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Domestic Funding for Civil Society in a Non-Democratic Context: The Example of the Presidential Grants in Russia

Yulia Skokova and Christian Fröhlich

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, growing scholarly attention has been paid to the consolidation and global spread of authoritarian and hybrid forms of state and public governance (Levitsky & Way, 2010). This, in turn, has caused increasing interest in civil society development in such regimes (e.g. Aarts & Cavatorta, 2013; Cavatorta, 2013; Giersdorf & Croissant, 2011; Lewis, 2013; Lorch & Bunk, 2017). These earlier studies argue that, in non-democratic regimes, civil society can play a positive role in

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Y. Skokova (✉)
Centre for Civic Initiatives Assessment, Institute for Applied Political Studies,
National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia
e-mail: jskokova@hse.ru

C. Fröhlich
National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia
e-mail: cfroehlich@hse.ru

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Z. Kravchenko et al. (eds.), *Resourceful Civil Society*, Palgrave Studies in Third Sector Research, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-99007-7_3

bringing about social and political change by challenging authoritarian governments (e.g. Alagappa, 2004; Arbatli & Rosenberg, 2017; Beumers et al., 2018). However, skepticism toward a civil society–democratization nexus is growing. Recent studies question the existence of a positive relationship between civil society and democratization and illuminate various ways in which civil society organizations contribute to regime legitimacy and stability (e.g. Froissart, 2014; Giersdorf & Croissant, 2011; Kawakibi, 2013; Lewis, 2013; Lorch & Bunk, 2017; Mazepus et al., 2016; Wischermann et al., 2018). Other authors have criticized "black-and-white" approaches to state–civil society relations in non-democratic regimes and have called for studying these processes as a reality of civic life (e.g. Cavatorta, 2013, p. 6). Under such regimes, with their varieties of complex state–civil society interrelations, governmental actors use institutional and regulative means in dynamic ways in their relationships with civic actors, at times coercing, at times enabling them (Huang, 2018).

Various countries with non-democratic governments shape the field of civil society by privileging organizations that provide social services while marginalizing human rights defenders and politically oriented actors (Giersdorf & Croissant, 2011; Skokova et al., 2018). Regulating access to material resources such as state funding for civil society organizations has thus become a crucial instrument for privileging and limiting certain actors of civil society. Moreover, adoption of public discourses or attachment of symbolic labels may serve to enable or restrict sources of organizational activity. However, the state itself also benefits from providing material resources to civil society organizations in that it gains symbolic success that strengthens its legitimacy. Studies show that non-democratic states do not repress civil society fully but rather partially support it, encouraging in particular those organizations concerned with the social needs of the population. Offering procurements and grants for civil society organizations also creates opportunities for states to take credit for their successful activities in this area (Lorch & Bunk, 2017). Furthermore, because non-democratic states lack developed representational structures, they often have difficulties detecting social problems and actors that threaten their status quo. In this sense, the public activities of civil society organizations can help authoritarian regimes monitor social processes and identify social needs (Lorch & Bunk, 2017; Lorentzen, 2013). Moreover, state support enables those organizations to embody, encompass, and disseminate values that align with the regime's own legitimation discourse (Lewis, 2013). As Lewis (2013) stated, "authoritarian states expend considerable resources to maintain a hegemonic discourse that both legitimizes the existing regime and also renders political alternatives politically and discursively impossible" (p. 333); civil society organizations can become bearers of an official discourse which they help to implement in the public sphere through their activities (Lewis, 2013, p. 335). In a study of Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam, for instance, Wischermann et al. (2018) found that many associations support state-propagated patriarchal gender norms.

However, in terms of studying state–civil society relations under authoritarian regime conditions, the studies have focused on only one or the other: either on organizations' welfare function or on how they support the regime's legitimacy. In this chapter, we argue that governmental support for civil society in non-democratic regimes not only bolsters its welfare function but also attempts to intertwine non-governmental welfare provision with elements of a state-led legitimation discourse. Thus, we interpret state funding as a double-edged tool utilizing civil society actors to strengthen regime stability. The state strengthens its symbolic capital in society by investing material resources in civil society activities in crucial policy areas. We focus on the question of what kind of civil society an authoritarian state wants by considering the financial aid that the state devotes to the support of civic activities. In order to do so, we study the case of Russia, where the state makes a significant effort to shape the civil society sector.

While the phenomenon of governments influencing civil society through such measures as co-opting, preferential treatment, and containment is known across regime types (e.g. Grubb & Henriksen, 2019: see also Bederson & Semenov, Chap. 7 in this volume), Russia is a profound example of non-democratic governments' employment of these measures to secure legitimacy. We agree with previous studies that argue that the Russian state employs a dual approach toward civil society (Robertson, 2011; Salamon et al., 2015; Skokova et al., 2018), dividing the field of non-governmental actors into those loyal to and those oppositional to its status quo and using various means to either support or restrict civil society organizations and individual actors. While limiting measures and their effects on Russian civil society have been well analyzed (Crotty et al., 2014; Flikke, 2018), the issue of how state support for civil society actors actually shapes the sector and how this support contributes to regime legitimacy remains understudied. Whereas co-optation of civil society organizations' successes in welfare provision is certainly a measure of securing regime legitimacy employed by many authoritarian states, the attempt to infect non-state social welfare with elements of a state-led legitimation discourse renders this process unique to the political and cultural context of a specific country. We show that, in Russia, conservative narratives about patriotism, nationalism, and militarism, among others, shape this public discourse and have become attached to public welfare.

In order to study the practice of state support for civil society organizations in Russia, we analyze the Presidential Grants Competition (PGC). This Russia-wide competition has been the largest funding institution for Russian civil society organizations since 2006. In 2016, more than 1500 organizations received grants totaling 4.148 billion rubles ($63.8 million USD, here and throughout 1 USD = 65 RUB). An annual average of 15,000 civil society organizations submit applications, which is about 7% of the total number of those operating in Russia today. However, there was until recently little accessible data on the characteristics of the civil society organizations that apply and win, on the fields of activities in which they work, and on whether their applications to the PGC appeal to values and discourses supported by the state. A web portal created in 2013 makes it possible to download and analyze the data on all submitted applications to PGC between 2013 and 2016. This unique dataset allows us to reveal the state's preferred fields of activities and to trace the imprints of a state-led official discourse about the essence of Russian society. As a result, the analysis of submitted and winning applications reveals what part of civil society the Russian state embraces as contributing to regime stability.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, a literature review discusses developments in Russian state policy toward civil society organizations since the 1990s. After initial negligence, the state began to actively build an institutional and legal framework for interaction with civil society. In doing so, it established a dual approach to civil society that prefers engagement with social problems and represses advocacy for political and human rights issues. This is supported by a state-led traditionalist–conservative discourse about Russian society. Second, the process of data extraction and the methodology behind the analysis are described. The third section provides the results of our analysis of the PGC data, showing that applications in the social sphere are strongly privileged and that reference to the traditionalist–conservative discourse raises a civil society organization's chances of winning. Finally, we discuss the contribution that our results make to the field of current and future state–civil society relations in Russia.

State–Civil Society Relations and Legitimation Discourse in Russia

State–civil society relations in Russia are very dynamic. After the Soviet Union collapsed, the meaning of the term "civil society" (*grazgdanskoe obzhchestvo*) was rarely addressed at the official state level; it was mainly used by social scientists, who understood it from a liberal perspective as "a kind of society […] based on citizens actively recognizing their civil rights and responsibilities towards the state, and each other […]" (Belokurova, 2010, p. 460). Consequently, civil society was assessed as weak or even absent in Russia (Evans et al., 2006). Indeed, during the 1990s, the Russian civil society sector was in its infancy, with a small number of active organizations and low levels of civic participation (Jakobson & Sanovich, 2010). Moreover, civil society organizations were not an object of state political interest at that time, and they subsisted primarily on funds from foreign donors who promoted their own preferred organizational models and missions (Belokurova, 2010; Evans et al., 2006; Jakobson & Sanovich, 2010; Sundstrom, 2006).

With economic growth and the rise of political centralization during most of the 2000s (Gel'man, 2015), the state reviewed its relationship to civil society issues, partially as a reaction to the color revolutions in

Eastern Europe and the Middle East (Crotty et al., 2014; Robertson, 2009). Since the 2000s, the state has gradually begun to put more effort into controlling the civil society sector (Gilbert, 2016; Jakobson & Sanovich, 2010; Salamon et al., 2015; Skokova et al., 2018). The starting point and the official turn of the state's policy toward civil society was the meeting of President Vladimir Putin and other government officials with more than 5000 civil society representatives at the so-called Civil Forum in 2001. Opening the Forum, Putin emphasized the need for partnership between the state and civil society and noted the importance of civil society organizations in solving various social problems as well as their contribution to the development of human capital. In the years to come, this vision of civil society organizations as actors performing socially significant functions would shape the general course of state policy.

By the mid-2000s, the first institutional fruits of the new state policy toward civil society appeared. The establishment of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights in 2004 and of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation one year later opened up a trend of creating different sorts of consultative entities that have "become a fad" all over Russia (Stuvøy, 2014, p. 409). Some scholars argue that consultative entities could provide civil society organizations with an opportunity for visibility and advocacy (Cook & Vinogradova, 2006; Stuvøy, 2014), but in most cases, such entities appear unable to influence the decision-making process (Evans, 2008; Fröhlich, 2012; Ljubownikow & Crotty, 2016; Richter, 2009a, 2009b). Often, consultations work for "particular, one-off cases, but do not allow any general challenge to the operation of the institutions" (Daucé, 2014, p. 245). Moreover, the councils and chambers prefer socially oriented organizations, which function as transmission belts between themselves and society, to human rights-focused and other contentious types of organizations that question their status quo (Evans, 2008; Stuvøy, 2014). With consultative bodies, the state wants simultaneously to control civil society organizations by including them in institutional structures and to use them for regime legitimation by claiming the successes of their social welfare provision for itself (Richter, 2009a). At the same time, this formal and often superficial institutional inclusion provides state actors with the opportunity to obtain feedback regarding social problems arising in the population

(Evans, 2008; Sakwa, 2010) as well as the means to solve them by co-opting the expertise of experienced civic activists (Richter, 2009a, 2009b).

In the next phase, these institutional arrangements were complemented by legal and financial measures aimed at substituting foreign funding for Russian civil society organizations. In part, this has entailed state imposition of various legal restrictions on funding provided by foreign donors. The first step toward these restrictions was made in 2006 with the implementation of amendments to the federal law "On Nongovernmental Organizations" that introduced new regulations for registration, activities, and reporting of "a branch or representative office of a foreign non-profit organization" (Crotty et al., 2014; Gilbert, 2016; Maxwell, 2006). As Crotty et al. argued, the law caused a "reduction in CSO activity and curtailment of civil society development" (2014, p. 1253). Some years later, in 2012, as a reaction to a 2011–2012 wave of anti-governmental protests, the Russian government adopted a new and restrictive law on "foreign agents" (Flikke, 2018; see also Chaps. 1 and 7 in this volume for more detail) that poses a threat to the survival of human rights organizations (Daucé, 2014; Moser & Skripchenko, 2018), environmental organizations (Matejova et al., 2018), and think tanks (Romanov & Iarskaia-Smirnova, 2015). These organizations usually have little or no access to domestic funding and depend heavily on foreign support because they carry out what is legally considered to be political activity.

Because the law is vaguely formulated and its application is inconsistent, a broad range of public activities, such as the conducting of mass opinion polls or the expression of views about state politics, can move any civil society organization with any amount of foreign funding into the searchlight of the Ministry of Justice, which may then require it to register as a "foreign agent" and display that label on all public materials. This status not only obliges registered "foreign agents" to regularly provide expensive reports but also, more importantly, undermines public trust in civil society organizations in general and complicates their cooperations with other civil society organizations, businesses, and authorities (Flikke, 2018; Skokova et al., 2018; Tysiachniouk et al., 2018). As a result, it weakens the legitimacy of civil society organizations and undermines their development (Moser & Skripchenko, 2018).

Meanwhile, the state has deliberately begun to accumulate various tools to support preferred organizational forms and activities within civil society. With the adoption of Federal Law No. 40-FZ "On Introducing Amendments to Selected Legal Acts of the Russian Federation on Support for Socially Oriented Nonprofit Organizations" in 2010, the state significantly increased financial support to civil society organizations that address social problems and function in that regard as partners of public institutions (Benevolenski & Toepler, 2017; Krasnopolskaya et al., 2015; Skokova et al., 2018). In addition to supplying financial support, the state has established incentives to support organizations working in the social sphere by providing them greater access to the welfare market. This is done mainly by stimulating the state agencies at the regional and local levels to contract civil society organizations to provide social services. For instance, in 2016, nonprofits obtained the legal status of "social service providers," which gave them the opportunity to cover their operational costs from budgetary sources. In turn, all regions must report on the percentage of social services they procure from nonprofits.

The largest state financial support program for civil society, known as the Presidential Grants Competition (PGC), was established in 2006. Initially, the competition was administered by the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation. However, in 2007, the Presidential Administration reassigned the organization of the competition, application review, and grant distribution to several non-governmental grant operators—an administrative service for which they kept 6% of the funds for themselves. PGC grant operators are usually well-known civil society organizations that have been working in their thematic field for many years (see Table 3.1). Due to their intertwinement with state institutions, almost all of them fall into the category of government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs), with the exception of *Grazhdanskoe dostoinstvo*, which distributed grants in the category of human rights. *Obshchesto "Znanie,"* the Union of Women, the Russian Union of Youth, and almost all other organizations that act as grant operators either date back to Soviet times or were established by the current Russian authorities. For instance, *Obshchesto "Znanie"* is the successor of an identically named Soviet "civic" organization which was re-established by special presidential decree in 2015. Allotting grant operation to GONGOs allows the

Table 3.1 PGC awards by grant operators and their thematic areas, 2006–2016 (in millions of RUB)

	2007	2008	2009		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Social research, including:	Institute of Public Design							Institute for Social, Economic, and Political Studies			Russian Union of Rectors 650
	60	100	100		80	60	60	110	275	422	
Historical heritage, Russian language and literature											
Education, culture, and art, including:	*Znanie* Fund			Institute of Problems of Civil Society				*Obshchestvo Znanie*			
	270	320	160		160	160	170	345	650	695	
Cultural and historical heritage, traditional values											
Humanitarian projects in CIS, Russian language and literature											
Human rights	*V podderzhku grazhdanskogo obshchestva*			*Soprotivlenie*				*Grazhdanskoe dostoinstvo*			
	135	200	170		160	160	170	200	500	528	500
Health	*Liga Zdorov'ya Natsii*					*Liga Zdorov'ya Natsii*					
	150	230				100	100	570	824	519	450
Social services, including:	National Charity Fund										
	400	400	500		320	240	260	525	674	585	
WWII heritage, support of veterans											640
Interfaith tolerance, public diplomacy											
Humanitarian projects in CIS countries											
Youth	*Gosudarsvenny* Club Fund							Russian Union of Youth			
	230	250	270		280	280	240	320	340	695	600
Public diplomacy, interethnic relations, traditional values								Institute of Problems of Civil Society			
								500	235		
Elderly people and people in difficult living conditions, including:										Union of Russian Pensioners	
										415	450
Traditional values											
Family support, family values, including:										Union of Russian Women	
										365	400
Cultural heritage											
Infrastructural support of social projects											*Pokrov* Fund 420
Rural and community development											*Perspectiva* Fund 480
Total funding (in million RUB)	1,245	1,500	1,200		1,000	1,000	1,000	2,570	3,698	4,228	4,727
Number of winners	1,224	1,120	736		451	602	585	1,237	1,278	1,392	1,579

state to maintain a high level of control over the process within PGC, on the one hand, and, on the other, to eliminate all potential risks in case of politically sensitive decisions. Although contentious human rights organizations won a few grants annually between 2013 and 2016, there are some policy areas in which civil society projects are not even symbolically supported. For instance, applications from independent nonprofits working in the field of election monitoring received minimal support ($8400) from the PGC only once, in 2014, while in the years before and after none of their project proposals were supported.

As shown in Table 3.1, the PGC system was quite stable until 2013. There were six main broad thematic areas and eight grant operators that annually allocated quite small funds of about $7600 per project. However, after the adoption of the "foreign agents" law in 2012, the PGC acquired new political and societal meaning. In order to substitute foreign funding and gain more control over the civil society sector, the state significantly increased the total amount of funding, which was distributed two or three times annually by an updated list of grant operators for an expanded range of thematic areas. The total amount of funding reached $39.5 million in 2013 and $69.2 million in 2016. More than 12,000 unique civil society organizations applied and more than 5000 won PGC grants between 2013 and 2016. As for the thematic areas, Table 3.1 clearly demonstrates their proliferation since 2013. From year to year, grant operators have covered increasing numbers of complicated and politically important issues going beyond the provision of social services to people in need. For instance, in 2015, the PGC began to approve and fund applications related to the topic of "soft power," those that realize "humanitarian projects in CIS countries," and those that "popularize Russian language and literature." Likewise, the issue of preserving and spreading traditional and family values has received increasing attention and funding from the PGC.

This shift toward issues related to "Russianness" and geopolitical concerns within the PGC corresponds with the rise of a public discourse fostered by state actors that set boundaries between the Russian people and other nations, chiefly those in the West, by circulating and reinforcing a particular political ideology through state-owned or state-loyal print and TV media (Babayan, 2017). This state-led discourse promotes an image of Russia as a "distinct civilization" that entails certain "spiritual values" and makes it superior to other cultures (Tsygankov, 2016). The literature on this Russian civilizational discourse has identified five main elements. While the emphasis on *traditional values* (1) allows for a separation from Western civilization, which is perceived as hostile (Østbø, 2017), it also supports a *nationalism* (2) that includes both international confrontations and domestic crackdowns on oppositional actors (Shevtsova, 2015). In addition, sacralization of the heroic victory in the Great Patriotic War (World War II, *sic*) leads to *militarism* (3) and *patriotism* (4) (Laruelle, 2015; Wood, 2011). This cultural, value-based exceptionalism aligns well with *orthodoxy* (5) as a crucial element of national identity (Jarzyńska, 2014).

This general discourse on the essence of Russian society relates to all of its subsystems and to civil society in particular. For the Russian government, civil society should be part of a non-partisan and apolitical partnership with the authorities to solve social problems, but it should not embrace values of human rights or undermine the state's status quo (Belokurova, 2010). Thus, civil society organizations must adopt the traditionalist–conservative ideological consensus that Russia's unique cultural, political, and historical features should define the country's path; those that oppose this position meet with hostile attitudes and little support (Chebankova, 2015). The following empirical section analyzes the PGC with regard to this ideological stance in Russian state–civil society relations. We argue that traditionalist–conservative elements of state discourse are introduced into civil society by means of governmental funding, thus ideologizing and to some extent politicizing public welfare provision.

Data and Methods

In order to determine which spheres of civic activities are most supported by the governmental PGC and whether these are intertwined with a conservative public discourse disseminated by the state, we downloaded all grant applications ($N = 48{,}551$) for 2013–2016 using the rvest package, version 0.3.2 for R software version 3.4.1. All applications to the PGC and the results of their review have been published on the official PGC website (https://grants.oprf.ru) with open access since 2013. When the dataset had been cleaned of duplications and applications with absent descriptions, the final dataset included 41,063 applications, of which 5381 won PGC grants. Each application contained the following information: the name of the project, a short project description, the name of the civil society organization applying, its place of official registration, and an organizational identifier. For successful applications, we also noted the amount of the grant in Russian rubles.

We coded applications to identify their fields of activities and the presence of discursive elements. First, we randomly selected 1700 applications and built a dictionary of specific search words on the basis of their content. Later, the dictionary was expanded using the target-word collocations technique available in the quanteda package, version 1.1.0 for R (Benoit et al., 2018). The dictionary covers all derived forms of all search words, including singular and plural forms as well as different grammatical forms, declensions, and endings.

To code the fields of activities of project applications, we applied the International Classification of Non-Profit Organizations (ICNPO) (Salamon & Anheier, 1996), which defines 11 specific fields varying from culture and recreation to social service provision, environmental protection, etc. (see Table 3.2). As discussed above, the state promotes a traditionalist–conservative ideology with regard to Russia in general and civil society in particular. In our empirical analysis, we therefore focused on identifying the occurrence of elements of that ideology over time in PGC project applications. The resulting dictionary included the five above-mentioned elements of the traditionalist–conservative discursive:

1. The element of *traditional values* is represented by words describing “traditional” [*traditsionnye*], “spiritual” [*dukhovnye*], and “moral” [*moral’nye/nravstvennye*] “values” [*tsennosti*], “attitudes” [*ustoi*], and “traditions” [*traditsii*], etc.;
2. *Nationalism* covers a wide spectrum of terms such as “national interest” [*natsional’nye interesy*] and “national security” [*natsional’naya bezopastnost’*], “Russian world” [*Russky mir*] and “Eurasian union”

Table 3.2 PGC winners by field of activities and presence of conservative narratives, 2013–2016 (%)

			Presence of conservative narratives within each field of activities (applications/ winners)					
Field of activities	Applications	Winners	Traditional values	Nationalism	Militarism	Patriotism	Orthodoxy	Any of 5 CN
Culture and recreation	20.4	17.7	4.4***/4.7	0.9/1.1	21.8***/25.4***	17.8***/20.9***	2.7***/3.6*	33.5***/39.6***
Education and research	23.1	23.4	2.9***/3.2*	1.4***/2.7***	10.4***/13.9***	9.8***/14.4	2.3***/2.9***	19.2***/25.6***
Health	6.5	6.4	1.2***/0.9***	0.3***/0.3*	10.8***/11.6***	2.4***/4.3***	2.7***/4.0	15.0***/17.3***
Social services	40.3	39.0	4.2***/4.8*	0.7***/1.0***	17.6***/20.1***	12.8***/15.8***	3.3***/4.0**	27.3***/33.1***
Environment	2.8	2.1	0.8**/1.7	0.1***/0.0	4.7***/3.5***	4.2***/3.5***	1.1***/0.9*	9.7***/7.8***
Development and housing	3.5	3.6	0.8***/0.0***	0.2***/0.5	8.5***/8.8***	4.0***/5.7***	0.4***/0.5***	10.9***/11.9***
Philanthropy	3.0	2.4	1.3***/1.5	0.6*/0.8	15.2/17.7	10.3/19.2*	2.3**/3.1	22.4**/28.5
Law and politics	7.3	10.9	1.2***/0.3***	2.5***/2.7*	17.3**/17.5	3.4***/2.9***	1.2***/1.4***	22.8*/23.5***
International activity	2.2	2.9	5.7***/4.5	5.4***/8.3***	13.4*/12.2*	12.4/14.1	1.6***/1.9*	29.4**/32.7
Religion	3.2	4.1	21.4***/21.1***	3.6***/2.8	15.3/14.7	17.4***/18.8*	45.7***/45.9***	69.8***/71.1***

(*continued*)

Table 3.2 (continued)

			Presence of conservative narratives within each field of activities (applications/ winners)					
Field of activities	Applications	Winners	Traditional values	Nationalism	Militarism	Patriotism	Orthodoxy	Any of 5 CN
Labor unions	0.3	0.4	0.0**/0.0	0.0/0.0	2.7***/0.0*	1.8***/0.0*	0.0**/0.0	3.6*** 0.0***
All fields of activities[a]	100	100	3.7 4.1	1.1/1.6	15.4/17.4	11.2/13.5	3.9/4.9	25.7/30.5
Total *N*	41,063	5381	1537/219	432/86	6343/937	4616/728	1598/264	10,543/1642

Note: Chi-square ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$

[a] Chi-square is unavailable for multiple responses

[*Evraziysky soyuz*], "fifth column" [*pyataya colonna*], "color revolution" [*tsvetnaya revolutsiya*], etc.;
3. The *militarism* narrative is identified by the words "military" [*voennij*], "war" [*voyna*], "army" [*armiya*], "soldier" [*soldat*], "veteran" [*veteran*], etc.;
4. *Patriotism* is indicated by the word "patriot" [*patriot*] and all derived forms of it;
5. *Orthodoxy* is defined by the words and phrases "church" [*tserkov'*], "orthodox" [*pravoslvny*], "metropolitan" [*mitropolit*], "Old Believers" [*staroobryadtsy*], "Orthodox procession" [*krestny hod*], etc.

Finally, words corresponding to the 11 fields of activities and the 5 conservative narratives were collected, counted, and saved in 16 new corresponding variables. Because a single application might refer to several categories of activities (on average, applications referred to 3.16), we recoded these variables and related an application to the field of activities for which it contained the most dictionary words. An application was assigned to several categories only if the numbers of dictionary words for more than one category were equivalent.

Results

As the largest domestic source of funding for civil society organizations in Russia, the PGC has considerable impact on the institutional and value structure of the country's entire civil society sector. Decisions on the allocation of grants are not apolitical; they are based on the state's vision for the civil society and on the activities expected of civil society organizations. By examining the data on (1) which organizations are applying and winning, (2) the content of their applications in terms of fields of activities, and (3) the presence of conservative narratives within the applications, we can better understand what kind of civil society the Russian state wants.

The PGC data analysis shows that, altogether, more than 12,000 unique organizations applied and about 5,000 were awarded grants in the 2013–2016 competitions. The number of applications constituted about 5% of all officially registered organizations. However, because some experts argue that only about one-third of registered civil society organizations are actually functioning (Mersianova & Jakobson, 2007), the actual percentage is presumably much higher and is likely as high as 20%. The largest percentages of applying organizations were based in Moscow (31%) and St. Petersburg (6%). Among other areas, organizations from Tatarstan, Ekaterinburg, Bashkortostan, Perm, Nizhny Novgorod, Samara, and Novosibirsk applied for and won PGC grants more than others. Most of the organizations were already quite well established; the mean organizational age of both applying and winning organizations was eight years, but 40% had been registered for more than ten years before they submitted an application to the PGC. Moreover, three quarters (76%) of the organizations that applied in 2016 had applied at least once since 2013, and almost half of all grants (47% of those awarded) were allocated to organizations that had won at least once in a previous year.

Most applying civil society organizations submitted one application per year, although some organizations managed to apply for several different projects simultaneously. For example, the Labor Union of Student Youth applied with 75 projects in 2016, but none of them was supported. Overall, about 10% of organizations proposed more than three projects per year. In terms of funding, the mean amount of a presidential grant was $38,500 per project. However, there was a huge difference between the smallest ($370) and the greatest ($307,700) amount of funding allocated to organizations during the selected period of 2013–2016, and the differences were similar in each year. The proportion of small grants (up to one million RUB or $15,400) decreased from 37% in 2013 to 22% in 2016, and, conversely, larger PGC grants (more than three million RUB or $46,200) became more common (15% and 28% in 2013 and 2016, respectively).

Concerning the content of applications, according to the results presented in Table 3.2, both applicants and winners addressing issues and concerns related to the social sphere were in an absolute majority during the period of study. Among all winners, 39% were from the social services field and 23.4% addressed education and research (mainly education); the third best-represented field was culture and recreation (17.7%).

Together, these three categories accounted for 77.8% of all applications and for 74% of winners. In monetary terms, they received 72.7% of all PGC funding from 2013 to 2016. The enormous bias toward the social sphere demonstrates the state's priority to integrate civil society into public welfare provision. It is politically safe to support civil society organizations in the social sector as they usually do not interfere in sensitive issues such as human rights and environmental protection (Giersdorf & Croissant, 2011). Supporting civil society organizations in the social sphere allows the state to secure legitimacy by co-opting the attainments of non-governmental service provision and solving social problems (Lorch & Bunk, 2017).

The remainder of applications, related to such fields as law and politics (10.9%), health (6.4%), and the environment (2.1%), together represent 29% of all winners and 30% of total PGC funding. Of all fields of activities, projects related to labor unions (0.4%) received the smallest share of PGC grants, with only 21 applications from 14 organizations winning support from 2013 to 2016. The marginal presence of these fields primarily reflects the weakness of Russian civil society in those particular areas. However, as shown in Table 3.2, the state supported them in almost the same proportion as they applied, and each year the list of winners included at least one famous, contentious civil society organization working in the field of human rights or environmental protection. For instance, the Moscow Helsinki Group won several PGC grants annually; 10 of their 15 applications were supported between 2013 and 2016.

Regarding the elements of the state's conservative discourse in application texts, our research results show that these were present in approximately every fourth project description submitted (27.5%). Among grant recipients, the use of conservative discourses was slightly more common: one-third (30.5%) of winning applications related to at least one of the five narratives. The percentage of applications containing elements of traditionalist–conservative discourses grew from 22.9% in 2013 to 26.8% in 2016. The same amount of growth appeared among the winners, with the percentage increasing from 25.9% to 31.9% during the same period (for both comparisons, chi-square $p < 0.01$).

In many cases, references to traditionalist–conservative discourses appeared in relation to a goal of the proposed projects—"preserve traditional values," "develop a sense of patriotism," or "sustain the memory of the Great Patriotic War." The most commonly present discursive elements were militarism and patriotism, which appeared separately in 17.4% and 13.5%, respectively, of all winning project submissions. The correlation between these two is statistically significant ($R = 0.364$, $p < 0.01$), as their merger in the phrase "military–patriotic" (related to "education of youth" or "summer camps") has become a cliché in the Russian language (Omelchenko et al., 2015). One grant recipient employed conservative narratives in the application as follows:

> The project suggests formation of military–patriotic [military, patriotic] and spiritual–moral [traditional values] education of young people for military service [military], giving the feeling of patriotism [patriotism] a new sound and continuing the traditions [traditional values] of the past.

The use of conservative narratives penetrated applications from most fields of activities, and statistically significant associations between those narratives and fields of activities demonstrate the impact that the state's official "civilization discourse" has had on Russian civil society organizations' descriptions of their proposed project work. Apart from the more obvious field of religion, in which 45.9% of winning applications operated with conservative narratives, they were also present in one-fourth to one-third of applications in the fields of culture and recreation (39.6%), social services (33.1%), international activity (32.7%), philanthropy (28.5%), and education and research (25.6%). These applications relied predominantly on narratives related to patriotism and militarism. For instance, many culture and recreation applications used these two narratives in proposals for projects to involve young people in preserving the cultural heritage of the Great Patriotic War and thus nurture a sense of patriotism among the younger generation:

> The project is aimed at the patriotic [patriotism] education of youth by conducting archaeological explorations at battle sites [militarism] of the Soviet–Finnish War [militarism] of 1939–1940 and development of skills in military–archaeological [militarism] affairs.

Many civil society organizations describing their operational work in social service provision, education, and healthcare also chose to insert references to conservative narratives into their grant applications. The following example shows the intertwinement of social rehabilitation issues with conservative narratives:

> The project is aimed at social rehabilitation and prevention of drug addiction and alcoholism among young people through a series of educational events. The ideological basis is the traditional spiritual values [traditional values] of the Russian people, as well as the rituals and traditions [traditional values] associated with the parental home, family, mercy, mutual aid, and a healthy lifestyle.

In sum, the results show that financial support provided to civil society organizations by the PGC is significantly biased toward specific fields of activities. With minor exceptions, about three quarters of winning PGC projects from 2013 to 2016 were related to the social sphere, while those involved with the environment and with labor unions were an absolute minority. These results indicate that state financial support to civil society serves as an instrument to shape it by privileging organizations that help to fill the gaps within the welfare system. Moreover, the results show that approximately one-fourth of all submitted applications as well as one-third of all winning applications relate to traditionalist–conservative elements of public discourse. In our opinion, this indicates a twofold process: first, the considerable proportion of submissions relating to conservative discourses provides evidence that these are perceived as a symbolic resource used in order to raise organizations' chances of acquiring grants. Second, the state is taking advantage of the work of successful applicants in line with its ideological discourse while also reinforcing this trend by privileging carriers of traditionalist and conservative values. This result indicates that governmental support in the apolitical, uncontentious fields of social service provision, health, and education retains a political dimension in that it provides the primary platform for the diffusion of state-led conservative legitimation discourse.

Conclusion

Taking the example of Russia, this chapter sheds light on the nature of governmental support for civil society under authoritarian regime conditions. It has been stated before that Russian civil society organizations live in "dual realities" (Salamon et al., 2015) in that the state sets up a structure of supporting measures but at the same time limits the scope of organizations' activities. The PGC shows these dualities in state–civil society relations, with the list of recipients featuring both patriotic, pro-Putin hardliners and long-established, critical human rights organizations. By analyzing the unique dataset of Presidential Grant applicants and winners between 2013 and 2016, we studied the scope of funded projects according to their topics and aims as well as the characteristics of the organizations behind them. In doing so, we were also led by the question of the extent to which submitted applications and PGC funding practices relate to a state-led legitimation discourse.

On one hand, the results of our study of the PGC demonstrate that the Russian state promotes the development of civil society with a nationwide and very well-funded support scheme, giving priority to organizations working on issues related to social services, education, health, and culture. Such a distribution of grants can be interpreted as a measure by the state to close welfare gaps and to engage in feedback processes regarding social needs in the population. In that regard, Russia fits into a general trend among non-democratic regimes to secure legitimacy by co-opting civil society successes in improving living conditions.

On the other hand, we illustrate that the PGC merges public welfare with a state-led conservative discourse regarding the essence of Russia and the Russian people. This civilizational discourse is most prevalent in submitted as well as in successful applications in welfare-related fields of activities. Although attempts to secure regime stability by establishing a legitimizing public discourse are common among authoritarian regimes, the core issues of the discourse are probably unique in every country. Furthermore, while welfare provision and discourse establishment may often be separate sets of strategic activities, the PGC in Russia is an example of a merging of both efforts in order to integrate civil society into a system that safeguards the regime. It attempts to do so by shaping the scope of activities of civil society organizations through a well-funded incentive system, but also by using public funding to adjust civil society organizations' positions in public discourse. Thus, material and immaterial resources are strongly interconnected in state–civil society relations in contemporary Russia. Material resource accumulation by civil society organizations has become increasingly linked with a stated attachment to certain elements of state-led public discourse that yield crucial immaterial resources for organizational sustainability; this trade-off, however, enables the state to convert material resources into symbolic value by co-opting civil society's provision of welfare services, strengthening regime stability by inducing a traditionalist–conservative legitimation discourse in the sphere of civil society.

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