

Decentralisation, Citizenship and Mobility: Residency Restrictions and Skilled Migration in Moscow

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ABSTRACT *This study explores the effects of political restructuring on citizenship in contemporary Russia by examining the impact of decentralisation on freedom of movement in Moscow. It seeks to explain why, in spite of the change of regime and delegation of authority from federal to regional government, there has been a marked continuity in the practice of residency controls that restrict freedom of movement. It investigates the conditions for skilled migrants who wish to settle in Moscow and examines how the deconcentration of authority over residency policy has produced new inequalities such as access to essential services, employment, and the property market which have effectively created new classes of citizenship based on differentiated options for mobility. The range of options is determined by geographical location, place of residence, occupational status, and political engagement, and is illustrated by three types of citizenship: (1) full Muscovite status; (2) conditional subjects; and (3) resident participants. The empirical basis for this study draws upon data gathered during field visits to Moscow in January 2005 and winter 2006 when interviews (n = 36) and focus groups (four) were conducted with migrants from other regions and employers.*

Introduction

One of the purported benefits of decentralised governance is that it strengthens the bond between state and citizenry by providing greater opportunities for interest group competition and political participation (Dahl, 1971; Manor, 1996; Crook & Manor, 1998; Blair, 2000). In the case of former Communist states, decentralisation¹ was also endorsed as a means of protecting economic and political freedoms from potential state interference (Hayek, 1945; Berlin, 1969; Nozick, 1974; Sen, 2000). Such arguments were publicised in Russia in the 1990s where the transfer of authority from central government also supported privatisation and anti-corruption programmes. In practice, however, decentralisation did not bring the anticipated benefits described above. Rather, transfers of authority fostered political fragmentation which was most notable at the regional (*Oblast*) level where a visible cadre of governors challenged the Kremlin over highly sensitive areas of policy (Carothers, 2002; Lokshina, 2002). These developments also promoted new debates over

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the nature of post-Soviet Russia's federal character,² with scholars disagreeing over the degree to which power actually shifted from the Kremlin.³

The apparent deconcentration of power from Moscow in the mid-1990s was upset during the second Putin presidency when the Russian leader sought to reign in recalcitrant governors and establish a regime based on "personified power and bureaucratic authority" (Shevtsova, 2006). His programme of recentralisation achieved greater urgency following the September 2004 Beslan school siege, after which the Kremlin overturned the existing provisions for elections by popular vote and instituted a policy of directly nominating regional governors, who were to be confirmed by local legislatures.⁴ Putin's power-grab struck at the heart of Russia's fragile democracy and was criticised as an attack on ordinary Russians' human and civil rights (Human Rights Watch, 2006).

In spite of the many controversies generated by Russia's experiments with decentralisation, few have investigated the way in which citizenship has been renegotiated in response these reforms. This is a particularly significant omission as research on other countries records that political restructuring may lead to increased social distance between groups and has given rise to claims of social stratification forms and varying classes of citizenship (Schuster & Solomos, 2002; Blitz, 2005; Kofman, 2005; Watters, 2005). This article explore the effects of decentralisation of residency policy on citizenship, in Moscow. While there is a long history of residential and territorial stratification in Russia (Matthews, 1993; Shearer, 2001; Højdestrand, 2003), one premise of this study is that the reorganisation of the state has seen the extension of greater individual rights to free movement and settlement (Codagnone, 1998a, 1998b; Light, 2005). Further, the devolution of authority to sub-national governments over residency policy, in addition to the emergence of an active private sector, explicitly challenges the state's monopoly over the movement of persons on its territory (Torpey, 2000) and thus offers an opportune subject for investigation.

This article is motivated by two research questions. First, it seeks to explain why, in spite of the change of regime and delegation of authority to sub-national governments, the creation of new laws has failed to translate into more liberal policies and the removal of residency controls that frustrate citizens exercising their claims to free movement (Council of Europe, 2001). Second, it investigates the conditions of skilled migrants living without proof of residency (registration) in Moscow and explores how the deconcentration of power has instituted new inequalities, based on differentiated options for mobility, which are described in terms of three new categories of citizenship.

The setting for this investigation is Moscow, a city that has enjoyed a particular status as an exclusive centre which historically restricted the admission of residents from other regions. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow has attracted thousands of new residents, as a result of internal spontaneous migrations and more recently managed migration programmes (Russian Life, 2006; Yablokova, 2006). It has also established itself as a recognised powerbase which under the leadership of Mayor Yuri Luzhkov has confronted the federal administration over economic policies and has consequently been a target for Putin's recentralising programme. Finally, Moscow is also home to the largest number of NGOs and specialist organisations that advocate on behalf of migrants.

This article begins with a review of the literature and introduces the concept of "civic differentiation" to explore new patterns of inequality and citizenship. The following section outlines the history of residency controls in the Soviet Union and their revision during the Russian Federation's first 15 years of democratic rule which sets the scene for

this case study and subsequent analysis in the third and fourth sections, respectively. The empirical basis for this study draws upon data gathered during field visits to Moscow in January 2005 when interviews ($n^1 = 30$) and focus groups (four) were conducted with migrants from other regions, and then in the winter of 2006, when further interviews were conducted with employers ($n^2 = 6$).

Citizenship Revisited

The reconceptualisation of citizenship has been the subject of important academic works that have exposed the changing relationship between the state and individual (Joppke, 1999; Castles & Davidson, 2000). For example, Yasmin Soysal and Seyla Benhabib maintain that since residents in many states now enjoy access and entitlements to the same public sphere as full citizens, it makes sense to conceive of “post-national” and “cosmopolitan” forms of citizenship. Others contend that national responses to the global threats have generated new patterns of stratification which have resulted in a hierarchy of rights and sub-categories of citizens—quasi-citizens, better described as helots or denizens (Gibney, 2006). The variation in the movement and settlement of peoples has engendered a process of differentiation which has resulted in governmentally prescribed “avenues of access” (Watters, 2001), vastly different social and political outcomes and contradictory policy responses (Castles & Miller, 1983).

The main premise of this study is that political restructuring often leads to the institutionalisation of social and political inequalities which are translated into new categories and varying classes of citizenship (Schuster & Solomos, 2002; Blitz, 2005; Gibney, 2006). It highlights the role of structural factors that limit access and participation, and hence qualify the way citizenship is experienced. It therefore stands in contrast to pluralist accounts that stress individual agency through their descriptions of “parochials”, “subjects”, and “participants” (Almond & Verba, 1963).

In this article, citizenship is treated as both a formal legal status and as an expression of the quality of access enjoyed by individuals in everyday life. Access is measured in relation to formal legal provisions and privileges enjoyed by native Muscovites, and is central to the concept of “civic differentiation” which describes the way new social identities emerge and are systematised by political authority that attributes meaning and significance to them (Blitz, 2005).⁵ The analysis is focused on the state and meso-levels where both group and individual identities⁶ are constructed and eventually recast as forms of citizenship (Blitz, 2005). Three categories of citizen are presented to explain the relative discrepancy in migrants’ access to jobs, information, housing, social services and benefits, and the extent to which their economic privileges have been redefined during Russia’s transition over the past 15 years.

- (1) *Muscovites* are residents of Moscow who as a result of birth can live in the city without the aggravation of registration; are eligible and practically able to vote in both federal and local elections; are able to buy, sell and inherit property; and enjoy regular access to state social services and educational establishments.
- (2) *Conditional subjects* are migrants who need to register with the authorities in order to live and work in Moscow but are often prevented from doing so and have difficulty in voting, accessing social and educational services, are barred from public employment and therefore drop out of the state sector, preferring

instead to use the private sector to achieve access to services: their actions are, however, conditional upon documents and payments.

- (3) *Resident participants* are a minority of migrants who currently live outside the application of the law in Moscow but nonetheless insist on the implementation of constitutional and legal provisions regarding free movement and other essential civil rights; their lives are constrained by the arbitrariness and lawlessness of the regional and state systems of governance which prevents them like conditional subjects from accessing state social services, educational establishments, and government sector employers; while they can only operate as full citizens in their home cities, they assert their claims to national citizenship through protest.

Research Context

The Propiska in the Soviet Regime

Propiska literally means “record” and was used to designate place of residence in the internal passports required by Soviet law from 1932 onwards. While the propiska stamp had its antecedents in Tsarist Russia, when residency permits were used to tie serfs to the land (Mathews, 1993; Rubins, 1998; Schaible, 2001), the propiska system came into effect during the height of Stalin’s programmes of industrialisation and collectivisation. The formal function of the propiska, namely, registration, quickly served to record the movement of people within the Soviet Union and demarcate those fit for inclusion or exclusion in the greater Socialist project. It did so by restricting access to scarce resources, including food and housing (Shearer, 2001). Living space was also allocated (*zhilploshad*) on the basis of nine square metres per adult (Höjdestrand, 2003). Even though it had no constitutional foundation, the propiska epitomised the extension of the state into the lives of everyday Soviets and by the 1950s it had expanded across the former Soviet Union (Schaible, 2001). It remained unchallenged until 1991 after which it was later abolished and replaced by a system of registration controls which had many similar characteristics and continued to regulate the right to residency. This section examines why the tradition of restricting mobility was carried over from the Soviet era to the contemporary democratic period.

During phases of intensive economic development and agricultural collectivisation, the propiska was used to curb the flight of migrants from rural areas to the growing industrial centres, above all the regime zones of Moscow and Leningrad (Mathews, 1993). Since only those who were able to secure the official stamp enjoyed access to civil, social and political rights, such as employment and voting in key regions, the propiska acted as a precondition to settlement and also controlled social relations. It enabled the authorities to “track” the whereabouts of residents (Human Rights Watch, 1998), and also as a part of a broader campaign of internal security and terror.

The propiska became central to the state’s obsession with socially engineering Soviet citizens. According to David Shearer its surveillance function reflected Stalin’s preoccupation with borders and territorial security and was a vital part of the state apparatus that enabled the Soviet leadership to redistribute resources, colonise land, identify, control and exterminate specific populations (Shearer, 2001, pp. 880–881). “The dual aim of the passport and residency laws—to count (*uchet*) and to cleanse

(*ochistit*)—was clearly stated in the preamble to the December 27 decree that initiated the system” (Shearer, 2001, p. 840) and was evidenced by official discrimination against designated ethnic and national populations,⁷ including deportation and executions. Rather than incorporate certain groups, the state introduced a limit system, *limitchiki*, which addressed the gaps in the labour force by establishing quotas of guest workers who were engaged on time-limited contracts and provided with temporary registration and collective housing.

Just before the Soviet Union collapsed, the propiska system was starting to show visible cracks (Schiabie, 2001). In 1991, the USSR Constitutional Supervision Committee ruled that the propiska laws violated freedom of movement and outlawed the practice. Rather than impose strict controls on movement, the Committee determined that the state was only permitted to ask migrants to inform authorities of their place of residence (Katanian, 1998). This ruling, however, was to no avail since the Soviet Union collapsed before the law came into effect in January 1992. Fearing a rush of migrants, and motivated by security fears and racist claims principally against Caucasians and others (Pilkington, 1998; Vitkovskaya, 2002), regional authorities in Moscow, St Petersburg Krasnodar and Stavropol quickly reinstated the propiska through regional laws, in defiance of earlier constitutional rulings (Human Rights Watch, 1997; Rubins, 1998; Cherepova, 1999; Schiabile, 2001).

Residency Restrictions in Contemporary Moscow

In 1993, the federal government formally abolished the propiska system and replaced it with a system of registration. Both the terms “propiska” and “registration” are currently in use and, in spite of the fact that the Russian Constitutional Court ruled in 1996, 1997 and 1998 against the use of restrictions on the right to free movement (see Council of Europe, 2001), the new system is remarkably similar to the instruments used in Soviet times (Rubins, 1998). In principle, the use of registration assumes the citizen has the right to free movement, as opposed to the former system which was based on gaining permission prior to settlement (Katanian, 1998). In practice, approximately three million people are “effectively non-persons in the eyes of the law” (Schiabile, 2001, p. 344) and encounter significant barriers that prevent them from enjoying the right to free movement as well as many other civil and political rights.⁸ This figure does not include the five million estimated illegal workers in Russia (Russian Life, 2006).

The Constitutional Court has attempted to uphold the right to free movement but has been constrained by both the extent of its rulings and weaknesses in the judicial system to ensure implementation (Rubins, 1998). Over the past decade, the court’s rulings have addressed elements of the propiska system but have yet to break the back of authorities that insist on controlling migration and settlement.⁹ In Moscow, for example, migrants must notify the City Department of the Interior within three days of their arrival before they can opt to register for permanent or temporary registration, both of which require proof of residence, lodging, etcetera. In practice, the city authorities continue to insist on registration and the payment of fees as a means of surveillance and extortion.¹⁰

There are several explanations for the continued use of restrictive measures which curtail the possible enjoyment of free movement. First, the policy of decentralisation warrants further consideration. Although power over registration policy was entrusted to regional bodies, and in the case of Moscow the city government, all the regions with the exception of Chechnya had strong incentives not to undermine the central state and

shared the practice of treating that migration as a matter of internal security rather than civil rights.¹¹ The accusation that migrants are “undesirable elements”, often refugees and internally displaced persons from other parts of the former Soviet Union who pose a security threat (Pilkington, 1998), was held by all governments which were composed of likeminded apparatchiks (Loiberg, 1998). Thus, the Putin government, which successfully reprimanded regional governments for their abuse of powers over taxation and natural resources, has been particularly tolerant of sub-national efforts to restrict in-migration, in spite of Constitutional Court rulings (Light, 2005, p. 15).

Second, the pattern of internal migration during this period did not provide an immediate cause for a radical change in policy. Both inter-regional and intra-regional migration was remarkably consistent during the last phases of Communism and Russia’s first decade as a new democratic state. In numerical terms, the level of inter-regional and intra-regional migration in Russia appears profoundly important—between 1990 and 1996 about 23 million people changed their residence, either within the same region (12.5 million) or moving from one region to another (10.6 million) (Codagnone, 1998b)—but recent empirical studies suggest that Russia’s transition from state socialism had no impact at all on overall internal migration rates (Gerber, 2005).¹² This finding stands in contrast to the level of immigration of ethnic Russians from former Soviet Republics (Pilkington, 1998). In this context, the migration of skilled persons from one Russian region to another is exceptional and defies traditional accounts of migration decision-making rooted in neo-classical economics (Gerber, 2005, p. 21).

Third, the prevalence of clientelism provides a potent explanation for the continued use of unconstitutional and economically disadvantageous practices that prevent skilled migrants from settling in Moscow and leave them vulnerable to abuse (White, 2003). As one former journalist explained,

Everyone working in state institutions doesn’t have problems [like other citizens] because the laws were designed for them. (Galina, Moscow, 25 January 2005)

One argument for Mayor Luzhkov’s defiance centres on the need to support his large bureaucracy. As a local analyst put it, “new laws ensure the flow of new bribes” (Khrushcheva, 1999). For this reason, Human Rights Watch claims that “there is not only no incentive to remove the regulations, there is indeed an active incentive to continue to invoke them” (Human Rights Watch, 1998, p. 2). Matthew Light shares this view and notes that sub-national governments are reluctant to pay the social costs of migration, above all the added burden on the housing market, especially while they reap the rewards of fee based systems, fines, and controls on migration (Light, 2005).

Finally, it is important to note that the current challenges to citizen’s rights to free movement often involve third parties, including employers and landlords who must approve documents and engage with bureaucracies. For both employers and landlords, the lack of registration not only adds to their administrative burden but also leaves them vulnerable to exploitation (Höjdestrand, 2003).

Findings

The central question this study sought to answer was how has the regionalisation of registration policy in Russia instituted new inequalities and new forms of citizenship?

To address this question, interviews ($n^1 = 30$) and focus groups (four) were conducted in January 2005 with new migrants to Moscow to explore the effects of registration on several aspects of participants' lives. One key concern was to examine how their situation now differed from native Muscovites. Questions asked focused on the way in which participants interpreted their claims citizenship and considered: (a) type of residency status; (b) definitions of being unregistered; (c) sense of self and personal identity regarding residency status; (d) legal barriers; (e) moral and social issues associated with registration; (f) challenges of dealing with state authorities; (g) access to civic services; (h) democratic challenges; and (i) effects of residency on personal life. Further interviews ($n^2 = 6$) were conducted in winter 2006 with employers to consider the impact that registration had on recruitment and retention of skilled workers, among other issues.

Participants included a mix of 3:2 men to women; 80% were ethnic Russian; all had access to the Internet and were educated beyond degree level. While the participants represented an elite section of Russian society, it is worth recording that more than three million Russians have been denied the rights to residency and free movement, and in many senses the participants' experiences were typical of new migrants to Moscow and other cities and regions within Russia. Many regional governments have continued to restrict residency, the most egregious violators being the Stavropol Krai, in the North Caucasus, and Voronezh, near the border with Ukraine (see Human Rights Watch, 1998; Katanian, 1998; Rubins, 1998). In spite of their educational status, the participants were representative of new migrants to Moscow in that they were young, did not have family or longstanding roots in the city, and relied on alternative sources of information to manage their lives, in their case the internet.

Interview and focus group data highlighted how the process of registration both continued Soviet practices and diverged from the former system of propiska and internal passports, creating new modes of exclusion. The findings also recorded the arbitrariness of the system and regional discrepancies in its application which polarised relations between newcomers and established Muscovites. Economic discrimination against new migrants led to political marginalisation, separation and alienation for most but some participants used role-playing and problem-solving tactics to get past the restrictions. Finally, a small number of participants engaged in dissent and opted out of the system altogether.

Arbitrariness and Regionalisation

While all participants were now able to travel internally within Russia, their ability to settle in Moscow was still compromised by numerous restrictions which appeared quite arbitrary. One participant from Lermontov explained that the process of registration was in some respects even more arduous than previous practises and now seemed quite ridiculous, given the relative openness of Russian society and knowledge of other national systems. He explained how the use of registration now created increased social distance between Russian citizens.

Imagine this, you go from London to Glasgow and someone asks you why did you come? And if you go to a hospital they tell you to come back to London. You'll go on the streets of Glasgow and the local police will check your status. In Russia this is normal procedure. (Yuri, Moscow, 21 January 2005)

Many individuals complained that they were arbitrarily stopped, searched and even arrested.

You're just waiting for a bus and didn't touch anybody. I've been picked out of a crowd of people. I was stopped at the metro by militia, so I asked them to show me their documents. The militia took my documents without even looking. "You seem to be the cleverest here—no one asks for documents. Let's go to the station." (Karen, Moscow, 23 January 2005)

Several argued that the arbitrary way in which the police and public agencies targeted migrants reflected broader problems with law enforcement and the rule of law in Russia which undermined their civil rights a daily basis.

There is a Constitutional Court decision that says we just need to inform the authorities where we live. But it hasn't been realised in practice because the militia interferes with our registration. We have the right to be here and to be registered and must always prove we have the right to live here . . . Our officials just don't believe us. (Karen, Moscow, 23 January 2005)

One advocate explained that the mid-1990s saw the mass exit of professionals from the law enforcement sector. He charged that the militia worked to conceal their lawless actions and were assisted by the prosecution service and court systems, which refused to take on cases of abuse and, when cases did reach court, they resulted in acquittals. This was evidence of a compact between the police, public prosecution service, and judiciary.

Instead of taking correct measures they [law enforcement bodies] just took short-term measures for show—in order to calm down people in society and minimise damage. (Mikhail A., Moscow, 24 January 2005)

Many hours of conversation focused on the prevalence of arbitrary arrest by police and militia and the continued practice of discrimination against non-Muscovites by state-owned enterprises. A central theme of these interviews exposed a widely held belief that level of arbitrariness and lawlessness undermined the development of a culture of individual rights which applied equally to all Russians.

Of course registration demolished out human rights. There is a law on Russian territory that everyone has freedom of movement according to the Constitution. For instance, to walk to work, to clinic and you are stopped by militiamen. Why are you here? They say return to your hometown. I tell them I'm Russian and they say prove it. I show them my documents and they say these can all be bought on the Arbat. (Karen, Moscow, 23 January 2005)

The director of an advocacy group stated that the lack of public accountability was at the root of the arbitrariness and lawlessness described by the interview participants:

This is Putin's style of governing. Everything explodes, submarines sink but no one takes responsibility. People are just replaced. (Mikhail A., Moscow, 24 January 2005)

Others complained that the arbitrariness of the current system was built into the design of the registration laws. One former student from Grozny described the contemporary practice of registration as a “vicious circle”, noting that residency was often a prerequisite for registration (Ivanov, Moscow, 22 January 2005). His friend elaborated on what he described as an unresolved problem.

Even if you buy a flat, you need to register ownership. But for that you need at least temporary registration. If you have no registration, all your documents won't be accepted. (Aleksey I, Moscow, 23 January 2005)

He then explained that precariousness of registration rested on multiple factors, including the good will of public officials who could determine both the outcome and length of the registration process by refusing to provide the necessary forms if they did not like the look of someone (Aleksey I., Moscow, 23 January 2005).

Further interviews with employers recorded that the inconsistent reading and application of the law on registration also applied to the corporate sector which often made employment conditional upon registration with the city and regional governments, even though it was beyond the employer's remit. Several reasons were given for this practice, including ignorance of the current laws and the potential intrusion of state authorities in a company's affairs.

Some employees demand a permanent registration in the Moscow region as a condition for employment, which is of course an essential violation of the constitutional human rights. But we can do nothing about it because a labour commission may come to a company and start checking. This commission may ask: this employee has a permanent contract in your company, why isn't he/she registered in Moscow, although the registration issue is not this labour commission's business. A person may live Moscow or change his/her address every three months and whether a person is registered or not concerns only him/her and the local authorities. A company isn't liable for the registration issue at all. (Human Resources Manager, Moscow, 24 February 2006)

While Russian policies on registration continued Soviet practices, they also introduced distinctly new features above all the regionalisation of service provision which negatively affected the way in which citizenship was experienced. The devolution of authority to the sub-national governments, coupled with the growth of the private sector and the increase in regulations and intervention by state bodies, reportedly undermined the quality of life available to non-registered migrants. Participants insisted that, even though the registration process was now the legal responsibility of the regional and city authorities, the application and acceptance of the registration procedure varied widely from one locality to another, giving rise to further claims of arbitrary enforcement of the registration policy and the creation of second class citizens.

One Ukrainian national described how the increase in regulations added a new layer of complication and precariousness which affected even the most mundane activities. While she was free to move from one city to another, she was forced to shop around for particular services including bank accounts and SIM cards (Alesiya, Moscow, 23 January 2005). Her Russian associate Aleksey illustrated the absurd geographical discrepancies in

the application of registration policy when he related the tale of a young woman registered in Moscow who was denied the right to purchase a SIM card for her mobile phone in Volgograd but did so successfully in St Petersburg (Aleksey I, Moscow, 23 January 2005). It was simply a matter of chance as to where and when one's registration status would crop up and complicate the course of every day life.

Yet, beyond the mundane examples of purchasing SIM cards, decentralisation of policy over registration also introduced far-reaching effects on the degree to which unregistered migrants were able to access social and educational services in Moscow. One woman noted that in order to have a baby she would either be forced to seek out private treatment or travel to her city of origin. David, a Russian citizen, originally from Georgia, spoke about how he needed to wait until the very beginning of the school year in order to learn if a place was available for his child to attend a local Moscow school (David, Moscow, 29 January 2005). Others less fortunate complained that they were subject to costly penalties, as illustrated in the case of Sergei, a former officer in the Soviet Army, who had been registered in the Soviet Republic of Latvia where he enjoyed had a different legal status and who was forced to pay between US\$8,000 and US\$10,000 to regulate his papers so he could receive medical care in Moscow (Sergei, Moscow, 29 January 2005).

Economic Discrimination and New Opportunities

New migrants to Moscow encountered several types of discrimination that undermined their quality of life by adding to their financial burden. Unlike native Muscovites, non-registered individuals and even those with temporary registration were denied credit and loans from banks but were still required to pay for rental utilities in advance. Others noted that the growth of the private sector had created new possibilities for circumventing the system, for example, by paying for services such as health insurance and schooling. The fact that still required some form of documentation to get around the system recorded their reliance on political authority and for this reason, they may be categorised as “conditional subjects”. Ironically, new market opportunities now enabled Russian citizens—both registered Moscow landlords and unregistered residents such as “conditional subjects”—to profit from the system of registration, and even expose some of its more ridiculous tenets, for example, *zhilploshad*, the proposed allocation of living space.

If you are the owner of 1 sq m of an apartment, the law allows you to register one square metre of a flat. So you can register 100 people in one flat. Of course you [the tenant] need to go to court and pay for communal services, about 1,100 Roubles for six months, if the owner of the flat agrees. (Aleksey I, Moscow, 23 January 2005)

Most participants who could be identified as “conditional subjects” reported the growth of private sector activity had helped to improve the economic prospects of new migrants. Rather than relying exclusively on the state, now the fate of new migrants was bound up with the policies of their employers.

Sometimes it is impossible to get a job in state-run ministries without registration. It is quite difficult to find a job even in banks. In Nikoil and Rolisip

investment companies there is an unwritten rule to take people without residency. (Aleksey I, Moscow, 23 January 2005)

I am now working in a staff agency and 70% of the people there have no registration. Employers now accept people without registration. They say if you can work we'll help you. When I started working, at first they said they only need Muscovites, they only understand the mentality. Now it's changing. (Yelena, Moscow, 23 January 2005)

Five years ago it [registration] was the first question I was asked. Now skills are more important. (Yaroslav, Moscow, 23 January 2005)

These views were confirmed in interviews with employers in medium to large size private firms. The human resources manager of a metal works company with offices in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg and Samara explained that her firm was bound by law to disregard registration in the selection of staff.

As to Russian citizens . . . we have a labour code which says that to be employed a person has to provide a passport, a certificate of degree, a pension certificate and a military card, if applicable. If a person does not have any of these documents I as an employee may reject employment. All other documents are not mandatory. In case a candidate does not have a registration or a tax number certificate I as an employee do not have right to refuse employment to him/her because of these reasons. (Human Resources Manager, Moscow company, 24 February 2006)

While the offer of employment ensured that participants could enjoy an easier life, it is important to record that those without registration did not enjoy the same level of protection as local-born Muscovites, or the same economic trajectories as registered professionals in similar positions. Even with a job offer, the most fortunate of participants were denied important civil and economic rights which could substantially affect their long-term security, for example, the right to licence businesses and inherit property which reinforced their claims of being second class citizens.

I am practically a Muscovite. I have a circle of friends from anti-Soviet times. I have no problems to get a job because I work within this circle. Now I have mandatory medical insurance because I got it at a time when I could. If I lose it, I can't renew it. I am now waiting for documents for permanent residency. I can't inherit a flat because my documents are not valid. (Vadim, Moscow, 23 January 2005)

Another distinction between Muscovites and unregistered migrants that hindered their economic opportunities was convincing even friendly employers of their intentions to remain in Moscow. One employer recorded that, in spite of the legal mandates, non-residents did not have the same attachments as local Muscovites and this could prove detrimental to both their retention and the quality of their work. The co-owner of a stained-glass window company explained why he no longer employed unregistered staff.

Earlier I didn't care about whether my employee has a registration in Moscow or not. But later I just stopped hiring people from other cities. Nothing holds these people

here. They can steal something, borrow money and slip away. For me what is important is not the fact of the registration itself, but that a person feels home, comfortable in Moscow, that this person is a settled person, not a nomad. Muscovites have normally nothing or little to worry about, that's why they can concentrate on work. Non-Muscovites have many things to worry about, a lot of problems to solve. It affects quality of their work adversely. (Igor, Moscow, 8 March 2006)

Political Marginalisation, Separation and Alienation

An essential difference in the quality of citizenship experienced by native Muscovites and unregistered Russian citizens concerns voting provisions. Research participants were unable to vote in local Moscow elections and also experienced difficulty voting in federal elections, even though they met the formal citizenship criteria. Explanations for political exclusion included the extraordinarily complex system of public administration regulations and most important the supremacy of residency as the right which granted access to other civil rights. One man stated that:

If you have legal registration you can vote in Federal Elections but it takes a huge amount of effort. (Aleks, Moscow, 22 January 2006)

But another assumed that voting would require a return journey to his city of birth:

I have never voted. First everything was legal, then I didn't have the possibility of course. I am living quite close—only five hours by train—but still I don't want to make a special action [journey] for voting. (Anton, Moscow, 22 January 2005)

In response to the question, "how do people feel about not being able to vote?" participants expressed varying degrees of dissatisfaction. One admitted that he had "got used to it" and while it was not, in his words, "nice" elections were not important for him since he did not consider himself a "patriot". His colleague was less complacent:

People are angry about the fact they can't vote in local elections. Of course we can go to court but the Russian system doesn't work on the basis of precedent . . . so one win doesn't lead to change of practice. (Konstantin, Moscow, 25 January 2005)

Fellow migrant Alexei added that he felt a sense of injustice and asked, "How can registered Muscovites have more rights than other Russian citizens?" (Alexei I., Moscow, 23 January 2005).

In addition to their political disenfranchisement, one irrefutable similarity between Soviet and contemporary Russian regional practices includes the use of registration as a means of social separation. A professional from Archangelsk explained that since Moscow was always the most desirable city where many social benefits were concentrated "people in power had to limit those benefits" (Aleks, Moscow, 22 January 2005). The net losers of this policy were the unregistered newcomers who lacked long-term personal security. One migrant described the effect of separating as being "on an island with no inhabitants" (Sergei, Moscow, 23 January 2005).

The participants interviewed argued that since 1991 the use of registration controls and their implementation by state and regional agencies has left open the possibility for

continued discrimination on the basis of residency which was substantially similar to former Soviet practices. Both ethnic Russians and nationals from parts of the former Soviet Union reported having experienced discrimination, in the form of police harassment, denial of access to essential services, and poor treatment in Moscow hospitals. Some women spoke about how they lived in fear of the authorities. Kristina, who admitted “hating the state and all state institutions”, described how she would seal herself off in order not to come into contact with the police.

I didn't open the door. I warned friends that they should call by mobile or intercom. I also warned neighbours but we still have a problem because we can't complain to local militia. (Kristina, Moscow, 22 January 2005)

The effects of the discriminatory treatment described above fostered a profound sense of alienation which was expressed in their self-identification as “marginals” and in the words of a human resources manager, originally from Siberia, “thrown out of society” (Yelena, Moscow, January 23, 2005). Her Ukrainian colleague shared similar sentiments explaining that her status as both non-registered and non-Russian affected the way in which she was treated in social circles as well.

We feel like second class citizens. I feel like I have a big load on me. The majority of my friends are Russians. Sometimes this is an embarrassment. (Alysia, Moscow, 22 January 2005)

Male research participants also described how their status as newcomers left them embarrassed and excluded. For example, Sergei reported that when he was denied the right to marry in Moscow his fiancée later declined his offer of marriage for fear of exposing his non-registered status to her family and friends. Several others spoke of a hostile environment that permeated both their social and personal lives. As “second class citizens”, non-registered individuals lacked protection and were exposed to blackmail and abuse by the authorities as well as greedy employers and landlords. Their vulnerability was compounded by the fact that many were unable to retaliate through legal channels, again for lack of registration. Recognising that he would face similar discrimination, Alysia's fellow Ukrainian associate Ruslan decided it was preferable to remain a non-national and use Moscow as an economic base. “We wanted to become Russian citizens but felt if became Ukrainian it would be better because Ukraine treats its citizens better” (Ruslan, Moscow, 22 January 2005). Others stated that they too chose to live as foreign nationals rather than validate the Russian system that had victimised them.

Role of Civic Actors, Problem-Solving and Role-Playing

While there were many similarities between Soviet procedures and the practices employed by Moscow city and regional governments regarding the application of registration policy, one particularly interesting development concerned the way in which individuals responded to the restrictions placed upon them by the establishment. In interviews, participants described how they employed sophisticated diversionary tactics and engaged in role-playing and problem-solving to escape from the scrutiny and interference of state authorities. Specifically, participants explained how they would resist the police, which

was invariably cited as the principal authority most likely to infringe citizen's rights on the grounds of verifying registration documents.

In response to frequent police harassment, a number of members of the advocacy group *Nelegal* produced information guides and explained how new migrants could minimise the chances of abuse by the authorities. There was a shared belief that the police used profiling techniques to identify targets for extortion and were, in the words of one human rights activist "good psychologists" who could "pick out from a crowd those who can be exploited" (Mikhail A., Moscow, 24 January 2005). A bright IT consultant offered a general rubric which was based on prevention and understanding of the police profiling techniques.

First you must avoid the police. It's quite easy. You can divide migrants into several groups: poor, rich, smart, stupid. All these controls in the streets . . . documents are only checked so money can be taken. First of all, you must be well dressed. . . . Moscow tries to protect the highest level of living. Poor people are embarrassed by the militia and it is easiest to exploit them and people who can't protect themselves—those who have never read laws or constitution. Second, don't be in a hurry or too drunk. Third, don't call attention by carrying big bags. There is a rule that if a person wears glasses he will never be stopped—or if he is carrying a newspaper. (Aleksey I, Moscow, 23 January 2005)

Aleksey's colleague Mikhail explained how he too used evasive tactics, in the knowledge that the police used narrowly defined profiling techniques.

If I have registration I just show it. I don't talk. I try not to look at them. I try to look like an ordinary person who is just carrying on. Often I travel with a book. But reading a book is not guarantee even though the probability is a bit lower. (Mikhail B., Moscow, 23 January 2005)

Others told how they would directly confront the police when stopped and issue either threats of legal action or use sarcasm and ridicule to challenge their interrogators. One young professional reported how he would tease police who attempted to arrest him:

Police approach you without any reason. According to law, militiamen must have reasons. I always say I am a vagabond. Then they say we'll imprison you. They don't even know the law was cancelled 10 years ago. (Yuri, Moscow, 22 January 2005)

His associate Kristina admitted that while she felt that she was now reduced to playing a character—"a Muscovite who has a lot of problems who has crazed eyes"—when stopped she would threaten the police with legal consequences which she considered to be more effective. She added that this was a strategic ploy. "It's not that people trust the judiciary, it's just that they threaten the police because they are scared of laws" (Kristina, 22 January 2005).

Arguably, the costs of avoidance described above, added to the stress and anxiety of many respondents.

We always must be pro-active and think several steps forward. I also feel constant concern and anxiety. (Galina, Moscow, 25 January 2005)

I have to think every minute to bring registration or I can be dismissed or my employers can stop me from working officially. It is something I always have to think about. I can't say it is so stressful but it is always in the background. (Yelena, Moscow, 23 January 2005)

It's very frustrating and irritating. It is almost constantly stressful. When I see a policeman, I feel disgust. It is terrible to think about it. (Mikhail B., Moscow, 23 January 2005)

Avoidance and Civic Protest

In interview participants expressed how they addressed the challenges of the registration policy. Two principal routes of dissent were identified: first, avoidance by purchasing services and deliberately opting out; second, civic protest. Both responses reflected widespread dissatisfaction in the level of democratic entitlement they experienced, the growing degree of arbitrariness and lawlessness in Moscow, and the absence of a state they could call upon, as Mikhail retorted, "where is the state? we pay taxes" (Mikhail B., Moscow, 23 January 2005). In response to this question, his associated answered:

The state is in the TV set and the state sets rules. Mostly stupid rules. (Kristina, Moscow, 22 January 2005)

Democracy is expressed in the details. I can be stopped and arrested. (Anton, Moscow, 22 January 2005)

Others added that the state not only had a moral obligation to uphold their rights but a contractual one as well (Mikhail B., Moscow, 23 January 2005). In recognition of the state's failure to protect and provide, several participants explained that they had chosen to opt out as much as possible. One man from Nizny blatantly stated:

The less you touch the shit the better. I prefer to pay someone to do it. (Anton, Moscow, 22 January 2005)

His mode of action was affirmed by Kristina from Krasnoyarsk who explained why she resorted to purchasing forged documents to "get the authorities off her back". She had been living in Moscow for three years and after having registered two or three times decided not to register any further. Claiming that she simply had no time, nor the nerves to communicate with legal bodies, and resenting the process of registration which she described as a disgusting procedure—"like being interrogated"—Kristina bought registration for US\$60 and subsequently found life much simpler (Kristina, Moscow, 23 January 2005). Others commented how on how they avoided local and regional state authorities by buying services including private medical insurance, education, and health care. For a number of those interviewed, highly skilled migrants working in the growing private sector, this was possible and was indeed the only way to create the sort of lives that they wanted. One woman interjected that "the only way one can have a baby in Moscow is to pay" (Yelena, Moscow, 23 January 2005), thus illustrating the relevance of the category of "conditional subjects".¹³

Another group of participants had chosen to confront the state directly through organisations, such as *My Right* which focuses on police brutality and offers legal support, and a 24 hour helpline. My Right also issues complaints to the Human Rights Ombudsman and takes cases to court on behalf of victims of police brutality. A further organisation, *Nelegal* provides both information and advocacy on registration issues and abuse of civil liberties. Galina Nowopaschina, one of the founders of the organisation *Nelegal*, explained how she became involved in civic protest. In 1999 a website had been set up by a concerned citizen, Sergei Biryukov, in response to restrictions imposed by the Moscow Mayor's Office, following the 1999 bombings. For her part, Galina was working as a sales manager for a subsidiary of Siemens. When she learned that she was subject to register in order to continue her work, she wrote to the head office in Germany, informing them that Siemens was violating the Russian Constitution. In response to her letter, the demand for registration was removed from their website and this action provoked considerable press interest, including articles in *Izvestia*. Galina's action was also acknowledged by fellow activist Boris, author of a guide on how to avoid the police, who invited Galina to join the fledgling organisation. With one more activist, she pioneered the creation of *Nelegal*, the first citizen's organisation dedicated to promoting free movement in Russia.

Having served as a witness six times before the Moscow city court, Galina concluded that the organisation should issue court actions against authorities that tried to prevent individuals from registering and enjoying their rights to free movement. The focus of their actions was opposition of the state of lawlessness and need to protect individuals' social rights. Galina recounted how she received a letter from one couple who was renting a room in Moscow and had been approached by the militia in search of bribes.

I advised them to say, "I will go to court if you continue to diminish [harass] me . . . I will write to the court". Then, the militiaman stopped bothering them. People should believe they are landlords before the authorities and not slaves anymore.
(Galina, Moscow, 25 January 2005)

According to Galina the organisation's greatest success was raising consciousness and changing the perception of civic protest, which in turn helped to reduce the sense of fear from public authorities, including the police.

We always say the authorities are guilty—we are not guilty. We are not anarchists. We are ready to register. (Galina, Moscow, 25 January 2005)

Such actions illustrate a greater degree of civic participation and thus individuals such as Galina might be better described as "resident participants"—their identity being determined both by their formal status and preference for political engagement.

Analysis: Decentralisation, Residency and Citizenship

The restructuring caused by the devolution of authority over migration and the state's refusal to insist on the application of constitutional court decisions has created a new spectrum of rights and rules that apply to distinct groups of citizens on the basis of residency, place of birth, possession of documents, ethnic attachment, and appearance as judged by the local police. Such qualifications determine access to social services, as well

as the enjoyment of basic rights, including the right to education, and the right to inherit property and thus give rise to claims of new and differentiated forms of citizenship such as “Muscovite”, “conditional subject” and “resident participant”.

The concept of “civic differentiation” helps to explain how the introduction of restrictive laws and practices on residency by Moscow city and regional governments in the early 1990s and continued to the present day have effectively institutionalised new social identities, for example, *Nelegalni*. These exclusive laws have also by default redefined the category of *Muscovite* as citizens who enjoy political and economic freedoms on the basis of their residency status, above all the right to vote in federal and local elections; buy, sell and inherit property; and enjoy regular access to state social services and educational establishments. One particularly distinct feature of this class of citizenship is their privileged access to the Moscow housing market.

Of the three categories of citizenship, there are effectively two classes consisting of *Muscovites* and others, namely, “conditional subjects” and “resident participants”. These two categories are distinguished from each other primarily on the basis of resistance: the “conditional subject” finds some way (usually in the private sector) to get around the regulations while the “resident participant” actively struggles against them. While many Russians seek to avoid the obstacles in their path without engaging in overt opposition, and in this sense the category of “conditional subject” applies to a vast majority of the population, there is an important theoretical distinction to be made in terms of the way in which these two groups experience and interpret their claims to citizenship. In the case of “conditional subjects”, citizenship is understood as a concept imposed by the state, as defined by laws and regulations. For “resident participants”, however, the concept of citizenship is more fluid and challenges the current design of civil–state relations which defers to the state. The emergence of the “resident participant” category is therefore an important development for a transitional society with a long history of authoritarian rule.

Regarding the claim that decentralisation providing greater opportunities for interest group competition and political participation, further qualification is required. As reported above, the deconcentration of power over residency policy has primarily empowered sub-national authorities which have gained greater access to soft money in the form of fees, fines and bribes. However, this study also documents some important developments in centre–periphery and civil–state relations. For example, the regionalisation of registration policy has indirectly undermined the state’s legitimacy by casting doubt over its ability and willingness to punish unconstitutional actions and reign in recalcitrant actors, including Moscow Mayor Luzhkov. Similarly, the re-evaluation of the need for registration by the private sector and the criticism voiced by individual protestors such as Galina and groups like *Nelegal* has furthered weakened the state’s authority over migration policy, even if it has not been accompanied by friendlier policies on registration and settlement.¹⁴

There are several reasons why the deconcentration of power over migration has failed to create more liberal policies on free movement. The most compelling explanations focus on the structural and institutional weaknesses of the contemporary Russian state. As recorded in interview, the increasing authoritarianisation of the bureaucracy (White, 2003; Shevtsova, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 2006), the lack of respect for civil rights and the rule of law coupled with an unprofessional police force, traditions of racism and xenophobia and a culture of harassment, extortion, bribe-taking helps to explain the lack of policy reform and the prevalence of abuse against unregistered migrants. Moreover,

the relative weakness of Russian civil society in the face of an increasingly authoritarian regime (White, 2003) also works against the prospect effective reform. Indeed, with the exception of the few individuals who could be identified as “resident participants” and activists such as the members of *Nelegal*, the arrival of unregistered migrants to Moscow does not constitute a political interest group, but rather a financial interest group for the state and regional bureaucracies.

Finally, when reviewing the perpetuation of residency restrictions and controls on mobility, the particular status of Moscow city needs to be taken into consideration. Moscow has historically been a catalyst for Russia’s political development, as both the ancient capital and seat of the Soviet empire, and many Russians accept that Muscovites have superior rights and advantages. Within Moscow, Luzhkov enjoys substantial support from locals who also consider migration in terms of security and want to see tight controls against newcomers to the city. This support may further account for the relative lack of resistance and preference of avoidance by groups such as “conditional subjects” to illegal policies on registration.

Conclusion

The history of residency and registration policy in Russia, and in Moscow in particular, challenges pluralist claims for decentralisation as a device that strengthens the bond between state and citizenry. As this study shows, the transfer of authority over residency to Moscow city and regional governments has left many migrants subject to discriminatory regulations on mobility and denied them access to essential services, including housing, healthcare, education, and the labour market. It also exposed them to potential abuse by the police and corrupt public officials who demanded registration fees and extracted bribes.

The discrimination shown to migrants from cities outside Moscow region by official bodies introduces new categories of citizenship based on residency status, as illustrated in the examples of “Muscovite”, “conditional subject”, and “resident participant”. While people born in Moscow, Russia’s wealthiest city, enjoy full access to the state, including social and educational services, medical insurance, government sector employment, they also benefit by being able to buy and inherit property, which is one of the most significant indicators of their economic and personal financial health, in the long term. By contrast, non-Muscovites face a radically different trajectory and must struggle to assert their rights to function in contemporary Moscow society or opt out of the state by purchasing services available through the private sector.

The application of unconstitutional laws regarding residency controls and the prevalence of arbitrary enforcement mechanisms has also created intra-group divisions. This is most apparent in the case of “conditional subjects” and “resident participants” which, following the logic of Almond & Verba (1963), are defined according to their degree of participation in political life. Although most Russians feel powerless and unable to influence the course of political decisions (White, 2003), by distinguishing between these two categories of non-Muscovite, we can better appreciate how citizenship is experienced and interpreted. The emergence of these new categories of citizenship calls into question the argument that decentralisation is an effective means of democratisation and instead reveals how the transfer of authority to sub-national bodies may undermine the state’s attempts at social cohesion.

Acknowledgements

The author is especially grateful to Galina Nowopaschina without whom this research project would never have got off the ground and who offered contacts, planned meetings, and provided interpretation and delightful company during his visit. He would also like to express appreciation to the members of Nelegal and the Moscow Helsinki Group; as well as several activists who provided information and assistance in support of this research project. Dmitry Valenty at the British Council and Dr Alexander Rutchine at Moscow University for the Humanities provided logistical support and made the author feel especially welcome. The author would also like to thank Dr Caroline Sawyer and colleagues at Oxford Brookes University's Centre for Democracy, the European Centre for the Study of Migration and Social Care at the University of Kent, and associates at the University of Oxford for their insightful comments on earlier versions of this article. Last but not least, the author would like to thank his wife Hayley Blitz for her assistance with note-taking, logistics, and her unflinching support during an exceptionally harsh winter research trip.

Notes

- ¹ Decentralisation took on many forms and was characterised by the terms “devolution”, “deinstitutionalisation”, “deconcentration”, “delegation”, “localism”, “regionalisation”, and “federalism”, among others.
- ² Tanya Lokshina writes that “the Russian center had acknowledged the fait accompli when the regional authorities acquired a good measure of powers”. The catch-phrase by B. Yeltsin “Take as much sovereignty as you can handle” had nearly become a command of the times. Though decentralisation was de facto acknowledged, it was not appropriately translated into relevant legislation, with the authority demarcation problem remaining outstanding (Lokshina, 2002, p. 5).
- ³ For example, Kathryn Stoner-Weiss argues that the political shift away from the centre to the regions fostered a “hyper-federation” in which regional governments usurped central authority and “imposed illegal tariffs, established citizenship requirements different from those of the Russian Federation, and even issued their own currencies” (Stoner-Weiss, 2006, p. 4). Mikhail Alexseev, however, qualifies this claim and suggests that the reform of Russia's domestic political organisation advanced a new “asymmetric federation” where regional governors gained control over the local economy, media and tax system but the Kremlin also developed significant leverage through its fiscal transfer policies, appointments of chief of police, and procurator's office, and could also set the cost of energy supplies (Alexseev, 2001, p. 104).
- ⁴ Putin further insisted that the 89 units that comprised the Russian federation would be reorganised, with the merger of some formerly autonomous areas.
- ⁵ For example, throughout Eastern Europe, national governments often distinguish at random between autochthonous and non-autochthonous Roma minorities who are afforded contrasting types of protection. While some communities are classified as indigenous and eligible to enjoy collective rights (including rights to cultural, political and linguistic representation) under the constitution, newer migrants in Slovenia, Slovakia and Poland enjoy fewer protections. Yet, even this distinction is inconsistently applied and ideological differences within autochthonous groups have led to discriminatory treatment and claims of unequal citizenship, for example, in Slovenia (Andreev, 2003; Zorn, 2005; Blitz, 2006).
- ⁶ Stewart claims that differentiation can also result from the process of social categorisation where individual fortunes are tied to the success of the defined group: “unequal access to political/economic/social resources by different cultural groups can reduce individual welfare of the individuals in the losing groups over and above what their individual position would merit, because their self-esteem is bound up with the progress of the group” (Stewart, 2002, p. 3).
- ⁷ The Soviet state also discriminated against political dissidents, social misfits, former criminals and others who were not allowed within a 100 km range of key cities. This restriction was applied to people accused of “parasitism”, those who could not find work and housing through the authorities, and consequently, the propiska system often led directly to the creation of homelessness (Höjdestrand, 2003, p. 4).
- ⁸ According to Human Rights Watch, this includes the 1993 Russian Federation Law of Freedom of Movement and Choice of Place of Residence within the Boundaries of the Russian Federation (FZ 5242-1); Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and, since one cannot

work legally, nor receive medical treatment, or state schooling without the propiska, it also the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 6), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 24 and 28).

⁹ For example, in April 1995, in the case of Lyudmila Sitalova who had claimed that the housing code violated Article 40.1 of the Constitution which provided everyone with the right to a home and freedom from being arbitrarily deprived of a home, the court's rulings simply upheld the right of a tenant to host guests in a rented space. In 1996, the Constitutional Court issued a more declarative ruling on the payment of registration fees which it found unconstitutional. This ruling enabled the Court to reproach regional governments that were charging excessively high fees, above all Moscow city government which had been requiring that required new residents to pay a fee of approximately US\$7,000 in order to receive a residence permit. In an important ruling, the Constitutional Court struck down the Moscow region law on 2 July 1997, claiming that it acted as a regional tax which discriminated against residents' rights to live anywhere in the Russian federation (NUP, 1997I).

¹⁰ The Soviet practice of *zhilploshad*, whereby a minimum area of space must be allocated per person, is also still in effect.

¹¹ The Federal Migration Service, for example, is housed in the Ministry of the Interior which not only describes itself as a central institution responsible for law enforcement and crime control but also advertises its efforts against Russia "war on terror" with running news feeds of attacks against militants, numbers of mortar rounds fired, munitions located and individuals detained.

¹² Moscow nonetheless received the lion's share and this placed additional burdens on the city.

¹³ See Levine *et al.* (2006) for an account of the costs and processes of paying for births in state hospitals.

¹⁴ Indeed, the attempt by the Putin administration to crack down on NGOs suggests that not only is the state still strong, but that it is currently developing a profoundly authoritarian character, at the expense of communitarian ideals and civil liberties.

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Interviews

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