is, as Schmidt points out, counterintuitive to argue that reducing the welfare state is in citizens' best interest, so persuasive communication strategies are important in overcoming potential opposition.<sup>71</sup> Constructivist scholars have also contributed to our understanding of the limitations of the prevalent notion of the welfare state. For example,

in emphasizing government spending and income-support programs, welfare states have at times been slow to adopt programs to encourage social inclusion of disadvantaged groups, or to promote gender equality in the workplace.<sup>72</sup>

As Shari Berman argues, constructivism needs to consider the circumstances in which established tenets are rejected, as well as those in which new ideas become entrenched.<sup>73</sup> Post-communist Russia is a subject of obvious importance to constructivists, because of the apparent suddenness with which ideas have been embraced and discarded. By the time Vladimir Putin began his second term as president in 2004, the once-popular concept of liberal democracy seemed almost as unfashionable as communism was in 1991. This study offers a number of innovations to the constructivist approach to social welfare. Rather than concentrating on a single set of ideas (such as liberalism), the work identifies several competing discourses in the Russian political arena in the 1990s. While one discourse, that of moderate statist nationalism became dominant, it never became truly hegemonic; alternative perspectives, such as feminism, continued to be voiced. In addition, while much of the literature on welfare reform ideas focuses on stable liberal democracies, this study examines the role that social policy debate played within a country undergoing a 20-year process of regime change. As Russia moved between democratization and de-democratization, the range and quality of political debate varied substantially over time. Finally, the Russian case serves to remind us that within a discourse, the message uttered by a political actor is not necessarily the same message that is absorbed by the audience. While Vladimir Putin's leadership sought to promote a particular vision of social policy in order to increase the regime's legitimacy, the citizenry showed in some contexts that they were developing their own interpretations of their social rights, which did not necessarily coincide with those of the leadership.

Constructivist and discourse approaches may invite questions about how the researcher decides how to interpret, how to select, and how to distinguish influential discourses from marginal ones.<sup>74</sup> As Anna Leander argues, the discourse analyst can sharpen her method simply by committing to wisdom, diligence, and conscientiousness in the pursuit of her research.<sup>75</sup> This emphasis on the individual researcher may not however convince area studies scholars, whose traditional embrace of empirical research is often accompanied by a commitment to more conventional research standards. Although a study of discourse is more art than science, it is fully possible to use a systematic approach and to articulate it in a transparent manner. This study undertakes a systematic

analysis of social welfare legislation in Russia between 1991 and 2009. Using Foucault's term, this study tracks the 'genealogy'<sup>76</sup> of pieces of social welfare legislation. The author followed the progress of draft laws through the State Duma (the lower house of the Russian parliament, or Federal Assembly, as well as its predecessor until 1993, the Supreme Soviet). The author considered the tone of debate, the formulation of arguments, and the ultimate outcome. Up until 2003, the Duma was elected under relatively democratic conditions, and no one political party had a majority in the legislature. Even after 2003, when the political party United Russia gained prominence, the Duma was still a lively body that featured active debates from a variety of political perspectives. Duma debates have followed a consistent format throughout the post-Soviet period, and follow formal conventions. Full transcripts are available on the Duma's website. This makes them a transparent, cohesive, and complete resource. Furthermore, parliamentary speech is public and interactive; deputies speak in dialogue with each other. Speakers use language to try to persuade and to refute. Finally, parliamentary records are a source that explicitly, and in real-time, link debates to outcomes. In this study, the researcher found cases of successful legislation, but also abandoned and defeated bills. Sometimes, a draft law is dormant for years without being officially abandoned. The stenographic records of the Duma provide a clear indication of changes in parliamentary discourse, and show how ideas are exchanged between interlocutors in a public setting.

In addition to an examination of the legislative process, the study also includes broad analysis of other kinds of texts: government positions, leaders' speeches, and decrees; Constitutional Court decisions related to social welfare; media coverage, especially the newspapers *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, *Izvestiia*, *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, and *Moscow News*; scholarly and scientific publications, such as *Gosudarstvo i pravo*, *Sotsiologicheskoe issledovanie*, and *Meditinskaiia gazeta*; and 'thick journals', including *Nash sovremennik* and *Novyi mir*; and popular publications, notably the women's magazine *Rabotnitsa*. The searchable databases of the State Duma's stenographic records (<http://transcript.duma.gov.ru>), and the database of decisions of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation at the Court's Website ([www.ksrf.ru/ru/Decision/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.ksrf.ru/ru/Decision/Pages/default.aspx)) were useful tools in this research, as was the HUDOC database of the European Court of Human Rights (<http://www.echr.coe.int/echr/en/hudoc>) understood in the Russian context. Decisions of the Constitutional and Supreme Courts were useful sources for the study because the judges' opinions were attentive to the written word

embodied in the constitution and the laws. Judicial decisions explicitly reveal the ways in which competing values and claims are ranked. Court decisions also provide insight into path dependency, in that they explicitly address the evolution of previous legislation and the cumulative experience of previous court rulings, revealing steps and patterns of logic. Finally, court decisions have a causal impact of their own, in that government is expected to use the ruling to guide its future behaviour.

A considerable number of the laws examined in this research were originally found through the 'Zakon' database of Russian legislation found at the State Duma's website (<http://ntc.duma.gov.ru/bpa/>); however, more recently, the website used for searching Russian legislation was the *Zakonodatel'stvo Rossii* website ([http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?start\\_search&fattrib=1](http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?start_search&fattrib=1)) of the official server of the Russian government (*Ofitsial'naia Rossiia*). The text of draft laws could be found at the State Duma's searchable database at <http://www.duma.gov.ru/systems/law/>. Many of the primary sources used were examined in the original Russian, especially for the main body of empirical analysis found in Chapter 2 onwards. Nonetheless, some sources in English translation were also analysed. The author's research initially focussed primarily on policy themes explicitly related to gender (such as maternity leave and child benefit policies), but over time branched outwards to consider the a broader context of social welfare as it was understood in the Russian context. Other sources of discourse examined in this study include academic publications, news media sources, leaders' statements and speeches, and party platforms.

To play devil's advocate, one could argue that the written word, as stated in the debates and deliberations of branches of government, is not relevant to the decision-making process in Russia. As Alena Ledeneva argued, much of the real political decision-making occurs behind closed doors, and remains unrecorded.<sup>77</sup> This is a valid critique, insofar as an important source of decisions is inaccessible to the researcher. Still, two points may be raised with respect to the present study. First, the Duma and the high courts produce a great deal of evidence based on their deliberation, and any assessment of their role in policymaking must be based on analysis of this evidence. It would be unscientific to disregard this volume of evidence simply because the Kremlin is powerful. Secondly, I believe (following Jacques Derrida) that the study of texts reveals and uncovers:<sup>78</sup> there really are few secrets in politics, as public figures inevitably give away their values, priorities, and assumptions in their speeches and documents.

## Hypotheses

The study will develop four basic theoretical propositions, all of which combine to build an argument about the path dependency of policy changes during regime transitions, and the impact that social welfare debates can have on the democratization process. The first hypothesis is that *social welfare crises contribute to the initiation of regime transitions*. Such crises produce discontent in the population, provide opportunities for challengers to mobilize support, and delegitimize old regime elites. Once underway, regime transitions create openings for reforms in social citizenship.

Part I will examine political discourses of the early post-communist transition in Russia, 1991–1997. Chapter 1 will explore how social welfare reform was first linked to democratization under Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika, while Chapter 2 will examine how these ideas changed after the Soviet Union's collapse under Boris Yeltsin's economic reform programme known as 'shock therapy'. Chapter 3 focuses on reform efforts early in the 1990s, which provided the underpinnings of gender and social welfare, including the 1995 reform of family law, and efforts to legislate on women's representation and equality in the workplace. Gender equality was reinterpreted in the post-Soviet context, as new ideas about representation, fairness, and social justice were advanced.

The second hypothesis is that *initial regime transitions can undermine social inclusivity and gender equality, because they create sudden upsets in resource allocation and generate discourses in favour of rapid, elite-centred reform*. Gender equality can evaporate unless it is deliberately prioritized in funding and specifically protected in law at early stages. In the 1990s, social welfare was on the whole neglected by the Russian government. As Weigle argues, Russia's reformist leaders of the 1990s had never initiated a national conversation on the form that citizenship would take in the new post-communist state.<sup>79</sup> This oversight had significant consequences. There was no new 'social contract', no clear forum for citizens to participate in shaping a new set of expectations for how a more minimalist state could provide for its people, no clear proposal of what would bind community together in the absence of a hegemonic Communist party. There was no coherent exploration of the new roles that charity, faith, and organized social groups could play in a newly invigorated civil society. In the absence of a concerted nation building effort, the decline in the social safety net galvanized deputies to posit that market reform had betrayed its promise to empower the autonomous individual. Part II of this study will explore how opposition

politics, especially nationalism, influenced social policy debates from 1995 to the early 2000s. Chapter 4 within this section explains the overall context of debate over the growing social crisis, which particularly engages the work's second hypothesis.

The third hypothesis is that when a transition is well underway (for example, within three to five years of the regime change), *discourses can become especially politicized*. When many laws are discussed and passed rapidly, discourses can especially shape laws by blurring the boundaries between policy areas. Oppositions can gain power and support by building powerful narratives about the cause and effect of social problems. General discourses about citizenship and society can, over time, change the assumptions, boundaries, and values of social policy, and penetrate the content of specific social policies. In the Russian parliament, the plight of the citizenry was actively debated throughout the 1990s. (It will be recalled that Russia has a semi-presidential system of government, where the parliament and the president are elected separately, and the President nominates a Prime Minister to head the government.) The 'social question' thus simmered on the back burner in a system where most attention was focused on the presidency. In the 1990s, Russia's legislature held debates about social welfare that led to reforms in family law, social insurance, pensions, and child benefits. The discussion of these reforms showed an evolution from an early liberal and social democratic approach to a more confrontational, statist approach. The opposition blamed Yeltsin's reformist leadership for the crisis in popular living standards. By the late 1990s, Communists and nationalists had seized initiative in the social welfare debate and used it to call for a state that was focussed not just on redistribution, but on social engineering. Legislative debates echoed the themes of public discourse taking place in society as a whole. Many Russians perceived the 1990s as an overwhelming crisis, in which social and economic problems worsened and where they felt a lack of control.<sup>80</sup> In this period, Russia's new parliament (Duma) was extremely active in advancing social reform proposals. Chapters 5 and 6 within Part II explore the emergence of notions of a 'crisis' of the Russian family, and its perceived impact on legislation; the debate over public morality; the criticism of the perceived role of the West and capitalism on Russian society; and the politicization of debate on the position of Russia's children.

The fourth and final hypothesis is that *authoritarian regimes may use social welfare policies to build political support, and legitimacy*. As President, Vladimir Putin used the social welfare issue as a primary justification for establishing a more authoritarian state. Social welfare debates reveal the

formation of a myth of the moral bankruptcy of the Yeltsinite order of the 1990s, which held that democratic freedoms were being abused by the powerful at the expense of society as a whole. To a certain extent, the social welfare crisis contributed to the unravelling of Russian democracy, not simply because social discontent eroded the legitimacy of democrats, but because a lack of social welfare was perceived as nullifying the rights and freedoms upon which democracy is based. The paternalist impulses of social policy initiatives under President Vladimir Putin undermined various efforts underway to promote gender equality within the state. The support that he gained from many voters and elites alike enabled him to achieve a departicipation of society that effectively limited the capacity of autonomous feminist initiatives. Women politicians tried – and failed – to gain quota representation in parliament, to gain concrete legal protections against discrimination, to defend institutions devoted to women's equality, and even to run for president. The downgrading of women's rights bodies mirrored trends in the larger society: under Putin, the political autonomy of units within the federal system declined, the status of ethnic minorities (especially migrants) became less certain, and the elderly protested cuts to their pension and veterans' benefits. Part III of this study examines the changes in social policy under Putin's presidency (2000–2008), including the adoption of pronatalist policies, conscription reform, and the overall of the social benefits system.

By the end of the 1990s, public debate broadened the scope of social crisis beyond the evidence of poverty and poor infrastructure, to include the increased prevalence of pornography, alcohol abuse, human trafficking, and child abandonment. This expansion of the boundaries of the social policy realm enabled the emergence of a discourse that blamed social problems on the predatory and exploitative behaviours of capitalists. Having framed the crisis as a moral issue, rather than an institutional problem, some opposition figures called for the state to protect women and children. The social welfare issue can be placed as part of an evolving storytelling process in Russia, akin to a legend or folktale based on the longing for a serene order within the country. The telling of the story itself, like so many bedtime stories, ends in a heroic defeat of a self-interested predator; as such, the story serves as a soothing substitute for actual institutional reform.

This study uses the notion of the 'wayward society' to describe the mythmaking process surrounding the state–society relationship in post-communist Russia. A political discourse emerged which weakened the idea of the individual citizen as an autonomous adult, and which contended that a rescuer state was needed to provide moral direction to

a drifting society. After 2000, orphaned children (*bezprizornye*) replaced pensioners as the primary symbol of the cost that the transition has had on society. According to the discourse of the 'wayward society', society as a whole was in need of correction from a quasi-parental state. Even adult citizens are regarded either as not fulfilling their parental or social duties, and where everybody needs protection from a state acting *in loco parentis*. Russian writer Valentin Rasputin actually used the phrase 'national orphanhood' to describe a Russian society abruptly cut off from its Soviet history.<sup>81</sup>

To complete the fourth hypothesis, however, *authoritarian regimes' efforts to gain legitimacy through social welfare reform are not always successful*. Such policies, if they are adopted in a top-down manner, can galvanize citizen protest and empower oppositions. Authoritarian leaders assume that strong executive control will be able to deliver social improvements, by curbing what they see as the opportunistic tendencies of legislators elected through free competition. Those assumptions, though, may downplay the value of citizen consultation and representation, which is of particular importance when considering social welfare reform. Authoritarian regimes' failings in social welfare can contribute to opposition narratives calling for more inclusive reform. The fourth and final section of the study will focus on the hidden sources of grassroots-based social inclusion in Russia, examining how citizens have protested social welfare cutbacks, especially in Russia's highest courts. Under Dmitry Medvedev's presidency (2008–2012), Russia's official rhetoric on social welfare became more inclusive,<sup>82</sup> but the rhetoric was not matched by policy changes consistent with democratic citizenship. The fourth and final section of this study will focus on the hidden sources of grassroots-based social inclusion in Russia, examining how citizens have protested social welfare cutbacks, especially in Russia's highest courts. We will learn from the Russian case whether it is possible to put the democratic and market reforms of the 1990s into reverse, to cherry-pick only those aspects of capitalism which do not threaten the entrenched authorities while citizenship rights of women weaken. This study will put gender into the forefront of the analysis of democratization.