

Democracy Derailed in Russia

THE FAILURE OF OPEN POLITICS



M. STEVEN FISH

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University of California–Berkeley



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Democracy Derailed in Russia

Why has democracy failed to take root in Russia? After shedding the shackles of Soviet rule, some countries in the postcommunist region undertook lasting democratization. Yet Russia did not. Russia experienced dramatic political breakthroughs in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but it subsequently failed to maintain progress toward democracy. In this book, M. Steven Fish offers an explanation for the direction of regime change in post-Soviet Russia. Relying on cross-national comparative analysis and in-depth field research in Russia, Fish shows that Russia's failure to democratize has three causes: too much economic reliance on oil, too little economic liberalization, and too weak a national legislature. Fish's explanation challenges others that have attributed Russia's political travails to history, political culture, or "shock therapy" in economic policy. *Democracy Derailed in Russia* offers a theoretically original and empirically rigorous explanation for one of the most pressing political problems of our time.

M. Steven Fish is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of California–Berkeley. In 2000–2001 he was a Fulbright Fellow and Visiting Professor of Political Science and Sociology at the European University at St. Petersburg. He is the author of *Democracy from Scratch: Opposition and Regime in the New Russian Revolution* (1995) and a coauthor of *Postcommunism and the Theory of Democracy* (2001). He has published articles in *Comparative Political Studies*, *East European Constitutional Review*, *East European Politics and Societies*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Journal of Democracy*, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, *Slavic Review*, *World Politics*, and numerous edited volumes.

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Continues after the index

*For my wife,
Olga,
and
our magic munchkin,
Nathaniel*

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Abbreviations

(Where names and abbreviations are translated from Russian, their Russian equivalents are noted in parentheses and italics.)

ARCSP0	All-Russia Center for the Study of Public Opinion (<i>VTsIOM: Vse-Rossiiskii tsentr izucheniia obshchestvennogo mneniia</i>)
AUCCTU	All-Union Central Committee of Trade Unions (<i>VTsSPS: Vsesoiuznyi tsentral'nyi sovet profsoiuzov</i>)
CEC	Central Electoral Commission (<i>TsIK: Tsentral'naia izbiratel'naia komissiia</i>)
CELI	Cumulative Economic Liberalization Index
CPRF	Communist Party of the Russian Federation (<i>KPRF: Kommunisticheskaia Partiia Rossiiskoi Federatsii</i>)
DCR	Democratic Choice of Russia (<i>DVR: Demokraticeskii Vybor Rossii</i>)
EFI	Economic Freedom Index
ELI	Economic Liberalization Index
FH	Freedom House
FIG	Financial-Industrial Group (<i>FPG: Finansovo-promyshlennaia gruppa</i>)
FITUR	Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (<i>FNPR: Federatsiia nezavisimyykh profsoiuzov Rossii</i>)
FNS	Front for National Salvation (<i>FNS: Front natsional'nogo spaseniia</i>)
FR	Forward Russia (<i>VR: Vpered Rossiia</i>)
FSB	Federal Security Bureau (<i>FSB: Federal'naia sluzhba bezopasnosti</i>)
HDI	Human Development Index

IMF	International Monetary Fund
LDPR	Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (<i>LDPR: Liberal'naiia Demokraticheskaia Partiiia Rossii</i>)
LPS	Legislative Powers Survey
NTV	Independent Television Network (<i>NTV: Nezavisimoe televidenie</i>)
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OHR	Our Home Is Russia (<i>NDR: Nash Dom Rossiia</i>)
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PPI	Parliamentary Powers Index
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic
RUIE	Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (<i>RSPP: Rossiiskii soiuz promyshlennikov i predprinimatelei</i>)
TI	Transparency International
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
URF	Union of Right Forces (<i>SPS: Soiuz Pravykh Sil</i>)
VA	Voice and Accountability scores

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Introduction

A decade and a half after the collapse of the Soviet system, Russian democracy lies in tatters. After the spectacular political breakthroughs of the late 1980s and early 1990s, democratization slowly ground to a halt. As the 1990s wore on and the new century dawned, many of the gains of the late Soviet and early post-Soviet periods were in jeopardy. By the time of Vladimir Putin's reelection as president of Russia in 2004, Russia's experiment with open politics was over.

To be sure, Russian citizens live in a more open polity than they did during the Soviet era. They also live a freer political existence than do the inhabitants of some other lands of the former Soviet Union. Russia did undergo substantial democratization. Unlike Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, Russia did not merely slide from one form of autocratic police state to another. In contrast with Belarus and Kazakhstan, it did not swiftly revert to full-blown dictatorship after a brief opening.

Yet unlike many of its other postcommunist neighbors, Russia failed to advance to democracy. This book seeks to explain why.

The Study and Its Arguments in Context

Russia was the central entity of the Russian Empire and then the Soviet bloc. Its course of political change after the demise of communism could not be dictated by foreign powers or be driven by mechanical emulation of foreign models. Russia had the economic, bureaucratic, military, and cultural resources to make its own choices. Thus, for social scientists, Russia is the big "independent" case in the postcommunist world. It had to chart, and has charted, its own course. What is more, the fate of regime change in Russia is of immense practical significance. Russia is the core power in