

**BABES IN PARTYLAND:**  
**THE RIDDLE OF PARTISANSHIP IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA**

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In the mass politics of democratic systems, the twentieth century was the century of the political party. Once a parochial organizational form confined to a dozen or so countries, after 1900 the type spread across the globe with seemingly irresistible force, and hand in hand with expansion of the franchise. The development of parties, Maurice Duverger could write with confidence at mid-century, is bound up with that of democracy.<sup>1</sup> In the same vein, Leon D. Epstein could pronounce it a waste of time to wonder whether democracies can get by without parties: At the level of empirical analysis, one can rest content with the view that, so far, parties have developed in every democratic nation as mediators between societal interests and the state.<sup>2</sup> In most of the established democracies most of the time, parties have recruited potential leaders, orchestrated their campaigns for public office, and to some extent coordinated their representative activities in government.

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<sup>1</sup>Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., trans. Barbara and Robert North (London: Methuen, 1964), p. xxiii; originally published in France in 1951.

<sup>2</sup>Leon D. Epstein, *Political Parties in Western Democracies* (New York: Praeger, 1967), pp. 13-14.

Lately there has been much debate about the possible decline or even the crisis of political parties in the entrenched liberal democracies. According to some analysts, gains in communications and fund-raising technology that allow ambitious candidates for election to bypass party machinery, combined with the greater independence and cynicism of affluent and well-educated citizens, are undermining parties and threatening to render them obsolete. The case is not yet a compelling one for political elites, since few insurgent politicians come to mind who have not tried sooner or later to get their hands on an established party or, like a Ross Perot or a Preston Manning, to found a party vehicle of their own at the fringes. For rank-and-file voters, the most the proponents of the decline-of-parties thesis can come up with are signs of a limited decrease in their psychic ties to the parties (which in the United States apparently halted in the 1980s), a limited increase in citizens' volatility at the polls, and a limited trend toward the detachment of their partisan affiliations from their issue positions.<sup>3</sup> In short, reports of the impending demise of parties in the older democracies seem sorely exaggerated, although the jury may still be out on their ultimate fate.

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<sup>3</sup>A convenient summary for the United States is Martin P. Wattenberg, *The Decline of American Political Parties, 1952-1992* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, rev. ed. 1994). For the contrary view, see John H. Aldrich, *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Party Politics in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). A more dramatic but also a less common phenomenon is the extinction or dramatic shrinkage of specific parties, such as the Christian Democrats in Italy or the Progressive Conservatives in Canada.

In new democracies like those that came into being in the former Soviet Union in the 1990s, the issue is not whether parties are an endangered species but whether they will *take root in the first place*. The crux of the matter is not sheer numbers or nameplates, since Russia and its neighbors in Eastern Europe and Eurasia have already demonstrated that they are fertile breeding grounds for political parties and quasi-parties. One hundred and thirty-nine party and party-like organizations were officially registered with regulatory agencies and entitled to nominate candidates for the Russian State Duma this past fall; twenty-six organizations ended up on the party-list ballot on December 19, 1999, and six of them crossed the 5 percent threshold for entry into the Duma. The fundamental question is about the quality of the parties= contribution to political life rather than about their quantity. And on this score experience teaches that appearance and reality may diverge. Duverger on his watch drew a provocative distinction between modern countries, where Athe rise of parties and especially of working-class parties has alone made possible any real and active cooperation by the whole people in political affairs,@ and developing countries Awhere the standard of living and education of the people are still much inferior@ and where parties, if they exist at all, are hollow shells that mimic the genuine article for sinister purposes: AHere parties are formal in character: rival factions struggle for power, using the voters as a soft dough to be kneaded as they will; corruption develops and the privileged classes take advantage of the situation to prolong their control.@<sup>4</sup>

Using data about contemporary Russia as my springboard, I would like to ask which scenario best fits the post-Communist protodemocracies. Michael McFaul=s paper at our conference deals with

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<sup>4</sup>Duverger, *Political Parties*, p. 425.

the leadership and organization of Russian parties. My focus is on the complementary theme of the response of individual citizens to the parties. In particular, I am curious about Russians' sense of attachment to them, about the difference partisanship may make for citizen behavior and the consolidation of democracy, and about the trend over time in this regard.

### **MODES OF ATTACHMENT**

The academics, officials, and taxi drivers with whom I talk politics in Moscow seldom have a kind word to say about Russia's political parties. This is most pronouncedly so when the conversation swings to parties in the aggregate. Afforded the chance, many of my friends will dismiss them as nuisances beneath the attention of sophisticated people such as themselves. There is plenty of survey evidence to back up the anecdotal evidence. In droves, Russians tell interviewers they distrust the parties in general and are skeptical of the benefits of multi-party competition. They are all but unanimous on one point, namely, their impatience with the numerical proliferation of parties. Eighty-eight percent of citizens interrogated by a survey team fielded by Michael McFaul, Polina Kozyreva, Mikhail Kosolapov, and myself during the 1999 Duma campaign agreed with the statement that Russia has too many parties. This is up from the 75 percent who voiced the same view in a voter poll organized by Kozyreva, Kosolapov, William Zimmerman, and me after the presidential election of mid-1996.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>The 1999 survey data are not yet fully cleaned. The 1996 data were collected during a three-wave panel survey that began in November-December 1995. Results of that project are reported in Timothy J. Colton, *Transitional Citizens: Voters and What Influences Them in the New Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, forthcoming May 2000), chap. 4. In the 1996 survey 10 percent of respondents said they completely distrusted Russia's parties and 44 percent said they completely distrusted them; only 17 percent expressed any degree of trust. In the first wave of the

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survey, in November-December 1995, 36 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, **A**Competition among various political parties makes our system stronger,@ while 29 percent agreed and 35 percent did not know or were indifferent to the statement.

When they take aim at specific parties, however, Russians are not nearly so censorious as when they are opining about the party system. In the survey interview setting, most will give a broad spectrum of evaluative responses to questions that touch on concrete political parties, and typically will say they think well of one or two of the parties. And in real life, it must not be overlooked, a majority of Russians have turned out to vote for someone or other in three post-Soviet parliamentary elections which have been marshaled principally by parties: the participation rate was 54 percent in 1993, 64 percent in 1995, and 60 percent in 1999.

Is there more to popular interaction with Russian parties than this? In the West, of course, political scientists have made out a whole lot more. Pivotal to fifty years of electoral research in the United States, Western Europe, and by now a host of other countries has been the concept of party identification.<sup>6</sup> Most U.S. citizens, it was claimed in the *locus classicus* of the theory, *The American Voter*, harbor a psychological identification with a political party. A bond the authors rephrased variously as an affective attachment, affective orientation, allegiance, loyalty, or commitment to it. For those who possess this affinity for one of the parties, they asserted, the strength and direction of party identification are facts of central importance in accounting for attitude and behavior.<sup>7</sup> The effects on behavior could be direct or indirect, channeled through other attitudes: Identification with a party raises a perceptual screen through which the individual tends to see what is favorable to his partisan orientation. The stronger the party bond, the more exaggerated the process of selection and perceptual distortion will be.<sup>8</sup> *The American Voter*, it should be added, did not restrict the influence of party

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<sup>6</sup> Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960), pp. 121, 133.

identification to the realm of electoral choice. In a desultory discussion, the authors documented a strong correlation between identification and subjective engagement in the political process: *A*the stronger the individual's sense of attachment to one of the parties, the greater his psychological involvement in political affairs.<sup>7</sup> Enmeshed in a national election campaign, partisans were more curious about the event, more viscerally concerned about its consequences, and more knowledgeable about it than independents.

An aspect of party identification that is exceedingly relevant to new democracies is the means through which it is implanted and transmitted. Angus Campbell and his *American Voter* colleagues unflinchingly attributed identification to childhood and adolescent socialization, arguing that individuals normally adopt the identity of their parents, especially when their parents had been politically active *C* with the interesting exception of families where father and mother subscribed to different parties, in which case identification among the offspring was up for grabs. Campbell et al., not going so far as to eliminate the possibility of change, typified party attachments as *A*firm but not immovable.<sup>8</sup> But they believed that a wholesale reworking of the partisan landscape would be a rare thing: *A*Our surveys force us to the conclusion that only an event of extraordinary intensity can arouse any significant part of the electorate to the point that its established political loyalties are shaken.<sup>8</sup> The examples cited in the book

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 148, 151. Subsequent research on American politics has found that the latitude for cross-generational change is rather greater than Campbell et al. thought *C* there were considerable shifts on account of the Vietnam War, for example *C* but the gist of the more recent work is that continuity trumps change in identification and most change in partisan identification is gradual. See in particular M. Kent Jennings and Richard G. Niemi's two books: *The Political Character of Adolescence: The Influence of Families and Schools* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), and *Generations*

were the U.S. Civil War, about which the researchers had no attitudinal data, and the New Deal, about which they had two decades-old recall information from their surveys in the 1950s.

## **PARTISANSHIP IN RUSSIA?**

It would take little effort to compose an eloquent brief for the inapplicability of the received wisdom about party identification to the at best half-built democracies of Russia and the other newly independent states. On the theoretical dimension, the main impediment to importing the concept of party identification has to do with the truncated time scale of key events. The watershed renunciation of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's legal monopoly on partisan activity did not occur until March 1990. Opposition parties C soon encompassing the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), the successor to the deposed and banned CPSU C flourished and multiplied only several years after that. The Russian parties that fought national elections in 1993, 1995, and 1999 were at most a few years old, and in some instances only a few months or even weeks old, at the time they went into political battle. So how can one speak meaningfully of an ingrained Aidentification@ with fledgling entities such as these? And what are we to do with the impossibility for most of Russia's flock of newborn parties of the transfer of partisan sentiments from generation to generation via extended socialization?

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*and Politics: A Panel Study of Young Adults and their Parents* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), and Paul Allen Beck and M. Kent Jennings, AFamily Traditions, Political Periods, and the Development of Partisan Orientation,@ *Journal of Politics*, vol. 53 (August 1991), p. 757.



On the practical dimension, the biggest obstacles to partisan attachments would seem to be the clutter of parties on the post-Soviet scene and, of a piece, the conspicuous unprofessionalism and instability of a good many of them. A handful of Russian parties persist; more often, they come and go, altering names and legal categories, or merging or splitting with fellow organizations, along the way. Electoral legislation, while now requiring preliminary registration of parties and quasi-parties (the current lead time for Duma campaigns is one year before election day), has a loophole that permits duly registered organizations to amalgamate into electoral blocs until the commencement of the campaign. The results of these metamorphoses can be baffling even for political aficionados. For example, Russia's Choice, the pro-government movement that finished second in the first Duma election, in December 1993, had by the time of the next election, two years later, restyled itself Democratic Russia's Choice and amended its status to that of an electoral bloc. By 1999 Democratic Russia's Choice, now a party, waged the Duma campaign as a partner in a conglomerate known as the Union of Rightist Forces. As another example, the Central Electoral Commission in 1999 disqualified Vladimir Zhirinovskii's LDPR (Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia) for procedural irregularities in filing its slate of candidates, only to assent days afterward in the registration of a Zhirinovskii Bloc consisting of two tiny satellites of the LDPR. The Zhirinovskii Bloc harvested 6 percent of the popular vote and was promptly seated in the new Duma as the legitimate caucus of the LDPR! Thirteen parties and quasi-parties all told disputed the 1993 Duma election. This paled before the forty-three entrants in the 1995 election (ten parties, fifteen stand-alone quasi-parties, and eighteen multi-partner electoral blocs); only eight of the forty-three had been on the ballot in 1993. In 1999 the contestants dwindled to twenty-six, but again there was much flux, as the roster included eighteen new

organizations and but eight holdovers from the forty-three players in 1995 (counting the Zhirinovskii Bloc as the equivalent of the LDPR).

Philip E. Converse and Roy Pierce commented in their elegant study of representation in Fifth Republic France that the repeated fracturing and disappearance of parties there left many identifiers in the lurch when their favorites went out of business. Even if political orphans fastened on a new object of affection, Aidentifications initiated afresh tend to intensify themselves only at slower and slower rates, the older the individual is at the time of initial adoption.@Moreover, the extreme fractionation of the French party system lowered the psychological barrier to defections undertaken voluntarily and maybe whimsically at the impetus of citizens themselves. AIt would stand to reason,@Converse and Pierce said, Athat if one political system packs ten times as many parties into a given political space as another, then one would expect cross-party changes in such a system to be somewhat easier.@<sup>9</sup> Both these points are apposite in contemporary Russia.

Serious as all of these impediments are, need they be fatal? Is the deck hopelessly stacked against the emergence of partisanship in Russia?

If we have in mind the well-buttressed, glacially changing, and tightly socialized identification patterns which *The American Voter* unearthed in the postwar United States, the answer would have to be Yes. If, though, we relax the definition and the empirical expectations somewhat, the matter is not nearly so cut and dried.

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<sup>9</sup>Philip E. Converse and Roy Pierce, *Political Representation in France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 83, 89.

It is worthy of note that Converse and Pierce, their rehearsal of the stumbling blocks notwithstanding, found partisan identification to be quite widespread in 1950s and 1960s France. In societies much less accustomed to democratic competition, such as Russia today, partisanship would in all likelihood take a looser form, but in principle it could begin to cohere at a fairly early date. The more profound partisan attachments manifested in older democracies, to say nothing of their reliable reproduction across generations, would come later, if ever. As for the here and now, let us not be too timid or purist: partisan feelings, if they are ever to take shape, have to break the surface *sometime*. In the former Soviet Union, it might be speculated, there is no better time than the present: the decade since the implosion of the Soviet regime has furnished an abundance of the events of extraordinary intensity@which *The American Voter* linked to shifts in existing partisan loyalties but which could just as well, under conditions of regime transition, stimulate the very genesis of such loyalties.

It might be objected *a priori* that only partisan attachments verifiably of long-term duration merit study in democratic politics, new or old. I do not find this position credible. A stable, decades-old partisan identity would have very different effects, and presumably more potent effects, than a nascent, barely tested attachment to a party. But this is not to say that the latter factor has to be of trivial importance.

Consider several hypothetical analogies with nonpolitical behavior. A man might buy his sweetheart a box of chocolates for Valentine's Day because he has a crush on her and deems himself obliged to advertise his passion on the occasion. He might have picked up a fancier, more expensive box if he had loved her deeply or over a prolonged period, and a year or two hence he might be giving candy to another woman. And yet, for the Valentine's Day celebration in question his behavior is

incomprehensible without knowledge of his current infatuation, regardless of other considerations. John H. Aldrich in his book *Why Parties?* refers in passing to the brand names which modern American parties display and which evoke set responses among voters.<sup>10</sup> The analogy is an intriguing one. The citizen pondering his voting options may be a little like the consumer shopping for cigarettes or diet cola, in that he may be swayed by an inchoate, partly emotional attraction to one brand or another. Again, it would be reasonable to suppose that conduct in the supermarket aisles, be it economic or political, will be more powerfully and more consistently colored by brand-name loyalty if that loyalty has resided in the consumer's consciousness for twenty or twenty-five years than if it is a year or two old. But that is not to deny that a relatively short-lived taste for a given brand, whatever its origin, may have an appreciable and indeed definitive impact.<sup>11</sup>

## MEASURES OF PARTISANSHIP

I would rather not speak for now of party identification, with its connotations of deep psychological roots and longevity, in Russia. In recent work, I have used the rubbery phrase *transitional partisanship* to characterize partisanship attachments in post-Communist politics. So long as the labels are appropriately specified and qualified, their exact wording may be more a matter of semantics than of substance.

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<sup>10</sup>Aldrich, *Why Parties?*, pp. 289-290.

<sup>11</sup>As a parent watching his second daughter progress through adolescence, I can testify with some authority to the rapidity with which rock-hard consumer preferences arise in that milieu. They may change at the drop of a hat or they may not but at the moment those preferences, plus minimal reference to parental finances, more or less dictate behavior.

Like full-fledged partisan identification in the West, transitional partisanship has at its core an autonomous, visceral sense of kinship with a political party. Unlike identification as we normally envision it in the West, in Russia, where democratic freedoms and parties are of such recent vintage, it crystallizes in the short to medium term and not in the course of a protracted political education. And, unlike the prototypical identification bond, it is vulnerable to other short-run forces and hence abnormally volatile.

I am far from the first scholar to ask about the eruption of partisan feeling in the former Soviet Union. In *How Russia Votes*, Stephen White, Richard Rose, and Ian McAllister recount an absence of party identification in Russia. They adduce an early (1993) survey to this effect in which 22 percent of respondents in fact did signal identification and say, "The result is that Russian elections do not register popular commitment to the parties that are elected."<sup>12</sup> In an article based on another dataset from 1993, William Miller, Stephen White, and Paul Heywood state that only about 20 percent of Russians and 14 percent of Ukrainians next door, questioned around the same time, had party attachments. This dearth they attribute to the lengthy dominance of the CPSU, which left voters in the former Soviet Union peculiarly allergic to the idea of committing themselves to any party.<sup>13</sup> Geoffrey

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<sup>12</sup>Stephen White, Richard Rose, and Ian McAllister, *How Russia Votes* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1997), p. 137.

<sup>13</sup>William L. Miller, Stephen White, and Paul Heywood, "Twenty-Five Days To Go: Measuring and Interpreting the Trends in Public Opinion During the 1993 Russian Election Campaign," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 60 (Spring 1996), p. 124. Related surveys at around the same time found 38 percent of citizens showing identification in the Czech Republic, 33 percent in Slovakia, and 28 percent in Hungary. See also William L. Miller, Stephen White, and Paul Heywood, *Values and Political*

Evans and Stephen Whitefield report on surveys conducted in 1993-1994 in Russia and seven ex-Communist countries nearby. Thirteen percent of their Russian respondents interviewed in the summer of 1993 gave answers conveying a party identification or a party attachment. This was the least of any of the countries; Lithuania led with 50 percent.<sup>14</sup> But Arthur H. Miller and his associates from the University of Iowa, quarrying more recent data, come to a much more upbeat assessment. They found that about half of Russians, 60 percent of Lithuanians, and 30 percent of Ukrainians had a party identification in the spring of 1995. By the beginning of 1997, the partisan portion in those three countries was up to 61 percent, signifying a rapid rise in partisanship.<sup>15</sup>

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*Change in Postcommunist Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 411.

<sup>14</sup>Geoffrey Evans and Stephen Whitefield, 'The Politics and Economics of Democratic Commitment: Support for Democracy in Transition Societies,' *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 25 (October 1995), pp. 499-500.

<sup>15</sup>Arthur H. Miller, Gwyn Erb, William M. Reisinger, and Vicki L. Hesli, 'Emerging Party Systems in Post-Soviet Societies: Fact or Fiction,' Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology, July 1996; Arthur H. Miller, William M. Reisinger, and Vicki L. Hesli, 'Leader Popularity and Party Development in Post-Soviet Russia,' in Matthew Wyman, Stephen White, and Sarah Oates, eds., *Elections and Voters in Post-communist Russia* (Cheltenham, U.K.: Edward Elgar, 1998), p. 103.

Chronology and question crafting need to be taken into account in interpreting these results. Russians would logically have reacted to an interrogation about parties in 1993, prior to the first multiparty election, differently than only a few years later, when organized opposition to the government was a less heretical idea and particular parties had logged some time in the limelight. White, Rose, and McAllister's question was worded as, "Do you identify with any particular political party or movement?" C phraseology which is cumbersome in Russian and probes more than would have been advisable at the time for fixity in the relationship. The question administered by Evans and Whitefield and by the Iowa team "Do you think of yourself as a supporter of any particular party?" C risks conflating psychic attachment with voting intention, with past voting practice, or with a utilitarian appraisal of a party's platform. The decision of both research groups to show respondents a card listing the parties might also have had the unwitting effect of leading the witness and elevating the ratio of affirmative responses. In surveys in many advanced Western democracies, party ID questions are qualified by terms such as "Generally speaking" or "Usually." In Russia in the early post-Soviet years, such nomenclature would have mystified respondents, inasmuch as it couches as recurrent a situation which for the bulk of the citizenry is still a novelty. Miller, White, and Heywood's lead question was worded, "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a supporter of any political party?" a formulation which probably suffers from this flaw.

I have used a slightly different battery of partisanship questions in four national surveys in the Russian Federation C in the first and last waves of a three-wave panel study of a probability sample of voters in 1995-1996; in a survey done on a consulting basis in early 1998; and in the first phase of

another multi-wave panel set up to track the parliamentary and presidential elections of 1999-2000.<sup>16</sup>

The sequence opens with the question, **A**Please tell me, is there any one among the present parties, movements, and associations about which you would say, **>**This is my party [*moya partiya*], my movement, my association?**@**The citation of **A**parties, movements, and associations**@** is a bow to the legal complexities of party and electoral politics in Russia. The possessive **A**my**@** translates into the Russian vernacular the intensity and exclusivity at the heart of partisanship without imbuing it with a false permanency. Interviewers asked persons who had given a Yes to the opening question to give the name of the organization (unprompted) and to say whether it **A**reflects your interests, views, and concerns**@** completely or partially. Finally, respondents who had replied in the negative to the first question or were unable to answer it were asked if any party, movement, or association **A**reflects your interests, views, and concerns more than the others**@** and if so to name the party.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>In the Russian survey done after the 1999 Duma election, we are using the party ID module approved by the CSES (Comparative Study of Electoral Systems) project. It begins with the query, **A**Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular political party, movement, or association?**@** **C** a nightmare to translate into Russian **C** and ends (for individuals who answered No to the lead question) with the question, **A** Is there a party to which you feel yourself a little closer than to the others?**@**

<sup>17</sup>As a check on comprehension, the first of the four surveys also asked respondents to name several of the leaders of the party with which they identified.



The series allows us to detect partisanship and to construct an ordinal scale of its strength. Post-Communist *strong partisans*, as I christen them, say there is *A*my party,<sup>18</sup> recall its name, and say it fully embodies their concerns. *Moderate partisans* have a party of *A*their<sup>19</sup> own but say it fulfills their needs only partially. *Weak partisans*, though negative on the *A*my party<sup>20</sup> question, later name a party which gratifies them *A*more than the others.<sup>21</sup> *Nonpartisans* either give straight negative responses or cannot answer.<sup>18</sup>

The distribution of partisanship in the Russian electorate, as measured by the four-point strength scale, is traced over the years 1995 to 1999 in Figure 1. The fraction of the whole who come across as partisans *C* strong, moderate, or weak *C* does fluctuate markedly.<sup>19</sup> It runs from slightly under one-third of voting-age Russians in the summer of 1996 to a shade under one-half in the autumn of 1995; incidence in 1998 and in the course of the 1999 Duma campaign falls in between the 1995 and 1996 polls. The perturbations aside, these results would seem to confirm the presence if not the ubiquity of some variety of partisan sentiment. Parties, collectively reviled, individually have struck a chord with many members of the Russian electorate.

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<sup>18</sup>Respondents who claimed to be partisans but could not name the party that was the apple of their eye, or who named more than one party, were coded as nonpartisans.

<sup>19</sup>N = 2,841 weighted cases in 1995, 2,472 weighted cases in 1996, 1,541 weighted cases in 1998, and 1,919 weighted cases in 1999. Weighting was for family size, to correct for the bias against members of larger households resulting from the Kish sampling procedure.

Figure 2 breaks down the 1999 partisans only by party of preference. As can be seen, 85 percent of all Russian partisans report an affinity for one of the half-dozen parties that cleared the 5 percent barrier in the voting for the party lists on December 19, 1999. Showing the way, as has happened in every one of the polls, is the KPRF (founded in 1993), which has the sympathy of 40 percent of the declared partisans in 1999. All non-Communist parties combined account for 60 percent of the partisan pool. Trailing the KPRF are the liberal Yabloko party, led by Grigorii Yavlinskii (founded 1993); the centrist Fatherland-All Russia coalition (assembled by Yuri Luzhkov and Yevgenii Primakov in 1998 and 1999); the pro-Kremlin Yedinstvo or Unity movement (invented on the eve of the 1999 campaign and endorsed by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin); Zhirinovskii's nationalist LDPR (1990); and the Union of Rightist Forces (founded in 1999 from a miscellany of liberal groups).

### **CAUSES OF TRANSITIONAL PARTISANSHIP**

Where do these incipient partisan allegiances come from? The orthodox social-science approach in the West would be to hunt for clues in citizens' biographies, beginning with family and parents. This approach is out of whack with the former USSR, where political socialization under Soviet auspices was the job of the single-party state, not the family. There is no evident connection between parental values and post-Soviet partisan identity, although subsequent research may tell us more. We asked Russians in the post-presidential election survey in 1996 about the frequency of discussion of political topics at home in their childhood years. Forty-eight percent said politics was never discussed in their households, 38 percent said it was discussed a little, and 5 percent said there were frequent discussions. But current-day partisanship was hardly any more commonly encountered among

individuals who had conversations about political affairs in the family kitchen often or occasionally than for individuals who never had them.<sup>20</sup>

The one officially sanctioned locus of political discussion and action in the Soviet universe was the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which had 11 million dues-paying members in Russia, and 20 million in the USSR, before its dissolution. Erstwhile CPSU membership, unlike the family nexus, is somewhat predictive of the acquisition of partisanship in the post-Soviet era. Ex-CPSU members were 23 percentage points more likely to be partisans in 1999 than persons who had never been in the ruling party. They were almost three times as apt as others (by a margin of 38 percent to 14 percent) to be KPRF partisans. This is not to reduce Russians' transitional partisanship to a simple echo of membership in the extinct CPSU. An overwhelming 81 percent of all partisans at the time of our 1999 interview--including 71 percent of all partisans of the KPRF itself--had never in their lives carried a CPSU party card.

Partisan proto-identities in Russia are most prevalent among those social groups which are overall most participatory in politics. Better-educated citizens are considerably more likely to be partisans than the poorly-educated: partisanship was 15 percentage points more common in 1999 among individuals with some higher education than among those with an elementary school diploma or less. Partisanship is most common in late middle age, peaking in the 1999 cross-section at roughly 50

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<sup>20</sup>The ratios were 33 percent scoring as strong, moderate, or weak partisans among persons who had discussed politics often in their childhood, the exact same for occasional discussions, and 30 percent for persons who had never discussed politics at home.

percent among persons born in the 1930s. And it is gender-related, as men are 10 percent more likely to be partisans than women.

Unfortunately, these background characteristics are not instructive about *why* some Russians would come to think like partisans, when so many of their compatriots are content to politically unattached. It so happens that the older and more experienced, the more highly educated, males, and erstwhile members of the CPSU show a greater proclivity than others to latch onto a party. Yet that inclination must be activated in any sociological group by a trigger or triggers coming out of the present political environment. The following are my hunches, none of them absolutely provable, about what those triggers are:

- ! For many citizens in a transitional polity, partisanship is a spontaneous accommodation to inter-party electoral competition and to the pressure to clarify one's position in preparation for the voting decision. Notice, though, that the aggregate level of partisanship in our 1998 survey, implemented when there was no national election on the horizon, stood at almost one-third of the electorate, indicating persuasively that Russians' partisanship is not a mere proxy for their voting intention.
- ! Partisanship for some persons draws on certain features of their life experience. Ex-members of the CPSU, and long-time members more than others, have a much better chance than average of identifying with a party and above all of identifying with the KPRF. In 1999 elderly former Communists in their seventies and eighties were more likely by a factor of three (62 percent to 20 percent) to be KPRF partisans than their age peers were.
- ! Partisanship may be midwived by mass communications. Showered with messages from partisan

entrepreneurs--many of them wrapped in the razzle-dazzle of television commercials--  
individuals seize on one that appeals to them and internalize it.

- ! The initiative comes from local or sectoral elites. The tractor driver on a collective farm, say, is urged by his chairman to look kindly on the KPRF or the Agrarian party. The building contractor or trader who subsists on government contracts hears only the best news about Our Home Is Russia in 1995 or Yedinstvo in 1999. The university undergraduate is impressed that her professor is running for Yabloko.
- ! Consciously or subconsciously, individuals may fear being left out or appearing antisocial or gauche if they do not have a favorite party C a bit like the impressionable youngster who feels he must root for a baseball or basketball club.
- ! Partisanship is convenient as a filter and sorter of information. Even in the United States, with its tidy two-party system, some scholars conceptualize mature party identification as an economizing device that helps people process political information at affordable cost in time and energy.<sup>21</sup> In Russia and Eastern Europe, where party systems are fluid, uncertainty is sky-high, and electoral seasoning is slight, I suspect that pseudo-identification and the locking onto political brand names that it affords have similar cognitive payoffs for not a few electors.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Voters who have difficulty handling the cacophony of varying political claims and arguments need some sort of guide in deciding how to vote . . . A standing decision to identify with one or another party may provide that guide. W. Phillips Shively, "The Nature of Party Identification: A Review of Recent Developments," in John C. Pierce and John L. Sullivan, eds., *The Electorate Reconsidered* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980), p. 227.

<sup>22</sup> The transitional environment, it has been said, is unusually full of information, and confusing information at that, given the deregulation of politics and economics . . . and . . . the absence of such

! Partisanship is molded or at a minimum reinforced by the act of voting. Among devotees of the three parties that made it into the Duma in both 1995 and 1999, continuity of opinion is apparent. Of the 1999 KPRF partisans who recalled having voted in 1995, for instance, 75 percent said they had voted for the KPRF list at the time; 62 percent of Yabloko partisans said they voted for that party in 1995; and 50 percent of LDPR partisans had sided with the LDPR in 1995.

### **EFFECTS OF TRANSITIONAL PARTISANSHIP**

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filters as class, institutions, roles, and interests to sort out environmental cues.@ Valerie Bunce and Maria Csanádi, AUncertainty in the Transition: Post-Communism in Hungary,@*East European Politics and Society*, vol. 7 (Spring 1993), p. 269.

The most straightforward effects of partisanship in Russia are on electoral choice. In the 1995 Duma election, 70 percent of declared partisans voted for the national list of the party with which they felt that camaraderie. These consistent partisans comprised almost 40 percent of the participating electorate in 1995, only 5 percent less than the nonpartisan plurality; inconsistent partisans, who voted for a party other than the one they counted as their own (usually one from the same programmatic family), constituted 16 percent. Partisan consistency in voting increased some in 1995 with the strength of the partisanship bond: from 66 percent for weak partisans, it rose to 69 percent for moderate partisans and 77 percent for strong partisans. A vote consistent with partisan self-image was more common among champions of the larger parties than of the smaller parties. Eighty-four percent of KPRF partisans voted for their party in 1995, as did 89 percent of LDPR partisans, 67 percent of partisans of Our Home Is Russia (the government party of the time), and 81 percent of Yabloko partisans. Consistency was 54 percent for advocates of the organizational midgets that missed the 5 percent cutoff.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>For the 1999 election, only data on voting intention are available right now. As of the pre-election interview, 85 percent of those self-styled KPRF partisans who planned to vote intended to for the KPRF. For the other parties that cleared the 5 percent threshold on December 19, the analogous percentages were 86 for Yedinstvo, 91 for Fatherland-All Russia, 90 for the Union of Rightist Forces, 75 for Yabloko, and 84 for the LDPR.

Multivariate analysis which isolates the electoral impact of discrete categories of explanatory variables bears out the importance of partisanship. Controlling for causally antecedent and equivalent variables,<sup>24</sup> the Russian who felt himself a partisan of one of the four major parties in 1995 ipso facto had his probability of voting for that party's national list elevated by .50 (50 percentage points) in the case of the KPRF, by about as much in the case of Our Home Is Russia, by roughly .70 in the case of Yabloko, and by almost .80 in the case of the LDPR. Only small minorities within the electorate qualified as partisans of any one of these organizations, but those who did were far more likely to vote for the said party than other citizens were.

Transitional citizens' partisanship also has implications for their political behavior over and above the vote. The most gratifying are for subjective involvement in public affairs. Much as *The American Voter* hinted at for the American electorate in the 1950s, in the Russian electorate of the 1990s partisans were better integrated with the political activities around them than nonpartisans. Figure 3 plots four measures of political interest and attentiveness in 1999 against our four-point partisanship index. Across the board, the measure of engagement rises with the strength of partisanship. Strong partisans are 26 percentage points more likely than nonpartisans to be keenly interested in the Duma election, 26 points more likely to discuss politics with their family and friends every day, 30 points more likely to

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<sup>24</sup>Effects were estimated by multinomial logit regression. The antecedent variables in gauging the effect of partisanship were social characteristics and citizen assessments of current economic and political conditions in Russia. Issue opinions were assigned to the same causal stage in the model as partisanship. See Colton, *Transitional Citizens*, chap. 4.



watch the television news daily, and, for TV viewers, 23 points more likely to say they watch political stories on the news very attentively.

In light of the uneven distribution of partisanship across the population, it is conceivable that the underlying personal characteristics of Russian partisans, and not their partisanship per se, would be the source of the participatory activity depicted in Figure 3. The regression analysis summarized in Table 1 convincingly disproves that possibility. Reduction of the span of the dependent and independent variables to the unit interval makes the coefficients comparable. As can be seen, in bivariate regressions positive outcomes for each measure of engagement **C** interest in the election, frequency of political conversations, frequency of viewing the television news, and attentiveness to political stories **C** are associated with greater strength of partisanship. When education, age group, gender, and past membership in the CPSU are introduced in the estimation, in the lower panel of Table 1, all those background variables have significant effects on most of the engagement measures, with education exerting the strongest influence. But even with the incorporation of those engagement-inducing sociological attributes, strength of partisanship continues to have a sizable impact on every indicator of political engagement. In fact, that impact is invariably *larger* in magnitude than the impact of any of the social indicators.

All of which is to say that partisanship, whatever difference it makes for voting decisions, also generates more diffuse benefits in a transitional polity. Partisanship to all appearances is good grease for the wheels of democracy in Russia and the former Soviet Union.

## **PARTISANSHIP DYNAMICS**

Time does not allow me to satisfactorily address the dynamics of partisanship in post-Soviet Russia. In earlier work,<sup>25</sup> I speculated that the difference in the aggregate level of partisanship between the 1995 and the 1996 data points in Figure 1 **C** a difference that showed up in a panel survey in which the same respondents were interviewed and reinterviewed **C** was essentially a function of the difference in political context between the Duma election, in December 1995, and the presidential election, in June-July 1996. Opinion in the Duma election was mobilized mostly by political parties; in the presidential election, in which the nonpartisan Boris Yeltsin won his second term, this was less the case. In terms of composition of the partisan segment of the population, most movement in 1995-1996 was from declared partisanship to neutral, nonpartisan territory or vice versa, as opposed to defections from one party or party family to another. If the 1995-1996 pattern holds, we should pick up a perceptible dip in total partisanship, plus some migration between categories, in the survey we will do after the forthcoming presidential election.

But to dwell on this detail may be too put too optimistic a spin on the story the data tell. A more telling comparison than the 1995-1996 comparison may be that between the aggregate levels of partisanship in the electorate uncovered in the pre-election surveys during the Duma campaigns of 1995 and 1999 (see Figure 1 again). If partisanship were developing and normalizing within Russian society, the trend over the four years ought to be upward. It is the reverse of that **C** down from 49 percent partisans in 1995 to 42 percent in 1999, when the measurement was taken in the same kind of political and electoral context as in 1995.

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

Future experience may well prove this modest decline to be a minor glitch in an otherwise smooth march toward a Westernized party system, with consciousness of party identity thoroughly disseminated among the adult population and with particular partisan identities firming up and beginning to be passed on to the younger generation through parental and other socialization mechanisms. A competing and gloomier proposition would be that the evolution of partisanship in post-Soviet Russia has seriously stalled **C** either momentarily or indefinitely **C** or even that partisan sentiment has entered onto a long-term downward trajectory.

Why might this be so? Among the factors that might hypothetically be yielding a degenerative prognosis for Russian partisanship, my prime suspects would be the parties as organizations and certain structural features of the larger political environment that are not hospitable to partisan consciousness and that give politicians incentives to treat voters as the undifferentiated **A** soft dough<sup>@</sup> Duverger warned against long ago. Especially disturbing are the following observations:

- ! Ten years into the era of partisan politics, most Russian parties **C** there are exceptions **C** are still underfunded, inefficient, and excessively personalized. Most do not make it through more than one election campaign. Most have accomplished little that would inspire loyalty or trust.
- ! Sizable minorities in the electorate, notably people with neither socialistic nor liberal values, seem susceptible to flash parties, as epitomized by the upstart Yedinstvo in 1999. Yedinstvo, patched together on the run several months before the election, won twice as many party-list votes as the Luzhkov-Primakov coalition, painstakingly built over the previous year, four times as many votes as the earnest party-building crew in Yabloko, and almost as many as the formidable KPRF.

- ! The national parties are still not much of a force in the regional politics of what has increasingly been a decentralized federation. Governors and their entourages and clients count for far more in most regions than parties.
- ! Most critically, parties are front and center in the election of the toothless State Duma but remain of secondary importance in the election of the president of Russia, the linchpin of the central government. Yeltsin stubbornly refused to organize his own party, either in his opposition phase or as master of the Kremlin. His hand-picked successor Putin, who looks like a shoo-in for this spring's election, has praised "Western-style parties" but studiously kept his distance from the existing Russian parties.

It is too soon to say if these partisanship-retarding factors will win out in the years to come over the partisanship-promoting factors that made such headway in Russia in the early and middle 1990s. If they do, some of the judgments offered in the main body of this paper will have to be reconsidered.







Table 1. Partisanship and Other Influences on Modes of Engagement in the Campaign, 1999 (OLS Regression Coefficients)<sup>a</sup>

Explanatory variable	Interest in election	Talk about politics	Watch TV news	Attentiveness to TV news
<i>Bivariate regression</i>				
Strength of partisanship <sup>b</sup>	.27**	.43**	.26**	.30**
<i>Adjusted R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.068	.083	.044	.076
<i>Multivariate regression</i>				
Education <sup>c</sup>	.16**	.27**	.17**	.23**
Age <sup>d</sup>	.07**	.05	.10**	.11**
Man <sup>e</sup>	.04**	.07**	.11**	.11**
Former member of CPSU <sup>e</sup>	.04*	.06*	.02	.05*
Strength of partisanship <sup>b</sup>	.23**	.39**	.22**	.25**
<i>Adjusted R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.101	.128	.086	.160

\*\*  $p \# .01$

\*  $p \# .05$

a. Values of all dependent and independent variables compressed to the range zero to one.

b. Four-point index (nonpartisan, weak partisan, moderate partisan, strong partisan).

c. Six-point index (illiterate or elementary, incomplete secondary, secondary, vocational, incomplete higher, higher).

d. Six-point index (eighteen to twenty-nine years, thirties, forties, fifties, sixties, and seventies and older).

e. Binary measure.