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**Vladimir Putin's Gradual Erosion of Civil Society in Russia**

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## Abstract

Since 2001, there has been a gradual erosion of civil society in Russia under Russia's current president Vladimir Putin's. Despite Putin's rhetoric on the importance of a strong civil society, his strict policies on nongovernmental organizations have weakened civil society over time. This thesis aims to prove that Vladimir Putin's fear of regime change and Western influence paired with his objective to rebuild Russia from the demise of the Soviet Union led him to take specific measures: the undesirable and foreign agents laws to protect his regime which led to the erosion of civil society in Russia.

In May 2015, three years following the enactment of Russia's Foreign Agent Law in 2012, Putin's Undesirable Organizations' Law was passed. Both the undesirable and the foreign agent's laws grant the Russia's Ministry of Justice power to determine which nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can operate in Putin's Russia. Under these repressive anti-NGO laws, organizations that receive foreign funding, participate in political activity or pose a threat to the security of the Russian Federation must register as foreign agents or shut down due to their status as an undesirable. The undesirable and foreign agents laws represent just two pieces of legislation in a series of statues enacted by the Kremlin to better control civil society organizations in Russia.

The results in this study show that several regional political uprisings and events in world politics such as the color revolutions in the early 2000s, NATO's intervention in Libya in 2011 and the Ukraine Crisis in 2014 caused Putin to take specific measures ending with the Foreign Agents and Undesirable Laws to build a strong society in Russia by heavily regulating civil society. The Orange, Rose, and Tulip Revolutions in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine represented a Post- Soviet shift towards the West in Central and Eastern Europe politics. This shift was a threat to Putin's regime because Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine were former Soviet Union territories. Since Putin believed that the West was closely involved with many international NGOs that influenced political demonstrations, organizations with Western ties were targeted, labeled as foreign agents or shut down as undesirables.

## Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter I	7
Chapter II	20
Chapter III	33
Conclusion	44
Appendix	49
Bibliography	51

## List of tables and figures

Figure 1: Timeline of civil society erosion	26
Table 1: Organizations listed as foreign	30

## Introduction

In late 2015, months after the enactment of Russia's federal undesirable organizations' law, 12 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were deemed "undesirable" and barred from operating in the Russian Federation.<sup>1</sup> Russia's undesirable law is one policy in a series of statutes that focuses on the heavy regulation of the financial and political activities of nongovernmental organizations. Among the organizations banned by the undesirable law was the Open Society Foundation (OSF), the third largest philanthropic organization in the world. Russia's General Prosecutor's Office declared that the Open Society Foundation was undesirable because the organization posed "a threat to the foundations of the constitutional system of the Russian Federation and the security of the state"<sup>2</sup>. The Open Society Foundation is a charity organization that financially supports NGOs and individuals with various development and human rights efforts in over 140 countries<sup>3</sup>. Helping build transparent and tolerant liberal democracies is one of the main functions of the organization. The Open Society Foundation was created in 1984 by a Hungarian born financial investor and billionaire George Soros. Since 1984 George Soros has donated \$32 million of "his" funds towards human rights, spreading democracy and education globally. Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union, Soros increased his support for the spread of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. Between 1993 and 2014, \$1.6 billion was donated towards to development of democracy in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. To date, the Open Society Foundation has an endowment of \$18 billion. In

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Roth, "The Great Civil Society Choke-Out", Foreign Policy, no. 27 (2016).

<sup>2</sup> "Russia: Open Society Foundation Banned," Human Rights Watch, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/01/russia-open-society-foundation-banned>.

<sup>3</sup> "The Open Society Foundations and George Soros," Open Society Foundations, , <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/factsheet-osf-soros-eng-20180221.pdf>.

2017 OSF's budget was \$940 million, and twenty-eight percent of that budget was allocated to "democratic practice and human rights."<sup>4</sup> Despite Soros's philanthropic efforts in Russia and around the world, he was perceived as dangerous to the Russian Federation. The tension between Russia and George Soros shows the current struggle that several NGOs have with continuing to exist within Russian civil society. Organizations that focus on social and political causes including human rights, political polling, LGBT rights and women's rights have been targets in the crackdown on NGOs in Russia. The perceived danger of Western, liberal or democratic NGOs in Russia is not exclusive to George Soros or the Open Society Foundation. Many Western civil society organizations are being targeted and shut down by Vladimir Putin's presidential regime through strict legislation such as the undesirable and foreign agents' law. Russia's foreign agent law heavily regulates NGOs by requiring organizations that receive foreign funding or participate in political activities to register as foreign agents.

The recent crackdown on NGOs in Russia through the undesirable and foreign agents' laws show the ongoing conflict between the Kremlin and the civil society sector in Russia. This rift between the Russian government and NGOs dates back to the early 2000s with the introduction of the Civic Forum, which will be further discussed in subsequent chapters. Given that Russian president Vladimir Putin has been in power since 2000, Putin plays a crucial role in the crackdown on NGOs in Russia. Putin's background as a former intelligence agent and head of the Russian Federation's intelligence agency has led him to view the world through a lens of threats and dangers; it has influenced his way of governing by encouraging greater distrust of and isolation from the West; and in practice, it led him to repressive actions such as the crackdown

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid

on NGOs in Russia. Putin grew up in the former Soviet Union in Leningrad which is present-day St. Petersburg. In 1975, Putin graduated from Leningrad State where he earned his degree in Law and joined the communist party. Following his graduation, Putin immediately went to work for the KGB, the Soviet Union intelligence agency.<sup>5</sup> In 1985, during the height of Cold War tensions between the USSR and the US, Putin was stationed as an agent in Dresden, East Germany.<sup>6</sup> As a KGB agent in the late 1980s, Putin experienced first-hand the negative effects that the failure of the communist party had on society in the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Towards the end of the Cold War standards of living in Russia declined rapidly, there were shortages of food, the economy experienced a severe recession and mortality rates rose.<sup>7</sup> Putin's current commitment to Russia's resurgence as a global superpower and strong state stems from the scarcity, poverty and political instability that he witnessed as a KGB agent during the demise of the USSR. Today Putin's political agenda includes a strong, powerful and unified Russia which includes a strong civil society sector that is in accord with the aims of the government: is not influenced by the West or in opposition to the Kremlin. Both the law on foreign agents and undesirable organizations are mechanisms that the Putin regime is using to restore Russia as a powerful player in the international system and a strong state.

Putin's recent NGO laws present a direct challenge to the effectiveness of NGOs and civil society in Russia. Both the undesirable law and the law on foreign agents grant the state extrajudicial power to determine which organizations can freely participate in Russian civil society without oversight. The rule by law approach Putin has taken in regard to NGOs in Russia has a negative effect on freedom of expression and ultimately democracy in Russia. Putin's

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<sup>5</sup> Maria Brock, "Mr Putin: Operative in the Kremlin," *Cold War History* 14, no. 2 (2014)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Michael Ellman, "The Increase in Death and Disease under 'katastroika'," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 18, no. 4 (1994)

strategy to Russia's renewal (which includes NGO regulation) has gradually undermined civil society in Russia. The undesirable law works in conjunction with Russia's foreign agent law to prevent NGOs which receive foreign funding from working in Russia.<sup>8</sup> Putin's strict NGO laws have had a detrimental effect on NGOs in Russia. Since the enactment of the foreign agent and undesirable laws in 2012 and 2015 over 150 non-governmental organizations have been required to register as foreign agents.<sup>9</sup> These laws have caused a decline in the registration of NGOs by thirty percent.<sup>10</sup>

After thorough research on Russia's NGO laws since 2005, it is clear that there was a gradual erosion of civil society in Russia. The change in Russian NGO policies under Vladimir Putin marks a stark contrast to his predecessor Boris Yeltsin, who somewhat overlooked NGOs and allowed organizations to operate at their own discretion.<sup>11</sup> Regional political conflicts, fear of regime change and the goal to restore Russian state power are influential in Putin's gradual erosion of civil society in Russia. The Orange Revolution in Ukraine, in particular (raising the possibility of a similar electoral revolution in Russia), followed later by the Arab Spring and NATO's intervention in Libya (reinforcing Putin's fears of domestic push for regime change reinforced by external forces) helped trigger the enactment of the foreign agents and undesirable organizations' law. After taking office in 1999, Putin had a mission to rebuild Russia from the metaphorical ashes of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Having stricter control over civil society eventually aided in the execution of Putin's goal of rebuilding a strong Russian state because of

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<sup>8</sup> "Russia Civic Freedom Monitor," Wwww.icnl.org, April 27, 2018, <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/russia.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Daria Skibo, "Five Years of Russia's Foreign Agent Law," Opendemocracy.net, August 14, 2017, , <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/daria-skibo/five-years-of-russia-s-foreign-agent-law>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Marcia A. Weigle, "On the Road to the Civic Forum: State and Civil Society from Yeltsin to Putin," *Demokratizatsiya* 10, no. 2 (2002)

the influence NGOs had in regime change, public opinion regarding the government and political opposition. Countering Western influence through the crackdown on foreign NGO funding was an element of Putin's restoration strategy. The creeping erosion of civil society in Russia is significant in current world politics because the undesirable and foreign agent laws suppress free speech and expression which blatantly disregard human rights. Putin's strategies to retain power, counter Western influence and rebuild Russia through democratic suppression may lead to protests, demonstrations or political unrest that could threaten or topple his regime. This thesis will demonstrate that despite Vladimir Putin's rhetoric about the importance of a strong civil society in Russia's renewal, there has been a gradual erosion of civil society in Russia since 2005. Putin's fear of regime change, U. S or Western interference, paired with his objective to rebuild the Russian state after the fall of the Soviet Union, have led him to take specific measures causing the gradual weakening of Russia's civil society. As evidence, this thesis will focus on two such measures: the Putin Administration's enactment of the Foreign Agent and Undesirable Organizations laws.

Through an analysis of the timeline of the Russian Federation's NGO laws and key political events that affected the enactment of the laws, it will be proved that there was a creeping erosion of Russian civil society. In subsequent chapters, the political and circumstantial reasoning behind Putin's crackdown on NGOs, the impact of the foreign agents and undesirable laws on civil society and democracy in Russia will be analyzed. To properly frame the argument of Putin's gradual erosion of civil society, relevant international relations theory will be referenced. Kenneth Waltz's theory on neorealism, Susan Strange's theory on structural power, as well as Machiavelli's theory on maintaining political power, will be used to explain Putin's crackdown on NGOs. A thorough overview of the history of NGO laws and policy in the

Russian Federation starting in 1999 will be provided to further provide context to the implementation of the foreign agent and undesirable NGO laws. Primarily a qualitative study, this thesis will demonstrate in what ways and to what extent the foreign agent and undesirable laws have affected Russian civil society and democracy.

## Chapter I: Theoretical Foundations

Vladimir Putin's use of the foreign agent and undesirable laws to address his fear of regime change, Western influence, and his agenda to restore Russia, can be explained by three international affairs and political theories: structural realism, structural power, and Machiavellianism. Kenneth Waltz, Susan Strange, and Niccoló Machiavelli are the theorists who will be referenced to theoretically frame the argument that Vladimir Putin took specific measures: the foreign agents and undesirable laws to secure his regime, limit Western influence and restore Russia which led to the gradual erosion of civil society. Structural realism describes a state's desire to constantly maintain and acquire power as the most important factor in international relations. Structural realism or neorealism is driven by anarchy or an absence of government; giving that there is no transnational body to govern the world states must actively protect themselves from the threat of attack from neighboring states. The theory of structural realism was introduced by Kenneth Waltz in 1979. Putin's crackdown on NGOs in Russia is an expression of neorealism because Putin began to target human rights, development and democratic NGOs following a series of political protest and demonstrations in neighboring countries that ultimately led to regime change which Putin has repeatedly ascribed to outside powers. The color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan in the early 2000s represented a wave of democratic regional politics in Central and Eastern Europe. This democratic political shift posed a direct threat to Putin's primarily authoritarian regime which later led him to enact strict NGO laws.<sup>12</sup> In *Toward a Theory of Transnational Empire*, Susan Strange describes the four foundations of structural power, which include: production,

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid

knowledge, finance (or credit) and security.<sup>13</sup> The security component of structural power refers to a state's nuclear military capabilities. Given that Russia is the second most important nuclear power in the world, Russia has the security aspect of structural power which allows Moscow to be take more risk and be more assertive in its affairs with other countries and at home, including towards Russian civil society. This thesis focuses only on the security component of the four foundations of structural power, and will demonstrate why Putin's narrow focus on this security component both encouraged and granted him a freer hand to crack down on civil society in Russia. It should be made clear that a state possessing nuclear arms does not mean it enjoys comprehensive or full structural power, which includes strength across all four components of power, not just military.

In addition, Machiavellianism will also be used to demonstrate Putin's tactics – that is, in what ways did Vladimir Putin enact the foreign agent and undesirable laws to protect his regime, limit outside influence, and help rebuild the Russian state. In Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, he introduces the idea of the using fear as a tactical tool to govern a state efficiently. Machiavelli declared that men are less likely to showcase contempt towards a leader that is feared and that because men are fickle avoiders of danger it is better to be feared than loved.<sup>14</sup> The foreign agent and undesirable laws are examples of Machiavellian tactics used by Putin. Under the foreign agent and undesirable NGO laws, specific organizations are targeted and eventually shut down voluntarily or voluntarily, and the fear of being targeted and/or shut down by the government influences organizations to adhere to Putin's civil society policies. In addition to establishing the theoretical framework, this section will also operationally define the term *civil society*, as well as

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<sup>13</sup> Susan Strange, "Toward a Theory of Transnational Empire," in *Global Changes and Theoretical Challenges* (1989)

<sup>14</sup> Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 18th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

analyze the theory of nongovernmental organizations as non-state actors to support the argument that there was a gradual erosion of civil society in Russia.

*Civil Society Definitions:*

Although there is no definitive definition for civil society for operational purposes in this study, civil society will be operationally defined as the “arena of polity where self-organizing groups, movements, and individuals relatively autonomous from the state, attempt to articulate values, create associations and solidarities and advance their interest”.<sup>15</sup> Independence from the state is the most important feature of civil society. Civil society groups include but are not limited to nongovernmental organizations, community organizations, religious groups, and social groups.<sup>16</sup> It’s imperative to note that civil society groups do not seek political power or monetary gain.<sup>17</sup>

After careful review of relevant literature pertaining civil society, there are three theoretical categories that will help demonstrate the gradual erosion of civil society by Putin’s regime; these categories are: Civil society I, Civil society II and Civil society III.

Works by Robert Putnam, Margaret Keck, Kathryn Sikkink, and Thomas Carothers will be used to specify the difference between Civil Society I, Civil Society II and Civil society III. Under the first category (Civil Society I), by participating in civil society, citizens learn norms and values that are liberal and democratic, such as tolerance and, compromise.<sup>18</sup> According to Foley and Edwards, Civil Society II is characterized as organizations that act to counter an "overreaching

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<sup>15</sup>Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stephan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)

<sup>16</sup> Brian D. Taylor, "Law Enforcement and Civil Society in Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 58, no. 2 (2006)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup>Robert D. Putnam, Robert Leonardi, and Raffaella Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994)

state". Keck and Sikkink add to the concept of Civil Society II with their theory on transnational advocacy networks. Transnational advocacy networks are groups that "promote causes, principled ideas and norms" to influence policy changes.<sup>19</sup> International NGOs are key transnational advocacy networks mainly because they tend to pressure more powerful stakeholders to take positions on issues that they advocate for.<sup>20</sup> The theory of Civil Society II is useful to the study of the gradual erosion of civil society in Russia because the extrajudicial powers granted to the Russian government to shut down NGOs under the undesirable and foreign agent laws can be analyzed as an abuse or overreach of power. The theory for the third category of civil society (Civil Society III) was developed by Thomas Carothers who also argued that "civil society programs seek a productive dialogue" with states to create a partnership between the two entities. Under the Civil Society III theory, the state and civil society work together which is a stark contrast to Civil Society I and II where organizations work to hold governments accountable and to seek policy changes. Marcia Weigle frames the Civil Society III argument in a Russian context by noting that activists in Russian civil society do not act in opposition to the government; they act in support of the government by subscribing to the strong state strong society model which values the state and civil society sharing the same aims and goals for the state.<sup>22</sup> The strong state strong society model declares that state power is required for the existence of civil society which is essential to a state's democratic behavior. Following the strong state strong society model in a Russian context, the state suffered from a weak civil society due to a weak state under the rule of Boris Yeltsin who gave little attention to civil

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

society.<sup>23</sup> Civil Society III is the category of civil society that Putin and the Kremlin strive to foster in Russia which can be observed through the creation of Russia's Civic Forum in 2001 that brought together thousands of Kremlin-backed civil society activists and government officials for civil society reform. The Civic Forum will be further discussed in the forthcoming chapter of this thesis. In the study of the gradual erosion of civil society in Russia, *civil society* refers to the second category of civil society or Civil Society II. The Civil Society II theory is most appropriate in proving Putin's gradual erosion of civil society because Russia is an overreaching state due to its harsh NGO policies, as well as its lack of tolerance for self-organizing groups independent from the mainstream aims and interests of the Kremlin. The crackdown on OSF and other primarily western and liberal organizations after the enactment of the undesirable law specifically targeted NGOs that fall in the category of Civil Society II such as the Open Society Foundation. Groups that pose a threat to the national security and interests of the Russian Federation under the undesirable law are targeted because they are under the second category of civil society.

The theories of good or proper governance that are laid out by Niccolo Machiavelli in *The Prince* are also helpful in interpreting the rationale behind Putin's strict NGO laws that led to the erosion of civil society in Russia. Putin's Machiavellian qualities show in his reactions to major political events. According to Machiavelli, an effective political leader must be feared rather than loved because men are fickle and avoid harm. Given that Putin is threatened by changes in regimes, democratic political uprisings and demonstrations he reacts by using his power and fear to undermine NGOs through enforcing new laws that indirectly limit political opposition and protests in Russia. This tactic is Machiavellian because it targets a specific group of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid

organizations, as opposed to every organization, to show he is not sweepingly cruel while simultaneously making an example out of the organizations that get shut down to better control civil society. The Orange Revolution in 2005 led to the first NGO laws under Putin in 2006.<sup>24</sup> The North American Treaty Organization's (NATO) military intervention in Libya in 2011 led to the Law on Foreign Agents in 2012, and the Ukrainian crisis caused by the Euromaidan movement in 2014, resulted in the introduction of the undesirable law in 2015. Through these events, there is a noticeable pattern of Putin cracking down on NGOs when he believes that Russian national security is threatened which is an example of the regular acquisition and maintenance of power. Through the introduction of the 2006 NGO laws and the Law on Foreign Agents in 2012 Putin acquired more power by imposing heavy restrictions on NGOs and maintained his power by successfully enforcing the policies on specific civil society organizations in Russia that posed a threat to his regime.

Structural realism is the most useful theory to help us explain Putin's gradual erosion of civil society in Russia. Putin's mechanisms employed to control the activities of NGOs are neorealist because these mechanisms were imposed to maintain power as well as counter outside influence. Neorealism or structural realism stresses that the power of the state is most important in international relations. Similar to realism, under structural realism, it is believed that states exist in an anarchical environment which causes a security dilemma (discussed momentarily). Structural realism also declares that countries are also in constant power competitions amongst one another for power because there is no transnational governing body in the international system. Since anarchy is the ruling principle of international relations states must always protect themselves through military or political means. The lack of trust between states in structural

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid

realism leads to the security dilemma that was mentioned previously. The security dilemma is a theory in international relations that claims that a state will begin to showcase power through increasing military strength, joining alliances and creating tension if it sees another state taking similar actions to maintain power or compete with other states. In the study of Vladimir Putin's crackdown on Russian civil society, he showcases a neorealist approach and perspective which are evident in his pattern of imposing unprecedented strict NGO legislation following demonstrations or political events that he sees as a threat to his political agenda primarily in Central Europe, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the West. After the Orange Revolution, in 2005 the first major changes to Russian NGO laws since the Yeltsin Administration were made. Similarly,<sup>26</sup> after U. S Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton criticized the election fraud conducted by Putin's political party in 2014, there was a major crackdown on Western or U. S affiliated civil society organizations with the implementation of the undesirable law in 2012<sup>27</sup>. In addition to tensions with the West, Putin's tactics to maintain influence in Ukraine are an example of his neorealist behavior. In late 2013, Vladimir Putin aided in blocking an Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union, which would have represented a political move towards the West, by offering Ukraine an attractive \$15 billion natural gas deal with then-President Victor Yanukovich.<sup>28</sup> The gas deal between Russia and Ukraine was essentially an attempt to bribe Ukraine to remain in Russia's orbit, thus dismissing the ongoing desire that Ukrainians had to strengthen relations with the European Union and move westward in political affiliation. Putin's neorealist interference in the Ukraine EU deal caused the existing Euromaidan

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<sup>25</sup> Barry Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," *Survival Global Politics and Strategy* 35, no. 3 (1993)

<sup>26</sup> Michael McFaul, "Ukraine Imports Democracy: External Influences on the Orange Revolution," *International Security* 32, no. 2 (2007)

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Nadia Diuk, "Euromaiden: Ukraine's Self-Organizing Revolution," *World Affairs* 176, no. 6 (2014)

protest in Kiev to escalate which eventually evolved into a military conflict between Putin backed rebels and Ukrainian military forces in the eastern region of the country that is still ongoing.<sup>29</sup> Putin's dealings with Ukraine is proof his neorealist worldview because it is clear that having influence in Ukraine is important to Putin's because that influence will allow him to maintain power in the former Soviet region and in current world politics.

Structural power is relevant to this study of the evolution of the crackdown on NGOs laws because the security framework of this theory explains why Putin gradually undermined civil society organizations. According to Strange, structural power is when states possess the capability "to decide how things shall be done, the power to shape frameworks within which states relate to each other, relate to people, or relate to corporate enterprises."<sup>30</sup> Following this theory, the power over structures or institutions takes precedence over the power of resources. Strange's theory contrasts the conventional theories of soft and hard power in international relations. Soft power, a theory that was brought to light by Joseph Nye was when a state or entity has the ability to affect what another state or party may do without coercion or force<sup>31</sup>. Hard power, on the other hand, is coercive where party A influences what party B does with military force, economic influence or other aggressive means<sup>32</sup>. Strange challenges the conventional theories of hard and soft power in the international system with the four frameworks of structural power that describe power dynamics among states in the international affairs; those four frameworks include: production, knowledge, finance, and security. Production

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Andrej Pustovitovskij and Jan-Frederik Kremer, Structural Power and International Relations Analysis: "fill Your Basket, Get Your Preferences" (Bochum: Inst. Für Entwicklungsforschung Und Entwicklungspolitik Der Ruhr-Univ. Bochum, 2011)

<sup>31</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 616, no. 1 (2008)

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

is outlined as the power of a state to determine what is produced. To achieve a command over the production framework a country must influence policies pertaining to factors of production that include employment of labor, land, and capital.<sup>33</sup> The knowledge framework is the power of states to control how knowledge is “accumulated and applied.”<sup>34</sup> The financial structure of this theory declares that if a state has authority over the “how much credit is provided by governments, international organizations, and banks” and how this credit is distributed within the international system then they have achieved the financial part of the structural power.<sup>35</sup> Security is the final framework under Strange’s structural power theory and the portion that is most relevant to the study of the gradual erosion of civil society in Russia. The security framework of structural power emphasizes the military power of a state. Russia has the security framework of structural power due to its nuclear capabilities in military force, which render Russia invulnerable to serious military attack. This relative invulnerability allows Vladimir Putin to feel freer to use military and coercive tools in Ukraine and Syria to attempt to balance power in the international system; similarly, it allows him to feel free in using political coercion to influence the international system as an institution. Putin's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and current involvement in the Donbas conflict in East Ukraine are current examples of Putin exercising the security framework of structural power. During t<sup>36</sup>he Ukrainian crisis, Putin sent Russian troops to aid in countering demonstrations.<sup>37</sup> In sum, Russia’s nuclear capabilities allow

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<sup>33</sup> Susan Strange, "Finance, Information, and Power," *Review of International Studies* 16, no. 3 (1990)

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>36</sup> ""Easter Ceasefire" in Donbas Fails on Its First Day with Attacks on Ukrainian Positions," *Unian.info*, 2018, <https://www.unian.info/war/10062323-easter-ceasefire-in-donbas-fails-on-its-first-day-with-attacks-on-ukrainian-positions.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Roy Allison, "Russian 'deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," *International Affairs* 90, no. 6 (2014)

Putin to militarily influence smaller countries. Putin's military occupation and annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 are clear expressions of the security foundation of structural power.<sup>38</sup>

Machiavelli's theories on maintaining political power are significant in the study of the evolution of the erosion of civil society in Russia because that Vladimir Putin uses Machiavellian principles to govern and interact with other countries in the international system. The Machiavellian school of thought in political theory stems from Niccolò Machiavelli an Italian political theorist and diplomat that is renowned by for his political treatise, *The Prince*. Machiavelli offers a contrast to the political writings of his time that stressed the importance of moral and ethics in governance. Gaining and maintaining power by means that are immoral and cynical are most valuable under Machiavelli's political theory. Machiavelli believes that there is no moral basis to judge "illegitimate and legitimate uses of power."<sup>39</sup> Since there is no moral basis to judge power, unconventional or immoral methods of governing which include deception, violence, and cruelty should be used to rule and ensure that the state is protected from external and internal threats. In fact, Machiavelli praises coercion stating that the legitimacy of the law rests in the use of coercive force<sup>40</sup>. Under this theory, Machiavelli also believes that it is better to be feared than to be loved by subjects as a leader because "love is sustained by a bond of gratitude which, because men are excessively self-interested, is broken whenever they see a chance to benefit themselves. But fear is sustained by a dread of punishment that is always effective."<sup>41</sup> There are many theories in *The Prince* to which Vladimir Putin adheres and which have an effect on his foreign aggression and NGO policies. Putin is Machiavellian in his

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<sup>38</sup>Jeffrey Mankoff, "Russia's Latest Land Grab: How Putin Won Crimea and Lost Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs* 93 (2014)

<sup>39</sup>"Niccolò Machiavelli," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2005, , <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/machiavelli/>.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*

approach to governing Russia because he uses unconventional methods that are “immoral” to secure the state and to maintain power this can be observed in his international military interventions and his the pattern of his crackdown on civil society after he feels threatened by the West or perceived outside interference. Putin’s Machiavellian perspective can be observed in his military interventions in Ukraine which overlaps with neorealism and the security framework of structural realism.

In addition to his military interventions in Ukraine, Putin’s military intervention in the Syrian conflict is also an expression of Machiavellianism. In late 2016, Putin aided Syrian president Bashar al Assad in the Syrian conflict by administering air strikes to counter anti-Assad rebel groups in the country.<sup>42</sup> Putin involved himself in what went on to become the Syrian civil war to counter U. S influence in the mMiddle East since he believed that the United States caused the Arab Spring which started the Syrian conflict or civil war. Putin's influence in Syria consists of fueling violence by providing the Syrian government with arms or war weaponry. In April 2017, the Syrian government issued a chemical attack on the town of Khan Sheikhoun that killed 80 people and left hundreds injured. It is assumed that Putin not only backed Assad in this air strike, but he also may have provided him with the chemical weapons used in the strike. After the chemical attack was condemned by major players in the international system such as the United States, both Assad and Putin denied the use of chemical weapons and addressed the claims made as a false due to a lack of evidence. Despite the attack being recorded, Putin and Assad still denied the attack and declared that the videos of the chemical strike were fake.<sup>43</sup> Putin and Assad’s denial of chemical warfare is an example of Machiavellian principles in action

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<sup>42</sup> Angela Stent, "Putin's Power Play in Syria: How to Respond to Russia's Intervention," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 106 (2016)

<sup>43</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Mark Landler, "Kerry Cites Clear Evidence of Chemical Weapon Use in Syria," *NyTimes.com*, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/27/world/middleeast/syria-assad.html>.

giving that deception was used as a political tool and morality was disregarded for Assad and Putin's political gain.

The reasoning behind Vladimir Putin gradually eroding civil society can be explained by the theory of structural realism (or neorealism), the security framework of structural power and Machiavellianism. Putin gradually eroded civil society with the foreign agent and undesirable laws to maintain power due to concern over regional political uprisings in neighboring countries, which posed a threat to his regime. Through Putin's policies and political interactions with other countries, it can be inferred that security and power are most important to his regime. One of Putin's main objective as president is to restore Russia as a global superpower and having strong control over civil society is a means to that objective. Putin's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and intervention in the ongoing Syrian civil war are examples of neorealist actions that Putin has taken to maintain power and relevancy in current world politics. Structural realism is germane in analyzing Putin's erosion of civil society because this theory identifies power as the most important factor in the international relations.<sup>44</sup>

In short, maintaining power was one of the motives behind the enactment of the Putin regime's NGO laws. After the regional color revolutions in the early 2000s, Putin used his power to counter regional political opposition mainly because the revolutions took place in former Soviet territories. The color revolutions presented a threat to Putin because the revolutions represented a move closer to democracy in the former Soviet Union. Russia's military interventions in the Ukraine crisis, as well as the Syrian civil, are examples of Putin expressing the security component of Strange's structural power theory. Because the Russian Federation has nuclear arms, rendering it invulnerable to an offensive strike from the outside, it is able to make

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<sup>44</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security* 25, no. 1 (2000)

use of its military as a tool of influence in smaller countries and in theory compete with other countries that also have nuclear weapons for power in the international system. As briefly stated previously, Strange argues that there are four pillars of structural power which are production, knowledge, finance, and security if a state possesses these four components it will enjoy structural power because of the institutionalization of the international system.<sup>45</sup> The Russian Federation does not have structural power in its entirety because it does not have the knowledge, finance and production frameworks, all of which are strengthened by a strong and lively civil society. Putin uses the security aspect of structural power to his advantage by militarily intervening in highly controversial international conflicts and cracking down on Russian civil society in an attempt to achieve structural power. Ironically, however, because Russia only possesses strength in the military or security dimensions of structural power, rather than across all four dimensions, Russia does not have the kind of comprehensive structural power that it seeks; while his crackdowns on civil society destroys the motor for generating the other three components of structural power that he needs.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid

## Chapter II: Historical Context

The historical context of Russia's NGO laws is crucial to understanding the gradual erosion of civil society through the Law on Foreign Agents and the Undesirable Organizations Law. Before Vladimir Putin became Acting President of the Russian Federation in 1999 and then its elected President in 2000, four basic NGO laws existed on the books under the Boris Yeltsin administration.<sup>46</sup> These laws consisted of the Law on Political Associations, the Law on Philanthropic Activities and Organizations, the Law on Noncommercial Organizations and lastly, the Law on Local Self Government.<sup>47</sup> These laws outlined the way in which noncommercial organizations could operate in Russia. NGO laws were much simpler under Boris Yeltsin as opposed to Vladimir Putin. The NGO laws in Yeltsin's Russia did not require organizations to register with the government; those laws outlined how groups could defend their rights within the legal system and defined "public associations" as self-organizing groups independent of the state.<sup>48</sup> In short, civil society during the Yeltsin era is a stark contrast to the current culture of the sector under Vladimir Putin, which provides strict guidelines for NGOs to operate.

Over the past decade, there have been an array of political occurrences and events that led to the crackdown on civil society under Vladimir Putin with the Law on Foreign Agents and the Undesirable Organizations law. Russia's poor social and economic status following the end of the Cold War is one of the driving factors behind Putin's NGO policies, mainly because restoring the strength of the Russian state was one of Putin's main priorities as president.<sup>49</sup> Vladimir Putin's vision to rebuild Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union included a state and civil

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Brian D. Taylor, *State Building in Putins Russia: Policing and Coercion after Communism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

society that was in one accord in national interest. This perspective created a challenge for Russia's civil society sector since many non-state actors or NGOs typically organize and function independently. Examining his early rhetoric on civil society, one can infer that Putin believes in having a strong civil society that is managed by the government. Indeed, <sup>50</sup>looking beneath the early rhetoric about the need for a strong civil society, we see that Putin's deeper understanding of what civil society should be contributed to the evolution of the undermining of NGOs in Russia between 2006 and 2015.

In 1999, when Vladimir Putin became Acting President of the Russian Federation, Russia's first post-communist decade had sown chaos across the country and sunk the country into deep economic depression, from which Russia was just beginning to re-emerge when the 1998 financial crisis hit. The result of the decade created a dramatic economic inequality gap, with some citizens struggling for basic necessities such as food.<sup>51</sup> Poverty levels were rising, public health was declining, along with overall population growth and life expectancy.<sup>52</sup> . In Putin's early speeches in 1999, it was already abundantly clear that Putin's approach to Russia's revitalization would include strong leadership and centralized order. Interestingly, at this early stage, his conception of Russian revitalization included the importance of a strong civil society, but one that is framed in service to the nation, not the freedom of the individual. Putin states in one of his speeches that "people participating in civil society, will regard as primarily important, not so much the idea of freedom, not so much the idea of interest, as the idea of service to a certain common cause."<sup>54</sup> Putin's conception of civil society values nationalism. This perspective

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<sup>50</sup> Sarah L. Henderson, "Civil Society in Russia," *Problems of Post-Communism* 58, no. 3 (2011)

<sup>51</sup> Seth Mandel, "The Death of the Soviet Union, 20 Years Later: Its Fall--and Putin's Rise," *Commentary* 5, no. 29 (2011)

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>53</sup> *ibid*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*

of civil society differs from the Western or more common understanding of civil society which places value on freedom of expression, independent organizing, and coalition building. The beginning of the erosion of civil society in Russia is marked with Putin's speeches in 1999 which show his perspective on how civil society should function.

In 2001, the Kremlin introduced the Civic Forum which consisted of a two-day conference featuring over 3,000 selected representatives from NGOs, as well as key government officials in Russia.<sup>55</sup> Focusing on the Civic Forum helps demonstrate and explain the gradual erosion of civil society in Russia because it showcases the Kremlin's effort to focus on strategies towards managing civil society and supporting certain nongovernmental organizations and the lack of clarity from the start in Putin's conceptualization of civil society. In fact, this unprecedented organization was created with a vague mandate to discuss general issues facing Russian civil society at the time. It is debated whether the Civic Forum was meant to bridge the gap between the federal government and NGOs or introduce the new order for civil society in Russia which would be heavily regulated by the government.

Shortly after the creation of the Civic Forum, governmental non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) began to appear in 2000.<sup>56</sup> One of the first government-run NGOs was *Grazhdanskoe Obshchestvo* (civil society) and this organization's main purpose was to select attendees for the Civic Forum. This onset of GONGOs shows a transition towards the erosion of civil society in Russia because NGOs or non-state actors are normally separate from the government in operations. This slow interference of the Russian state in civil society took another step forward in 2002 with the creation of the Presidential Council on Civil Society

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<sup>55</sup> Alexander Nikitin and Jane Buchanan, "The Kremlin's Civic Forum: Cooperation or Co-optation for Civil Society in Russia?" *Demokratizatsiya* 10, no. 2 (2002)

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*

Institution and Civil Rights “to assist the President in the exercise of his constitutional responsibilities to guarantee and protect human rights and freedoms, keep the President informed on the situation in this area, facilitate development of civil society institutions in Russia, and draft proposals for the President on matters within its mandate.”<sup>57</sup> This brief synopsis of the council shows that the Kremlin was under the impression that civil society must be in some form developed by the government. Dr. Catherine Owen of the Foreign Policy Center suggests that the Council on Civil Society Institution and Civil Rights was meant to aid in the development of cohesive public opinion on “critical social matters,” despite the lack of influence that the council has on the Russian public.<sup>58</sup> How to achieve this goal, however, was not entirely clear at the start. This conclusion stems from the framework of the council, whose members were drawn from civil society and human rights organizations. Renowned Russian Human Rights activist Ella Pamfilova was the head of the council between 2002 and 2010.<sup>59</sup> Under Pamfilova's leadership, it was a space for "independent criticism" until pressure from a "pro-Kremlin" group the Nashi Youth group influenced her resignation which took place on March 6, 2012.<sup>60</sup> After Pamfilova's resignation, many other members began to leave the council, as well. When Ella Pamfilova led the organization, only 15-20% of its members were "Kremlin loyalists", but that percentage steadily declined in the wake of her departure.<sup>61</sup> With the story of the Council on

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<sup>57</sup> Russia, Council For Civil Society And Human Rights, Presidential Councils, Meeting of Council for Civil Society Institutions and Human Rights

<sup>58</sup> Catherine Owen, "Is The Presidential Council For Civil Society And Human Rights 'Democratic'? Implications For Russian Governance", Fps.org, 2012, , <http://fpc.org.uk/articles/573>.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> Robert Coalson, "Former Presidential Rights Adviser Says Russian System Turned Into 'Rock-Solid Insult To All Of Us'," Rferl.org, 2011, , [https://www.rferl.org/a/russia\\_human\\_rights\\_ella\\_pamfilova/24091990.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/russia_human_rights_ella_pamfilova/24091990.html).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

Civil Society Institution and Civil Rights, it can be observed that erosion of civil society continued to progress in 2002, although no laws pertaining to NGOs were introduced yet.

During his State of the Union Address in 2003, Putin directly addressed his concerns with NGOs receiving foreign funding, stating that NGOs that received funding abroad were a “dubious group” who served “commercial interests,” opposed to the real interests of the Russian people.<sup>62</sup> These comments show the creation of two versions of civil society by president Putin: the “real” civil society which represented the true interests of the Russian people and the civil society that acted as agents for Western or foreign non-state actors. When meeting with the Nashi Youth group, Putin also states that “[w]e need a civil society, but it must be permeated by patriotism, concern for one’s country.”<sup>63</sup> This shows that again, nationalism is the most important component of civil society to Putin.

Shortly following Putin's address in 2003, the Federal Law on Self Governance was amended by the State Duma.<sup>64</sup> Although this law wasn’t directed against NGOs, it did list suggestions for state issues of importance to citizens, who were called upon to participate either at the federal or local level. The law recommended civic participation in the following federal or local duties: execution of municipal budgets, provision of utilities and government services, and input on housing reform and city.<sup>65</sup> This legislation signifies the Kremlin’s evolution towards setting up civil society avenues for citizens that aligned with the agenda of the Russian state.

The year 2004 was a major turning point for the gradual erosion of civil society in Russia mainly due to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. The Orange Revolution represented one of

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<sup>62</sup> Aseem Prakash and Mary Kay. Gugerty, *Advocacy Organizations and Collective Action* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

<sup>64</sup> ibid

<sup>65</sup> ibid

several color revolutions that occurred in former Soviet countries between 2003 and 2005, but it was the most significant in Moscow's eyes.<sup>66</sup> Considering Russia's historical ties with Ukraine that date back to the 1800s when the country was a part of the Russian empire, Ukraine was very significant to Putin's maintenance of regional power. On November 22, 2004, Ukrainians took to the streets of Kiev to protest the fraudulent reelection of Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich.

<sup>67</sup>According to exit polls, opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko's had an advantage earning 52 percent of the votes opposed to Yanukovich's 43 percent. When the winner of the election was announced, it was said that Yanukovich won the election by 2.5 percent. Corruption was also one of the main issues in the 2004 Ukrainian elections sparking the Orange Revolution.

Yanukovich was favored among the corrupt leaders in Ukraine and Yushchenko represented a western shift in post-communist politics due to his role as an opposition leader. The Orange Revolution lasted a total of 17 days ending with the inauguration of Viktor Yushchenko as Ukraine's President.<sup>68</sup>

The Orange Revolution greatly accelerated the creeping erosion of civil society in Russia because it provided a clear example of regime change in close proximity to Putin and Russia. Regime security is one of the driving forces behind Vladimir Putin's crack down on nongovernmental organizations due to his belief that these organizations contribute to revolutions like the Orange Revolution that influence regime change. During the same month as the Orange Revolution, legislation to develop a Federal Public Chamber was introduced which was hardly coincidental. The stated purpose of the Public Chamber was to "present and discuss"

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<sup>66</sup> Adrian Karatnycky, "Ukraine's Orange Revolution," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 2 (2005)

<sup>67</sup>Taras Kuzio, "The Opposition's Road to Success," *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 2 (2005)

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*

citizen's initiatives.<sup>69</sup> This new law, however, represents another shift towards the crackdown on NGOs and civil society in Russia, since some of the functions of the Public Chamber included investigating potential breaches of the law, submitting recommendations to the State Duma on domestic policy, freedom of expression in the media and other salient issues in Russia.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the organizational structure of the chamber is largely controlled by the president, who appoints one-third of the members, and those members choose another one-third of members, and the aggregate of the members nominate the final one-third of the chamber members.

In November 2005, in response to the Orange Revolution, the Civil Codes, Law on Public Associations, On Non-Commercial Organizations and Closed Administrative-Territorial formations were toughened up.<sup>71</sup> One of the most controversial features of these new NGO laws was the power of the government to deny NGOs that “create a threat to the sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity, national unity and national interest of the Russian Federation” rights to register with the government.<sup>72</sup> Believing that the Orange Revolution was largely driven by western-funded NGOs in Ukraine, the Kremlin was now determined to reduce or block the influence of foreign NGOs in Russia. Suddenly, the official language, as in the above quote, began to stress threats to Russian "sovereignty", "national unity" and "territorial integrity."

As part of this crackdown, annual audits were also required for NGOs and Russian residency was now required for the registration of an organization. There was widespread pushback of the law both internationally and domestically. The backlash from the bill caused

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<sup>69</sup> Debra Javeline and Sarah Lindemann-Komarova, "A Balanced Assessment of Russian Civil Society," *Journal of International Affairs* 63, no. 2 (2010)

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

<sup>71</sup> Inara Gulpe-Laganovska, "Choking On Bureaucracy: State Curbs On Independent Civil Society Activism," *Hrw.org*, 2008, , <https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/02/19/choking-bureaucracy/state-curbs-independent-civil-society-activism>.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

Putin to urge the State Duma to amend the law; after the revisions were made on December 26<sup>th</sup> the law was endorsed.<sup>73</sup>

Despite the softer revisions to the law, protests continued, leading the Duma to secretly pass the NGO laws. On January 10, 2006 Vladimir Putin discreetly signed the law,<sup>74</sup> which came into effect on April 18, 2006. This early version of the NGO laws regulated the activity of approximately 500,000 NGOs in Russia which included 148,000 public policy organizations, as well as 5,000 foreign branches of western NGOs. Under these new laws, organizations were required to report many aspects of their activity to the government through activity reports which were intricately detailed. To be compliant with what has come to be called the first Foreign Agent Law, NGOs were now required to submit intricate details about their performance, event expenses, and even office supply expenses. NGOs were not directly forced to shut down under this law, however, the immense pressure that the law placed on many organizations made it difficult for organizations to continue to exist in Russia.

Compounding this pressure on NGOs from the demanding requirements of the NGO laws in Russia, the government also began to financially support sectors of the civil society of which it approved. The state allotted 500 million Rubles or 15 million dollars to grant competitions for NGOs.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, in 2007 1.25 billion Rubles or 50 million dollars were given to fund grant competitions. The Russian government began to invest funds into GONGOs which showcased which types of organization were welcome in Putin's Russian civil society. The creation and introduction of this legislation are important to the gradual undermining of NGOs because it is

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<sup>73</sup> Yevgeny Volk, "Russias NGO Law: An Attack on Freedom and Civil Society" Heritage.org, 2006, , <https://www.heritage.org/europe/report/russias-ngo-law-attack-freedom-and-civil-society>.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid

<sup>75</sup> Julie Hemment, "Nashi, Youth Voluntarism, and Potemkin NGOs: Making Sense of Civil Society in Post-Soviet Russia," *Slavic Review* 71, no. 2 (2012)

the first piece of legislation that set the boundaries under which NGOs that received foreign funding could operate in Russia.

Under the Medvedev administration in 2009, NGO laws in Russia began to soften, possibly due to the international attention that the laws were gaining. Medvedev requested the development of a working group dedicated to NGO law reform and made several amendments to the law “On Noncommercial Organizations”.<sup>76</sup> The law On Non commercial Organizations formerly denied the right to register NGOs seen as a “threat to the unique character, cultural heritage, or national interest of the Russian Federation.” It had also rejected NGOs that had failed to submit documents adequately and required NGOs to submit annual governmental audits. Medvedev scaled back the demands of the law On Noncommercial Organizations by no longer requiring NGOs to complete governmental audits annually; instead, he made them register every three years. He also removed key phrases from the law, such as “threat to the unique character, cultural heritage, or national interest of the Russian Federation,” and no longer denied NGOs registration if they fit this description. Before the amendments to the law On Noncommercial Organizations, Medvedev met with U.S. President Barak Obama to discuss civil rights in Russia.<sup>77</sup> It can be inferred that Medvedev’s meeting with President Obama influenced the changes that he made to the NGO laws. Although the amendments to the law on Noncommercial Organizations did relax some of the strict policies on NGOs in Russia under the Medvedev administration, civil society was still gradually being eroded and Putin still had an influence on the sector as prime minister. In 2010, the Freedom House decreased Russia’s

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<sup>76</sup> Karla W. Simon, "International Non-Governmental Organizations and Non-Profit Organizations," *International Lawyer* 44, no. 1 (2010)

<sup>77</sup> Arch Puddington et al., "Contending with Putin’s Russia: Proposals for a New Approach." *Contending with Putin’s Russia: A Call for American Leadership*, Freedomhouse.org, 2012, [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Contending with Putin's Russia.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Contending%20with%20Putin's%20Russia.pdf).

democracy score and stated that Russia was not an electoral democracy.<sup>78</sup> This new rating reflected Putin's evolving crackdown on NGOs and civil society.

The Arab uprisings and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's critique of the 2011 parliamentary elections in Russia also had an immense effect on the progressive erosion of civil society in Russia.<sup>79</sup> After the reelection of Vladimir Putin as president in 2012, there was widespread protest following reports of election fraud. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that the elections were "dishonest and unfair" which caused Putin to blame Western influence for the protests in Russia and the Arab Spring. Putin believed that the United States State Department and Hillary Clinton "signaled" opposition leaders and demonstrators to "undermine" his power.<sup>80</sup> The way Putin interpreted this situation, and his reaction to it contributed greatly to the next steps in the erosion of Russian civil society.

In November 2012, the NGO Law on "Foreign Agents" was implemented.<sup>81</sup> The law on Foreign Agents required organizations that engaged in "political activity" or received foreign funding to register as foreign agent regardless of whether the funds they received were used for political activity. Once an organization is classified as a foreign agent it must turn in quarterly financial reports, register political activities before participation is approved, and submit all materials that are given to the media.<sup>82</sup> If foreign agents fail to comply with the law, they will be banned from participating in protests and run the risk of being fined 300,000 rubles (10,000 Dollars) or imprisonment<sup>83</sup> The Foreign Agent law is a particularly controversial law regarding

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<sup>78</sup>"Freedom in the World 2010: Russia," Freedomhouse.org, 2010, , <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2010/russia>.

<sup>79</sup> Kathryn Stoner and Michael Mcfaul, "Who Lost Russia (This Time)? Vladimir Putin," The Washington Quarterly 38, no. 2 (2015)

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> Ibid

<sup>82</sup> Ibid

<sup>83</sup> Ibid

NGOs and civil society in Russia due to its hard crackdown on NGOs that receive foreign funding. It is clear that there were many factors gradually contributing to the enactment of the law on Foreign Agents. Many of these factors involved the Western inference, political demonstrations, and Kremlin fears of regime change (typically following protests).

Though the enactment of the 2012 Foreign Agent law clearly accelerated the erosion of civil society in Russia, that erosion intensified even further after Putin's 2014 military intervention in Crimea during the Ukrainian crisis. This intervention ultimately led to the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula on March 19, 2014 and a military conflict in eastern Ukraine between Kremlin-backed rebels and Ukrainian forces that is still ongoing. Russia's intervention in Crimea caused an international uproar and resulted in widespread economic sanctions from the European Union, the United States, Canada, Norway, Switzerland, and other influential countries.<sup>84</sup>

It can be argued that the backlash from the West following Putin's annexation of Crimea on March 19, 2014 caused Putin to increase regulations on NGOs with the subsequent passing of the Undesirable Organization Law on May 2015. The Kremlin introduced Russia's Undesirable Law along with the Law on Measures of Affecting Persons Related to Violation of Basic Human Rights and Freedoms of the Citizens of the Russian Federation, the Code of Administrative Offenses, Criminal Code, Criminal Procedure Code, and the Law on the Procedure of Exit from the Russian Federation to counter Western influence, secure the Putin regime and progress in Putin's mission of Russian resurgence in current international relations.<sup>85</sup> The Undesirable Law is the most recent NGO law in Russia, and grants the Prosecutor General

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<sup>84</sup> Iana R Dreye and Nicu Popescu, "Do Sanctions against Russia Work?" European Union Institute for Security Studies 35 (2014)

<sup>85</sup> Ibid

power to declare an organization “undesirable” if it deemed to be a national threat. Through analyzing the development of the undesirable law, one can see that this legislation is an expression of Putin’s fear or paranoia of Western influence. Indeed, given the timing of the undesirable law, the focus on national threats within the language of the law which states that the Prosecutor General can declare and NGO undesirable if the activities of the organization are a threat to the national security of the Russian Federation, it can be inferred Hillary Clinton's comments on alleged election fraud in 2011, combined with the international response after the Crimea intervention in 2014 prompted and intensified the development of the undesirable law. The Undesirable Law allows the Russian prosecutor general to expel organizations that pose a "threat to the foundation of the constitutional order of the Russian Federation and the security of the state”<sup>86</sup>. These instances show that Vladimir Putin views the West as a deliberate, active and revisionist threat to his political agenda to rebuild Russia, limit opposition and sustain power.

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<sup>86</sup> Russia, The Prosecutor General's Office Of The Russian Federation, The Prosecutor General's Office Of The Russian Federation Decided To Recognize As Undesirable The Activity Of The Foreign Non-Governmental Organization In The Russian Federation, December 4, 2015, , <http://eng.genproc.gov.ru/smi/news/news-989881/>.

## Timeline of Civil Society Erosion in Russia 1999-2015

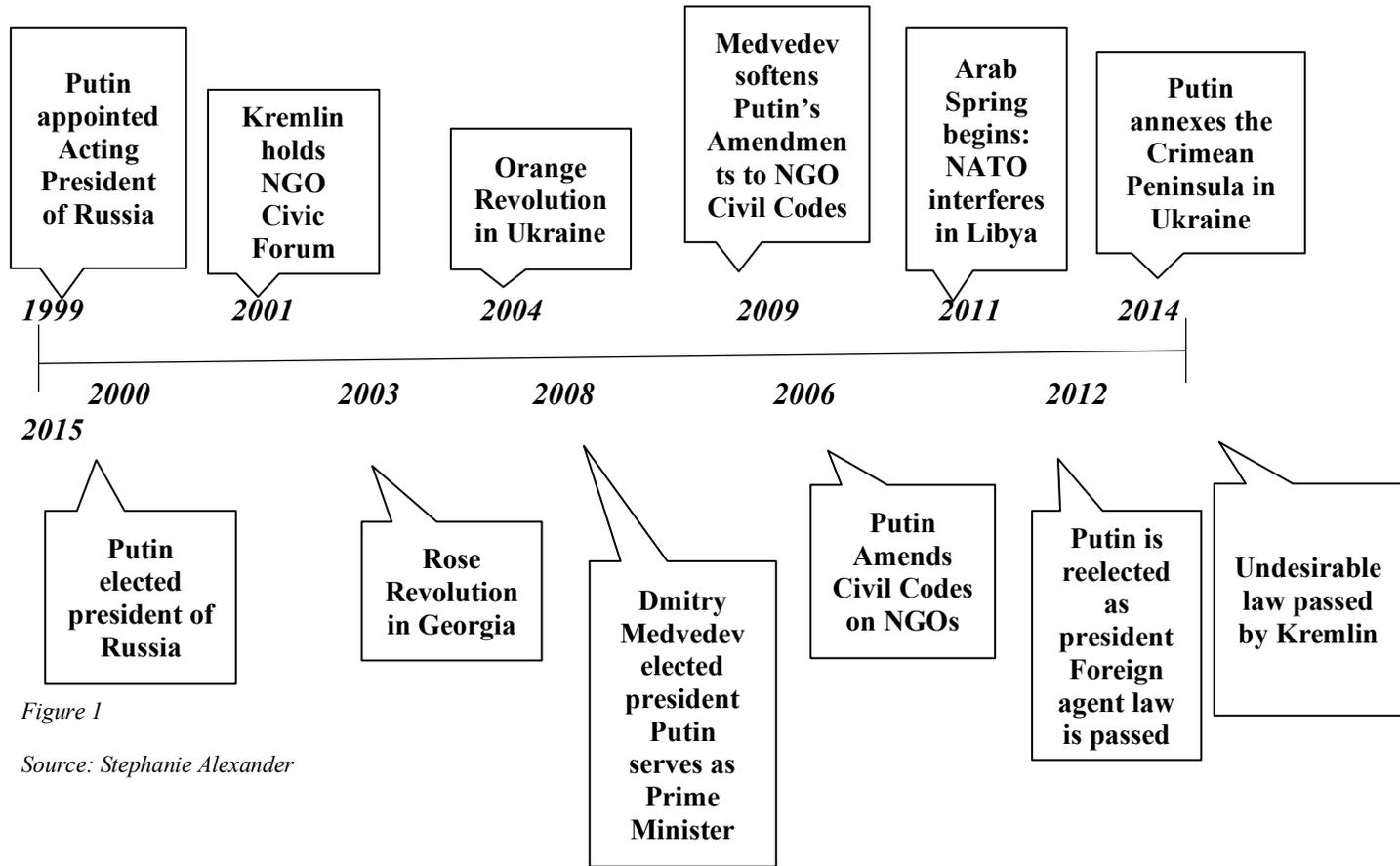


Figure 1

Source: Stephanie Alexander

### Chapter III: Research Findings

This section of the study on Putin's gradual erosion of civil society in Russia under the provides the research findings of the effects that the foreign agent and undesirable law had on NGOs in Russia. The primary research methodology used in this study was qualitative, although there was one quantitative component that is germane to the research findings. Overall there was a mixed methodology that was used to conduct this study. Qualitative research involves gathering data or information that does not include numerical values, information in qualitative research is gathered from interviews, observations or written documents.<sup>87</sup> Quantitative research, on the other hand, incorporates numerical data and or statistical analysis.<sup>88</sup> Since the foreign agent law has been in effect for five years and the undesirable law has been in place for three years there is not a wide range of numerical or statistical data listing organizations that were affected in Russian civil society and how. Thus, qualitative data was most appropriate for this thesis especially giving the empirical nature of this study. Following a primarily qualitative methodology, relevant literature on organizations that were registered as foreign agents and undesirables was reviewed to determine how the law on foreign agents and undesirable organizations impacted civil society and democracy in Russia as well as the rationale behind Putin's political agenda which caused him to enact the undesirable and foreign agent laws. Although the primary methodology of this study is qualitative when analyzing the effects of the law on foreign agents few quantitative measures were included. A case study approach was also used to analyze the effectiveness of the undesirable organization's law.

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<sup>87</sup>Michael Quinn. Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2015)

<sup>88</sup> Todd D. Jick, "Mixing Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: Triangulation in Action," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1979)

The law on foreign agents and undesirable organizations has undoubtedly negatively impacted NGOs and civil society in Russia. After analyzing the effects of these two controversial NGO laws one may notice that there is a pattern of human rights, development and Western non-governmental organizations that were primarily targeted. The majority of the organizations that were listed as foreign agents and undesirable organizations between 2012 and 2017 were organizations in those three categories. This chapter will present the organizations that were affected by the foreign agents and undesirable laws, the types of organizations that were targeted and the most recent accounts of organizations that were added to the Ministry of Justice's registry of foreign agents and undesirables.

Data proves that under the law on foreign agents and the undesirable organizations Law human rights, development and Western-affiliated organizations were affected most. Between the years of 2014 and 2017, Russia's Ministry of Justice has declared 158 organizations within these categories as foreign agents.<sup>89</sup> Rather than be deemed Foreign Agents due to the negative connotation of the title some organizations choose to voluntarily shut down. Since the enactment of the Foreign Agent Law in July of 2012, 30 organizations voluntarily shut down rather than registering as foreign agents.<sup>90</sup> Under this law regardless of an organizations mission or activities if an organization receives the foreign funding they are required to be registered as foreign agents in Russia's governmental registry of NGOs and adhere to special rules and regulations which include submitting routine finance reports as well as, being subject to random audits from the government. In fact, human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, Transparency International, Human Rights Watch and 80 other NGOs were raided by Russian

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<sup>89</sup> "Russia: Government vs. Rights Groups | Human Rights Watch," Hrw.org, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/russia-government-against-rights-groups-battle-chronicle>.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid*

government officials.<sup>91</sup> These surprise raids came just eight months after the Law on Foreign Agents was enacted and one month after Vladimir Putin gave a speech in mid-February of 2013 to the Foreign Security Service or FSB urging them to enforce the Foreign Agent Law. In his speech, Putin calls for the crackdown on NGOs that receive foreign funding by stating “No one has the right to speak for all of Russian society, especially those who are directed and financed from abroad and thus serve the interests of others,” and that the order for NGO activity in Russia has been set with the introduction of the Law on Foreign Agents.<sup>92</sup> Following this speech, organizations were audited without warning and deemed “foreign agents” based on the findings of the Ministry of Justice. By 2014 the first tangible list of foreign agents began to emerge. According to a list published by Human Rights Watch, in 2014, 15 human rights, free press, social and women’s groups were classified as foreign agents. In 2015, the number of organizations listed as foreign agents increased to 36. In 2016, 27 organizations were added to the list of foreign agents and in 2017 only seven organizations were added to the list of foreign agents. It should be noted that in 2017, 15 to 20 organizations were taken off of the list of foreign agents after refraining from receiving foreign funding over the course of one year.<sup>93</sup> Figure one depicts the growth of foreign agents starting in 2013.

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<sup>91</sup> Darin Christensen and Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Defunding Dissent: Restrictions on Aid to NGOs," *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 2 (2013)

<sup>92</sup> Miriam Elder, "Russia Raids Human Rights Groups in Crackdown on 'foreign Agents'," *The Guardian*, March 27, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/27/russia-raids-human-rights-crackdown>.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Foreign Agents Added</b>
2013	0
2014	15
2015	36
2016	27
2017	7

*Table 1*

*Source: Stephanie Alexander*

It should be noted that there are no foreign agents listed in 2013 despite the Law on Foreign Agents being enacted in late 2012 because Putin's speech on February 2013 influenced the enforcement of the law which included investigations and raids on the organizations that were mentioned previously. In 2015, there is a noticeable spike in the number of organizations that were added to the foreign agents' list. This spike in 2015 is most likely due to the conflict Putin had with the West following Russia's military involvement in the Ukrainian crisis as well as the annexation of Crimea which resulted in widespread sanctions from many prominent countries in the international system. There is a significant decrease in organizations that were added to the foreign agent list in 2017 because over 15 organizations were removed from the list. According to the International Center for Non-Profit Law as of 2017, there are currently 162 organizations in total that are listed on Russia's registry of Non-Commercial Organizations (NCO) that are operating under the status of foreign agents. Of these 162 organizations, nineteen of the organizations voluntarily registered as foreign agents, forty organizations were exempt from the

registry after being liquidated and twenty nine organizations were also exempt from registering after no longer acting as a foreign agent or receiving international funding.<sup>94</sup>

This section will entail the findings of case studies that were conducted on NGOs that were deemed undesirable in Russia. There are three determining factors regarding which organizations are deemed undesirable which are the geopolitical affiliation of the organization as well as the mission or cause of that the organization works towards and the organization's financial activity (if any) of the organization. Geopolitical affiliation, civil society involvement, and financial activities were imperative in observing which organizations were affected under Putin's undesirable law because these factors were most likely taken into consideration by the Russian Prosecutor General to determine which NGOs could participate in Russian civil society. Giving that Vladimir Putin enacted the Law on Foreign Agents and the Undesirable organizations' laws in response to Western interference or domestic opposition and to strengthen domestic civil society organizations that worked in the interest of the state, international, democratic and philanthropic groups were also targeted and listed as undesirable organizations. The NGOs that were studied include the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for Democracy, Freedom House and the U. S Russia Foundation for Economic Advancement and the Rule of Law. There is substantially more data on NGOs that were affected by the Law on Foreign Agents compared to the Undesirable Organizations Law. It's possible that the lack of data vis-a-vis the undesirable organizations' law could be because the law was passed three years after the foreign agent law or because the undesirable law was much more punitive than the foreign agent law.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid

In 2017, there were 11 organizations listed as “undesirable” organizations. The National Endowment for Democracy and the Open Society foundation were among the first organizations to get shut down on July 2015 shortly following the enactment of the law on May 2015. In 2016, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, Media Development Investment Fund, and the International Republican Institute were listed as undesirable. Finally, in 2017, Open Russia, the Institute of Modern Russia, as well as the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation were also added to the list of undesirable organizations. The National Endowment for Democracy being the first organization to be listed as an undesirable organization in Russia is significant because it represents Putin targeting democratic or Western organizations as well as determining who (in NGOs) posed a threat to his plan to strengthen Russia and rebuild Russian civil society. The National Endowment for Democracy was responsible for funding dozens of organizations that were listed on the Ministry of Justice’s registry of organizations that were operating as foreign agents.<sup>95</sup> The primary reason why the National Endowment for Democracy posed a threat to national security in Russia was the organizations’ donations to NGOs that monitored elections. The National Endowment for Democracy was also founded in 1983 in part by U. S President Ronald Reagan as an effort for the United States to help promote democracy abroad. The Charles Stewart Mott and MacArthur Foundations were also on the brink of being targeted as undesirables in 2015 but chose to shut down to avoid being added to the blacklist of organizations.<sup>96</sup> The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation was as a 20-year-old philanthropic organization that provided grants for civil society

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid

<sup>96</sup> Ibid

<sup>97</sup> John Dalhuisen, "Russia Begins Blacklisting ‘undesirable’ Organizations," Amnesty International, 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/07/russia-begins-blacklisting-undesirable-organizations/>

efforts which included educational, environmental and human rights efforts.<sup>98</sup> Before the foundation was considered undesirable it gave 25 million Dollars to civil society in Russia starting in the early 1990s.<sup>99</sup>

After researching the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, it is clear why Putin saw this organization as a threat to Russia in security. This organization was not a political organization but the organization did fund civil society causes in the United States, South Africa, as well as Central and Eastern Europe. Among the countries that the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation supported was Ukraine which was an obvious trigger for Vladimir Putin. The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation is also an organization that is based in the United States. So, it can be concluded that because this organization was from the United States, gave money to civil society causes in the region and funded causes in Ukraine, it posed a threat to the security and constitution of the Russian Federation which led to its undesirable status. As of 2017, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation still funds civil society efforts in Ukraine. In fact, the organization has current grants for the Ukrainian Catholic University, Ukrainian Philanthropist Forum, the Ukrainian Women's Fund and the Center for Society Research in Kiev these civil society grants amount to over 500,000 Dollars. The MacArthur Foundation was also targeted the same manner as the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation was under the undesirable law. The MacArthur Foundation also provided grants to Russian civil society efforts starting in the 1990s.<sup>100</sup> The foundation specializes in donating to causes like mass incarceration, climate change and the prevention of the use of nuclear weapons.<sup>101</sup> After claiming to have been put on a "patriot stop-list" of undesirable organizations, the MacArthur Foundation closed its Moscow office in late

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<sup>98</sup> "Grants Database a," Mott.org, 2018, [https://www.mott.org/grants/#pr=6,s=post\\_date|desc](https://www.mott.org/grants/#pr=6,s=post_date|desc).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid

<sup>100</sup> "About Us," Macfound.org, , <https://www.macfound.org/about/>.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid

2015.<sup>102</sup> The headquarters of the organization is in Chicago there are also offices in Mexico, India, and Nigeria. The MacArthur Foundation gave over 173 million dollars to Russian civil society organizations.<sup>103</sup> After analyzing the case of the MacArthur Foundation as an undesirable organization, there are many common factors that contributed its status as a threat to the Russian constitution and national security, although the organization is independent of the US government: the MacArthur Foundation is an American NGO. Like the many of the other organizations that were deemed undesirable, the MacArthur foundation invested millions of dollars into Russian civil society. The organization's stance on the limiting the access and use of nuclear weapons also contributed to its status as a threat to Russian national security, according to the undesirable organizations' law. In the cases of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation and the National Endowment for Democracy, there is a pattern found in what makes an organization a national security threat or undesirable to the Russian Federation: they are all American organizations that support civil society causes and democratic development in Russia. This observation also applies to the George Soros foundation which was briefly discussed in the introductory chapter. As mentioned previously, George Soros's charitable foundation the Open Society Foundation was also shut down as a result of the undesirable organizations' law. Like the Mott and MacArthur foundations, the Open Society Foundation was also put on the stop list of undesirable organizations that threatened Russian national security. Through his many philanthropic efforts, George Soros also donated millions to Russian civil society efforts and supported democratic civil society causes such as government transparency and accountability. In the case of the U. S Russia Foundation for Economic

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid

<sup>103</sup> MacArthur Foundation, "Statement of MacArthur President Julia Stasch on the Foundation's Russia Office," news release, July 21, 2015, Macfound.org, <https://www.macfound.org/press/press-releases/statement-macarthur-president-julia-stasch-foundations-russia-office/>.

Advancement and the Rule of Law organization, it is almost self-explanatory why this organization was listed as an undesirable by the Russian Prosecutor General. Through simply analyzing the title of the organization one can infer the issues that Putin and the Kremlin may have with this NGO; the U. S Russia Foundation for Economic Advancement and the Rule of Law is an American philanthropic organization that supported a democratic cause – promotion of rule of law – which contrast with Putin’s authoritarian way of governing and efforts to limit Western influence. The U. S Russia Foundation for Economic Advancement and the Rule of Law (USRF or U.S.-Russia Foundation) was listed as a national threat or undesirable because the organization financially supported NGOs that were registered as foreign agents.<sup>104</sup> In addition to funding organizations that operate as foreign agents, the president of the U. S Russia Foundation for Economic Advancement and the Rule of Law, Mark Pomar is banned from Russia until 2025 for funding organizations that participated in political activities or foreign agent organizations. Unlike the MacArthur and Charles Mott foundations, USFR is a newer organization that became active in 2008 to help improve U.S.-Russia relations. The organization claims to support “innovation, entrepreneurship, education, and scientific expertise” within the Russian Federation.<sup>105</sup> The U.S.-Russia Foundation's main line of work included providing grants supporting rule of law and governance, a market-based economy, and civil society.<sup>106</sup> This NGO was cracked down on by the undesirable law because of its affiliation with the United States and its support of civil society efforts. The most intriguing factor, in this case, is that this organization was created bilaterally in 2006 by U. S President George W. Bush and Vladimir

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<sup>104</sup> "NGO U.S. Russia Foundation For Economic Advancement And Rule Of Law Recognized As Undesirable In Russia", "Russialist.org, 2015, <http://russialist.org/ngo-u-s-russia-foundation-for-economic-advancement-and-rule-of-law-recognized-as-undesirable-in-russia/>

<sup>105</sup> "About Us," Usrf.Us, 2017, <http://usrf.us/index.php/about/>.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid*

Putin at the G8 summit. Since 2006 relations between the United States and Russia have drastically changed – in part, due to NATO's intervention in Libya – Hillary Clinton's accusation of Putin's election fraud in 2011, Russia's military intervention in Ukraine in 2014 and Western sanctions that followed after Putin's annexation of Crimea.

Bases on the cases of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, and the U.S.-Russia foundation, the three key qualities that relegated all these organizations as 'undesirable' are all identical: geopolitical affiliation with the West, support of democratic causes and substantial controversial philanthropic activity which includes but is not limited to grants to Ukraine as well as grants for democratic causes across Eurasia. Moreover, the fact that these organizations (the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation and the National Endowment for Democracy) are based in the United States, they are perceived as a national threat to Russian security, mainly because of residual political tensions between Russia and the West. In addition to an NGOs affiliation with the United States, if an organization offers democratic or civil society support, especially to other organizations classified as foreign agents, then it will have a heightened chance of being deemed an undesirable due to Putin's rejection of democratic norms and any political opposition. Similarly, these organizations' philanthropic contributions to other NGOs that in some implicit way challenge the Putin regime, relegate them to the rank of undesirable, as in the cases of Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the U.S.-Russia Foundation and the Open Society Foundation.

Russia's law on Foreign Agents and Undesirable Organizations have undoubtedly had a negative impact on civil society in Russia. The gradual implementation of NGO laws that initially surveilled the activities of NGOs and eventually granted the Ministry of Justice and the Russian Prosecutor General the power to shut organizations down or ban them from Russia had a

dampening effect on civil society activity in Russia in general. After all, genuinely autonomous civil society organizations are intrinsic to democracy, allowing citizens to form non-state actors and organize based on their social demands or interest separate from the state. Although Putin takes an authoritarian approach to leading Russia, democracy is imperative to the future of a healthy Russian civil society as well as society in general. If the erosion of civil society and NGOs continues – as we have seen with the implementation of both the Foreign Agents and the Undesirable Law – then eventually internal tensions between the government and the people may develop. If tensions between the Kremlin and the Russian people rise because of a lack of democracy or rights for civil society, then Russian citizens may finally challenge or topple the Putin regime. This is why the issue of democratic suppression through the erosion of civil society is so important.

## Conclusion

This thesis has argued that there was a gradual erosion of civil society in Russia spanning between 2006 and 2015 with the enactment of the Foreign Agents and Undesirable Organizations Law in 2012 and 2015. The gradual erosion of civil society in Russia is a result of Vladimir Putin's fear of regime change, Western or outside interference, as well as Putin's political agenda to restore Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union. It was pointed out that following the demise of the Soviet Union, Russia struggled from a financial, political and public health standpoint.<sup>107</sup> Russia's crisis following the Cold War paired with Russian President Vladimir Putin's career as a former KGB agent for the Soviet Union and his former leadership of the KGB's successor agency the FSB has shaped Putin's worldview and desire for Russia's resurgence as a world power. Putin's desire to rebuild Russia from the demise of the Soviet Union has an intense effect on his interactions with other countries in the international system, primarily the United States and his policies that have gradually undermined civil society organizations Russia. The mechanisms Putin used to restore Russia included countering political opposition and Western influence via NGOs through tough civil society policies, such as the Civic Forum, the Law on Foreign Agents and the Undesirable Organizations Law. Through studying the evolution of civil society policy in Russia starting in 2001, it was found that strict NGO laws that heavily regulated how NGOs functioned in Russia were passed over the course of 10 years (2005-2015) starting with amendments to the four existing NGO laws in 2005 and ending with the enactment of the Undesirable Organizations Law on July 2015. The two laws that most accurately represented the crackdown on NGOs and Russian civil society were the Law on Foreign Agents and the Undesirable Organizations Law. The Law on Foreign Agents and the

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid

Undesirable Organizations Laws are an expression of Putin's neoliberalist or structural realist perspective vis a vis restoring and governing Russia.

Through researching Putin's political and military behavior between 2005 and 2015, it is clear that his approach to what he sees as threats to Russia's national security (which can be debated) consists of both military and political hyperactivity. Similar to his neorealist political perspective, Putin's political and military hyperactivity in the international system overlap with Machiavellianism and components of structural power. The Machiavellian school of thought argues that the acquisition and maintenance of power should be most important to political leaders opposed to morality and ethics.<sup>108</sup> Through his annexation of Crimea, intervention in Syria, as well as the crackdown on NGOs, Vladimir Putin is Machiavellian. Susan Strange's security facet of structural power overlaps with both neorealism and Machiavellianism because it states that security is one of the main frameworks in achieving (structural) power in international relations. The security facet of Strange's structural power theory states that security in terms of military defense capabilities is one of the four major components of structural power based on how the international system is set up or institutionalized. Production, knowledge, and finance are the other three components of structural power, which Putin stresses far less, to Russia's serious disadvantage in terms of real, long-term structural power. From the time that Putin took office as president of the Russian Federation in 2000, he embarked on security policies that eroded Russian civil society, although he professed that a strong civil society would be an integral part of his restoration plan. Putin's early speeches show his value of a strong civil society that is in accord with a strong state; and yet, his future policies on NGOs in Russia undermined

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<sup>108</sup> Nigel Warburton, Jon Pike, and Derek Matravers, *Reading Political Philosophy: Machiavelli to Mill* (London: Routledge in Association with the Open University, 2000).

his own professed vision.<sup>109</sup> Putin's creeping erosion of civil society in Russia demonstrates his paranoia of opposition from the West, extreme will to stay in power, as well as his goal to strengthen Russia. Although Putin's ultimate objective is to strengthen the state, his means of achieving this goal have resulted in weakening democracy, limiting freedom of expression and undermining NGOs or civil society in Russia. The issue with Russia's gradual erosion of NGOs and civil society is not simply the negative effects that it has on Russian democracy, but also on Russia's long-term structural power.

Research on Russia's NGO laws starting in the mid-2000s shows that over time there was evolution of civil society in Russia. Civil society went from being virtually ignored by the state under Yeltsin to being heavily regulated and repressed under Putin. It should be noted that it was never Putin's malicious intent to erode civil society in Russia; rather, his neorealist and Machiavellian worldview influenced his conception of a strong state as one that overlaps with civil society, not one that is independent from the state. This state-based evolution of civil society in Russia began with the 2001 Civic Forum, which introduced GONGOs or state-backed nongovernmental organizations. The process continued in late 2005 when the existing NGO laws were amended and implemented in 2006. The erosion reached its final stages between 2012 and 2015 when the Law on Foreign Agents and the Undesirable Organizations were enacted. The most important factors regarding this timeline are the political events that influenced the development of the 2006 NGO laws, Law on Foreign Agents and the Undesirable Organizations Law. Political events that occurred between 2004 and 2014 such as the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, NATO's intervention in Libya, Secretary Clinton's comments on Russian protests and Putin's reelection in 2011/2012 as well as the annexation of Crimea in 2014 caused Putin to

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid

crack down on civil society in an effort to guarantee regime security. These political events align with the timing of the creation of new legislation from the Russian government that had a significant impact on civil society, NGOs, and democracy in Russia. The Orange Revolution was threatening to Putin because the election of Viktor Yushchenko represented a major democratic or Western shift within the region which conflicted or interfered with Putin's maintenance of regional power. NATO's intervention in Libya was a threat to Putin because it fueled his theories of the West, primarily the United States, influencing regime change. After the death of Muammar Gadhafi, Putin went on to criticize the U. S for spearheading the intervention in Libya for political gain<sup>110</sup>. Putin's annexation of the Crimean peninsula following the Ukraine crisis in 2014 caused the Russian Federation to receive economic sanctions from major players in the international system which caused Putin to enforce the Undesirable Organizations Law in 2015<sup>111</sup>. It can be argued that with Putin's repression of NGOs, he does not intend to harm civil society or NGOs in Russia (even though that is the effect); rather he intends to send a clear message to the West and his opposition that reminds them of his power, and the strength of bonds between Russian civil society and the Russian state.

The gradual erosion of civil society in Russia is a relevant issue in international relations because civil society represents the freedom of citizens to organize based on their interests independent of the state. Through the implementation of various laws that affected the way organizations could operate in Russia, the onset of Kremlin-backed GONGOs, as well as the Civic Forum, civil society in Russia was undermined by Vladimir Putin's regime.<sup>112</sup> Although Putin's focus was to ultimately strengthen and restore Russia, through contributing to the

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<sup>110</sup> Eliza Relman, "US Intervention in Libya Was Turning Point for Putin," Businessinsider.com, 2017, , <http://www.businessinsider.com/putin-us-libya-intervention-hillary-clinton-2017-2>.

<sup>111</sup> Alina Polyakova, "Putinism and the European Far Right.," Institute of Modern Russia 19 (2016)

<sup>112</sup> Ibid

creation of a Kremlin-backed civil society and an undesirable civil society through the Civic Forum and implementation of harsh NGO laws, civil society and democracy were negatively impacted in Russia. The negative effects that the 2005 NGO laws, the Law on Foreign Agents and the Undesirable Organizations have on democracy are the problem with the gradual erosion of civil society in Russia. Democracy in Russia and in general is important because it provides citizens with freedom within the state which includes civil society, expression, and human rights. If citizens continue to be stripped of freedom of expression, democracy and human rights under by the rejection of civil society, political chaos could eventually ensue, resulting in the very thing that Putin is trying to avoid. Ironically, Putin's attempt to limit opposition, demonstrations, and protests in Russia with the strict NGO laws may cause his regime to be changed.

## Appendix

Figure 1

Timeline of the erosion of civil society in Russia

Source: Stephanie Alexander

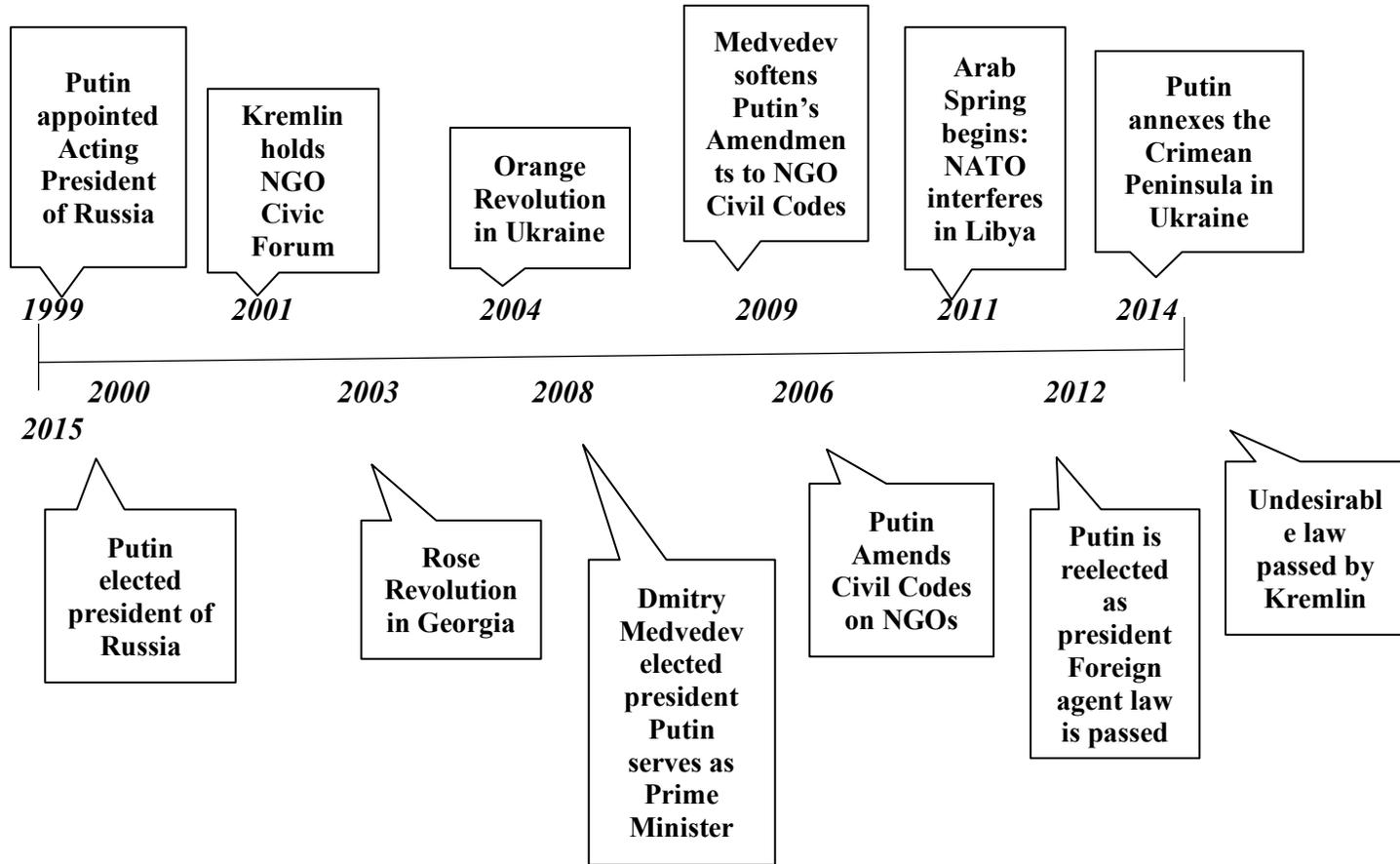


Table 1 The number of organizations classified as foreign agents and the corresponding years

Source: Stephanie Alexander

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Foreign Agents Added</b>
2013	0
2014	15
2015	36
2016	27
2017	7

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