

Ideological or Pragmatic? A Data-Driven Analysis of the Russian Presidential Grant Fund

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Abstract

Research on Russian civil society focuses largely on the repressive legislative side of state policies, to the virtual exclusion of the rise of domestic funding, be it individual, corporate, or public. This article instead contributes to the discussion of state funding for the third sector by looking at the Russian Presidential Grant Fund, a state institution that has disbursed RUB18 billion (approx. \$275 million at the August 11, 2019, exchange rate) to the third sector since 2016, making it one of the most influential sources of financial support to Russian civil society. A data-driven analysis of the Fund reveals that, although it prioritizes certain types of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) over others, there is a discernible attempt to address some of the most pressing social ills in Russia today. Whereas some grant directions, such as the “preservation of historical memory” and “development of public diplomacy and support of compatriots,” further long-held, Kremlin-sponsored ideological projects, the biggest categories supported by the Fund focus on more classical philanthropic issues, confirming the state’s growing delegation of the provision of public services to the third sector.

Keywords

Russia – civil society – third sector – ideology – Russian President Grant Fund

1 Introduction

Amid changing legal, political, and social conditions, the Russian civil society sector presents a complex picture. The Ministry of Justice claims that the number of officially registered Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) has risen 1–2 percent annually since 2011.¹ However, the number of such organizations appears to have decreased from 227,000 in 2016² to just over 216,000 as of July 8, 2019.³ It is impossible to know how many organizations ceased operations due to negative civil society conditions or whether the federal database merely removed organizations to more accurately reflect the organizational makeup.⁴ Furthermore, the majority of registered organizations (approximately 140,000) are designated as “socially oriented” by the state—and therefore considered by Western political scientists to be less confrontational to the state—while the more controversial human rights and environmental organizations, are estimated to comprise a mere 5–10 percent of the total.⁵

As foreign funding in Russia continues to shrink in response to political and legal pressure, Javeline and Lindemann-Komarova argue that domestic sources such as private sector funding, philanthropy as well as crowdfunding, and state-funded grants are becoming increasingly important contributors to the civil society sector.⁶ While the rise of philanthropy and crowdfunding confirms an increased interest in social engagement on the part of the most active segments of society, state-funded grant mechanisms—chief among them the President Grant Fund (PGF)—continue to be perceived by Western observers as a tool used by the state to co-opt Russian civil society in support

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- 1 EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, “Report on the State of Civil Society in the EU,” 2017, 101.
 - 2 Elena Bogdanova, Linda J. Cook, and Meri Kulmala, “The Carrot or the Stick? Constraints and Opportunities of Russia’s CSO Policy,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 4 (2018): 501–513.
 - 3 “Information on Registered Non-Profit Organizations,” Russian Ministry of Justice, Accessed 8 July, 2019. <http://unro.minjust.ru/NKOs.aspx>.
 - 4 Debra Javeline and Sarah Lindemann-Komarova, “A Balanced Assessment of Russian Civil Society,” *Journal of International Affairs* 63, no. 2 (2010): 171–188; Javeline and Lindemann-Komarova, “Indigenously Funded Russian Civil Society;” Debra Javeline and Sarah Lindemann-Komarova, “Financing Russian Civil Society,” *Europe-Asia Studies* (2019): 1–43.
 - 5 Rosstat 2013 in Yulia Skokova, Ulla Pape, and Irina Krasnopolskaya, “The Non-Profit Sector in Today’s Russia: Between Confrontation and Co-optation,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 4 (2018): 531–563, 539.
 - 6 Debra Javeline and Sarah Lindemann-Komarova, “Indigenously Funded Russian Civil Society,” *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* 496 (November 2017), <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/indigenously-funded-russian-civil-society>.

of ideological goals that meet the regime's needs.⁷ In this paper, we seek to contribute a more nuanced discussion of this federal grant.

While legislation and prosecutions represent negative reinforcement, or sticks, in the Putin administration's governance toolkit, federal grants like the PGF are positive reinforcement, or carrots. Whereas considerable attention has been paid to those third sector activities, subjects, and individuals discouraged by the state, we strive, through analysis of the PGF, to identify those which the state approves. Given the size of its budget (RUB18 billion, or approx. \$275 million, has been spent since 2016), the PGF plays a large role in funding civil society and ensuring the longevity and function of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) it supports.

Our main finding is that, contrary to conventional perceptions, the PGF prioritizes funding to address critical social needs, focusing on disabled children, orphans, substance abuse and reforming the medical field, as well as categories reminiscent of the Soviet tradition, namely promoting talented children. More ideological projects, such as the "preservation of historical memory" and the "development of public diplomacy and support of compatriots," are of lesser importance (as indicated by the smaller grants awarded to these organizations). This finding complicates the commonplace outlook on the Putin administration as a solely repressive force in civil society, but rather demonstrates the state's recent emphasis on social service provision, a topic more palatable to observers. What does this shift in state-civil society relations signal?

2 The Evolving Relationship between the State and the Third Sector

In theory, civil society is said to exist independently of its public and private counterparts. In practice, most states manage civil society to varying degrees using a large array of regulatory paradigms, legislative agenda-setting, and state funding, and Russia is no exception.

The Russian state's relationship with civil society has oscillated over time. In the 1990s, the transitioning Russian state played a minimal role in the civil society sphere.⁸ A 2011 Higher School of Economics study described the

7 We are grateful to Debra Javeline and Sarah Lindemann-Komarova for their comments on the draft of this paper.

8 Valerie Sperling, *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1999).

government's behavior during the 1990s as "benevolent non-interference," noting that state budgetary support for CSOs was "insignificant."⁹ In response to such conditions, foreign funds flooded into the country: billions of dollars from USAID, the MacArthur Foundation, the Ford Foundation, George Soros's Open Society Foundations, the Initiative for Social Action and Renewal in Eurasia (ISAR), and International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) supported civil society projects and represented the Western hope for a more democratic Russia. In the period 1992–2000, USAID alone injected over US\$92 million (dollar estimate from year 2000) into Russian for "civic initiatives and NGO sector support" civil society.¹⁰

Several scholars investigated the effects of foreign grants on Russian civil society.¹¹ Foreign funding provided Russian CSOs with extensive opportunities for development, in particular the increased ability to subsidize employee wages, purchase computers and other technology, rent office space, and provide training.¹² However, most argued that although foreign funding was critical, it came with notable caveats, making it what Richter calls a "mixed blessing."¹³ Meanwhile, Henderson is careful to point out that recipients of foreign funding were "divided between Russian needs and the politics of pleasing home offices," leading to further conflict in Russian civil society interests.¹⁴ To retain funding from international donors, Russian NGOs found themselves having to tailor their communications—and, in some cases, their missions—to their sponsors.¹⁵

9 Charles Buxton and Evgenia Konovalova, "Russian Civil Society: Background, Current, and Future Prospects," *Development in Practice* 23, no. 5–6 (2013): 771–783, 776.

10 Sarah Henderson, "Importing Civil Society: Foreign Aid and the Women's Movement in Russia," *Demokratizatsiya* 8:65 (2000), note 1 pg. 79.

11 James Richter, "Promoting Civil Society?: Democracy Assistance and Russian Women's Organizations," *Problems of Post-Communism* 49, no. 1 (2002): 30–41, 30; Buxton and Konovalova, "Russian Civil Society."

12 Sarah Henderson, "Importing Civil Society: Foreign Aid and the Women's Movement in Russia," *Demokratizatsiya* 8, no. 1 (2000): 67.

13 Richter, "Promoting Civil Society," 39.

14 Sarah Henderson, *Building Democracy in Contemporary Russia Western Support for Grassroots Organizations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 22.

15 Richter, "Promoting Civil Society," 37; Henderson, "Importing Civil Society," 75; Sundstrom, "Women's NGOs in Russia"; Johnson, Kulmala, Jarpinnen, "Street-level Practice of Russia's Social Policymaking in Saint Petersburg: Federalism, Informal Politics, and Domestic Violence" (2015); Valerie Sperling, *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition* (1999) 221.

Johnson and Saarinen call this phenomenon “mission drift.”¹⁶ As one CSO employee put it, “we have to be like chameleons.”¹⁷

Whereas Boris Yeltsin did little to promote civil society, merely “presiding over a negligent state,”¹⁸ his successor, Vladimir Putin, significantly changed—and continues to change—the conditions for the third sector by establishing a “vigilant state.”¹⁹ In 2004, the Russian government created a national framework of Public Councils to promote the relationship between state and civil society.²⁰ Between the promotion of public chambers, select civil society groups, and volunteerism on one side and restrictive legislation on funding and operation on the other, Aasland, Berg-Nordlie, and Bogdanova suggest that Russian civil society has been “encouraged but controlled” of late.²¹ Some scholars believe that cooperating with the state provides NGOs with special opportunities to “hold the state accountable” or to convince the authorities to “take on new responsibilities.”²² Similarly, some Russian NGO employees feel empowered, and some restrained, by the state mechanisms for partnering with civil society.²³ Janet Johnson instructs readers that, in Russia, “a model of closer state-society relations is more appropriate than a liberal one,”²⁴ with the result that it is not advisable to assume that every NGO that cooperates with the authorities is at the state’s beck and call.

16 Janet Elise Johnson and Aino Saarinen, “Assessing Civil Society in Putin’s Russia: The Plight of Women’s Crisis Centers,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 44, no. 1 (2011): 41–52, 45.

17 Julie Hemment, “Global Civil Society and the Local Costs of Belonging: Defining Violence against Women in Russia,” *Signs* 29, no. 3 (2004): 830.

18 Henderson, “Civil Society in Russia,” 12.

19 *Ibid.*, 18.

20 Buxton and Konovalova, “Russian Civil Society,” 777.

21 Aasland, Berg-Nordlie, and Bogdanova, “Encouraged but Controlled.”

22 Johnson et al. 2015, 294 and 301; Henderson, “Civil Society in Russia”; Skokova, Pape, and Krasnopolskaya, “The Non-Profit Sector in Today’s Russia.”

23 The following testimony shows that some Russian CSO employees see real benefits to cooperating with the state: “Thanks to this council, we got closer to them [the authorities], we’ve made decisions to work together, to realize certain projects. [...] If there weren’t such a council, where would I find them, should I just try to seek them out on the street? [...] Now I’m not just calling from the street, I’m invited as a leader. (Non-state, immigrant integration, St. Petersburg)” from Aadne Aasland, Mikkel Berg-Nordlie, and Elena Bogdanova, “Encouraged but Controlled: Governance Networks in Russian Regions,” 165.

24 Janet Elise Johnson, Meri Kulmala, and Maija Jäppinen, “Street-Level Practice of Russia’s Social Policymaking in Saint Petersburg: Federalism, Informal Politics, and Domestic Violence,” 294.

However, another school of thought considers the relationship between state and civil society organizations to be mostly repressive, with legislation aimed at bringing the latter under state control.²⁵ Daucé argues, for instance, that conflicting actions by the Russian state serve mainly to repress civil society: “In contemporary Russia, control of NGOs uses both repression by law enforcement, on the one hand, and liberal management by public subsidy, on the other.”²⁶ Bogdanova argues that the foreign agent laws is a crucial factor in the decline in public trust of civil society and therefore the weakening of the third sector.²⁷ Another complaint about the state’s expanding relationship with NGOs and the creation of government-organized NGOs (GONGOS) is that it creates artificial inequality in the third sector.²⁸

Increased state influence over civil society has come in the form of legislation and funding. In addition, it has gradually curtailed foreign funding by instituting legislation that ousted foreign funding, fearing that Western democracy aid incited protests against the regime.²⁹ According to the Civil Society Forum (CSF), the main law on “Non-Profit Organizations” has changed 77 times since its adoption in 1997, with over half of the changes having been made in the past five years.³⁰ Hence, the dialogue among political scientists has shifted in recent years to account for the increasingly watchful role of the state in relation to civil society and the division of the third sector into categories designated by the state. Although the literature is well-endowed with analyses of growing

25 Françoise Daucé, “Activists in the Trap of Anti-Politics: An Exploration of the Powerlessness of Human Rights NGOs in Russia,” *Laboratorium* 2 (2012): 86–102; Lester M. Salamon, Vladimir B. Benevolenski, and Lev I. Jakobson, “Penetrating the Dual Realities of Government–Nonprofit Relations in Russia,” *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 26, no. 6 (2015): 2178–2214; Elena Bogdanova, “NGOs under State Regulation: Strengths and Weaknesses of the Russian Civil Society,” *Laboratorium* 3 (2017): 5–10.

26 Françoise Daucé, “The Duality of Coercion in Russia: Cracking Down on Foreign Agents,” *Demokratizatsiya*, 23, 1 (2015) 59, 72.

27 Bogdanova, “NGOs under State Regulation,” 5.

28 A. Pronin and D. Skibo, “Structural Inequality in the Third Sector: How Law and Legislative Drafts Produce, Support and Organize Hierarchical Systems Among Non-Governmental Organizations,” *BRICS Law Journal* 3, no. 3 (2016): 117–137; Skokova, Pape, and Krasnopolskaya, “The Non-Profit Sector in Today’s Russia”; Irina Krasnopolskaya, Yulia Skokova, and Ulla Pape, “Government–Nonprofit Relations in Russia’s Regions: An Exploratory Analysis,” *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 26, no. 6 (2015): 2238–2266.

29 Saskia Brechenmacher, “Delegitimization and Division in Russia.” In *Civil Society Under Assault: Repression and Responses in Russia, Egypt, and Ethiopia* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017), 1–19.

30 EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, “Report on the State of Civil Society in the EU,” 102; Skokova, Pape, and Krasnopolskaya, “The Non-Profit Sector in Today’s Russia,” 540.

state influence via repressive laws, there is a dearth of specific research into domestic sources of funding in Russia, with the notable exception of Javeline and Lindemann-Komarova's work on indigenous funding sources.³¹ Yet the majority of funding was always domestic: the share of all CSOs receiving foreign funding peaked in 2009 at just seven percent.³² This domestic funding is selective, a reality that even the Public Chamber openly addresses, explaining that "doing charity in Russia has its peculiarities. For example, people are not always ready to help certain social groups."³³ Areas that receive a significant proportion of total charitable giving are children (88 percent of people surveyed in 2014 indicated willingness to donate), sick and disabled people (28 percent), and people or families in "difficult life situations" (32 percent).³⁴ In comparison, human rights groups or CSOs providing less traditional services receive less aid from individual donors.³⁵

To "renationalize" Russian civil society, the government deployed what Brechenmacher considers a "divide-and-rule tactic."³⁶ Some NGOs are now defined by negative labels including *foreign agent* and *undesirable organization*, while others are positively marked as *socially oriented* and *socially useful*. As Krasnopolskaya, Kokova, and Pape explain, "the Russian government's approach marginalizes nonprofit activity in contested political areas such as human rights, while at the same time strengthening nonprofit involvement on issues that align with state interest, most notably in the social sector."³⁷

The designation of *foreign agent* stems from a 2012 law that targeted human rights, research, and advocacy NGOs that were perceived as interfering with domestic politics.³⁸ The law sought to label organizations that received foreign funding and were involved in domestic "political activity," a term with

31 Debra Javeline and Sarah Lindemann-Komarova, "A Balanced Assessment of Russian Civil Society."

32 Javeline and Lindemann-Komarova, "Indigenously Funded Russian Civil Society."

33 Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, "Report on the Status of Civil Society in the Russian Federation for 2017," 2017, 49.

34 Charities Aid Foundation, "Russia Giving 2014," 2014, accessed August 14, 2019, <https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/publications/2014-publications/russia-giving>, 16.

35 Less than 10 percent of respondents had given money to preserve Russia's cultural legacy, protect the environment, support arts and culture, or fight HIV/AIDS in the 12 months prior to the survey (Charities Aid Foundation, "Russia Giving 2014," 16).

36 Brechenmacher, "Delegitimization and Division in Russia."

37 Krasnopolskaya, Skokova, and Pape, "Government–Nonprofit Relations," 2241/531.

38 Henderson, "Civil Society in Russia"; Bogdanova, "NGOs under State Regulation," 6; Françoise Daucé, "The Duality of Coercion in Russia: Cracking Down on Foreign Agents"; Salamon, Benevolenski, and Jakobson, "Penetrating the Dual Realities."

an expansive definition.³⁹ In addition to publishing funding sources, “foreign agents” must include in every publication (and on their website, if they possess one) a section which flags their designation as a “foreign agent”⁴⁰ and are often required to undergo extensive financial audits, inspections, facing fines and legal penalties should they not comply.⁴¹ Brechenmacher estimates that the label “foreign agent” and compliance expectations associated with it create approximately 284 additional hours of work for the labelled organization.⁴² The list of “foreign agents” includes 75 organizations as of July 28, 2019.⁴³

Another law, drafted in June 2015 which entered into force in April 2017, allows the prosecutor general to label international NGOs as *undesirable organizations* (Federal Law No. 129-FZ) if they “present a threat to the foundations of Russia’s constitutional order, defense capabilities or state security.”⁴⁴ First introduced in 2015, Article 284.1 of the Criminal Code stipulates up to six years of jail time for individuals or organizations found guilty of “carrying out the activities of an undesirable organization” in the Russian Federation.⁴⁵ As is the case with many pieces of Russian legislation relating to civil society, the terms used are vague. As of July 8, 2019, the list of “undesirable organizations” consists of 17 organizations, the most recent additions being the Free Russia Foundation and Atlantic Council.⁴⁶

2.1 *Incentivizing Select NGOs: “Socially Oriented” and “Socially Useful” Laws*

Coverage of recent civil society changes under Putin has focused mainly on repressive state interference at the expense of some positive reinforcement measures. While the Russian government has imposed restrictions on the civil

39 EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, “Report on the State of Civil Society in the EU,” 2016, Bogdanova et al. 2018, 505, Pronin and Skibo 2016, 121.

40 Brechenmacher, “Delegitimization and Division in Russia.”

41 Pronin and Skibo, “Structural Inequality in the Third Sector,” 127, 131–132.

42 Brechenmacher, “Delegitimization and Division in Russia.”

43 Ibid.

44 Liz Barnes, Andrey Kalikh, “Toxic cash: the risks of Russia’s ‘sovereign civil society’ program.” accessed 19 June, (2017) <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/andrey-kalikh/russias-ngo-policies/>. Brechenmacher, “Delegitimization and Division in Russia.”

45 Sergey Davidis, “Russia’s ‘Undesirable Organization’ Law Marks a New Level of Repression,” *The Russia File (blog)*, April 12, 2019, accessed July 8, 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/russias-undesirable-organization-law-marks-new-level-repression>.

46 Russian Ministry of Justice, “List of Foreign and International Non-Governmental Organizations Whose Activities Are Considered Undesirable in the Territory of the Russian Federation,” last modified June 26, 2019, <https://minjust.ru/ru/activity/nko/unwanted>.

space, it has also encouraged partnership with so-called socially oriented NGOs (SoNGOs), which usually fall into nine categories of CSOs.⁴⁷ The EU-Russia CSF indicates that the majority of these socially oriented NGOs provide services to “poor families, disabled people, and orphans,” as opposed to addressing human rights and environmental issues.⁴⁸ However, Kivinen et al. have observed that some SoNGOs, like veterans organizations, perform advocacy work to varying degrees of success.⁴⁹ In 2016, they received grants in excess of RUB20 billion (more than \$300 million) from the government.⁵⁰ These SoNGOs become contributors to state projects and receive benefits such as resources, contacts, reduced taxes, subsidized or free property, information support, and employee training.⁵¹

The creation of a new designation, that of *socially useful* NGOs—organizations to which the state also refers as “providers of publicly useful services”—has added another layer of division in the third sector.⁵² To be

47 Bogdanova, “NGOs under State Regulation.” The categories are as follows: “(1) Social support and social protection of citizens; (2) Activities aimed at preparing the population to overcome the consequences of natural disasters, environmental or technogenic accidents, or at preventing such accidents; (3) Aid to victims of natural disasters, environmental, technogenic, or other accidents, aid to victims of social, national, or religious conflicts, refugees, and involuntary migrants; (4) Environmental protection and the protection of animals; (5) Protection of artifacts (including buildings and constructions) and territories of particular historic, cultural, religious, or environmental value, including places of burial; (6) Legal aid provided free of charge or at reduced fees to citizens and nonprofit organizations, legal education of the population, protection of human rights, and civil liberties; (7) Prevention of socially dangerous behavior patterns of citizens; (8) Philanthropic activities as well as activities to facilitate charity and volunteering; (9) Activities in education, research, culture, arts, health care, disease prevention, the promotion of healthy life styles and of physical culture, activities to improve the moral and psychological condition of citizens, as well as support for the above activities, and facilitation of spiritual development of the individual” (Salamon, Benevolenski, and Jakobson, “Penetrating the Dual Realities,” 2197). See the Russian Ministry of Justice website for the specific parameters in Russian: <https://minjust.ru/ru/node/286923>.

48 EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, “Report on the State of Civil Society in the EU,” 99.

49 Kivinen, Markku, Meri Kulmala, Markus Kainu, and Jouko Nikula. 2014. “Paradoxes of Agency: Democracy and Welfare in Russia,” *Demokratizatsiya The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 22:544.

50 Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation (Общественная Палата Российской Федерации), “Report on the Status of Civil Society in the Russian Federation for 2017.” (2017) 28.

51 Aasland, Berg-Nordlie, and Bogdanova, “Encouraged but Controlled,” 150; Pronin and Skibo, “Structural Inequality in the Third Sector,” 133; Salamon, Benevolenski, and Jakobson, “Penetrating the Dual Realities,” 2193.

52 Skokova, Pape, and Krasnopolskaya, “The Non-Profit Sector in Today’s Russia,” 544.

considered for this distinguished label, an NGO must have minimally provided social services for longer than a year and must not be marked as a foreign agent or owe taxes or debts.⁵³ These “socially useful” and “socially oriented” NGOs enjoy preferential access to media sources and are able to advertise their services for free, whereas non-SoNGOs are required to pay the market rate.⁵⁴ Additionally, the former are given increased opportunities to apply for and receive state support for periods of up to two years.⁵⁵ As of July 8, 2019, the Ministry of Justice recognizes 273 “socially useful” organizations.⁵⁶

Aasland et al. provide first-hand accounts in which interviewees cite the rigid expectations and limited areas of activity as one drawback of collaboration with the state.⁵⁷ They characterize the link between the state and SoNGOs as symbiotic: the former receive the aforementioned benefits and the state makes use of the “proximity to service users” that those civil society organizations provide.⁵⁸ One of the biggest benefits, apart from direct financial support, is the credibility bestowed upon organizations that work with the government.⁵⁹

Some scholars argue that the Russian state plans to use SoNGOs and *socially useful* organizations to supplement welfare services and reduce its federal spending,⁶⁰ especially in light of public discontent with the lack of social services available.⁶¹ The state strategy for the third sector should therefore be put in a broader context, that of neoliberal reforms that the Russian government—like its counterparts across Europe—is being forced to implement in order to deal with its reduced financial capacity. In the following

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 “Information of the register of non-profit organizations—performers of publicly useful services,” Russian Ministry of Justice, Accessed 8 July, 2019. <http://unro.minjust.ru/NKOs.aspx>.

57 Aasland, Berg-Nordlie, and Bogdanova, “Encouraged but Controlled,” 164.

58 Ibid., 150.

59 Skokova, Pape, and Krasnopolskaya, “The Non-Profit Sector in Today’s Russia,” 553.

60 Ibid., 552. Putin stated: “What we all want is to improve the quality of social services by engaging non-profits in this sphere ... I instruct the Government and the Parliament to finalize efforts to devise a clear legal framework for non-profit organizations as providers of socially important services” (Hartnell, “Philanthropy in Russia,” 6).

61 Kivinen, Markku, Meri Kulmala, Markus Kainu, and Jouko Nikula. 2014. “Paradoxes of Agency: Democracy and Welfare in Russia,” *Demokratizatsiya The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 22:545.

section we seek to answer the questions, “what kinds of civil society activity does the state seek to encourage through its federal fund and why?”

3 The Presidential Grant Fund: Structure and Strategies

A federal grant competition, the Presidential Grant Fund was created in 2006 to fund Russian CSOs. From its inaugural year until 2010, six “NGO ‘operators’” disbursed RUB1 billion (\$33 million) per year to support third-sector activities.⁶² Criticized for lack of transparent selection criteria and geographic diversity in recipients and judges, the Presidential Grant Fund was replaced by a new civil society support project in 2011.⁶³ The Ministry for Economic Development (MED) created two new competitions, one dispersing awards to regions in support of civil society development (which could allocate the grant money as they saw fit) and the other offshoot financing NGOs directly. Grant competitions took place between two and four times annually. In 2016, the MED programs halted and the grant competition was overhauled by Sergei Kirienko, First Deputy Director of the President’s Administration. Under the “Kirienko Plan,” funds are now disbursed twice per year by one entity, the Presidential Grant Foundation for the Development of Civil Society. New features of the redesigned PGF include a website that provides resources for application, a catalogue of all past applications and award winners with numerical application ratings, and greater geographic diversity of applicants and winners. Although the redesigned PGF is hailed by many as a transparent, consistent and honest grant competition, the consolidation of the PGF under one operator has also come under fire from some Kremlin critics. Kalikh, for instance, perceives this change as reflecting the government’s desire to “prevent state funding falling into the hands of obvious ‘enemies.’”⁶⁴

62 Javeline and Lindemann-Komarova, “Indigenously Funded Russian Civil Society,” 2; Javeline and Lindemann-Komarova, “Financing Russian Civil Society,” 18.

63 Javeline and Lindemann-Komarova, “Indigenously Funded Russian Civil Society,” 2.

64 “The aim of the administration’s spin doctors was clear: stronger control over grant allocation was necessary in order to prevent state funding falling into the hands of obvious ‘enemies’—i.e. independent human rights and environmental NGOs”. Kalikh serves as the coordinator of the EU-Russia Civil Forum’s working group on trans-border corruption.

Liz Barnes and Andrey Kalikh, “Toxic Cash: The Risks of Russia’s ‘Sovereign Civil Society’ Program,” *OpenDemocracy*, 2017, accessed June 19, 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/andrey-kalikh/russias-ngo-policies>.

Since 2016, the Presidential Grant Fund has allocated upwards of RUB2.25 billion (US\$35.5 million at the July 23, 2019, exchange rate) per competition, with the greatest disbursement, in the second competition of 2018, reaching almost RUB4.7 billion (\$74.2 million)—see Figure 1. The new iteration of the PGF has disbursed a total of almost RUB18 billion (approx. \$275 million) in 8,430 individual grants since 2016. Grants have ranged from a low of RUB32,975 (\$521) to a peak of RUB115 million (\$1.8 million).

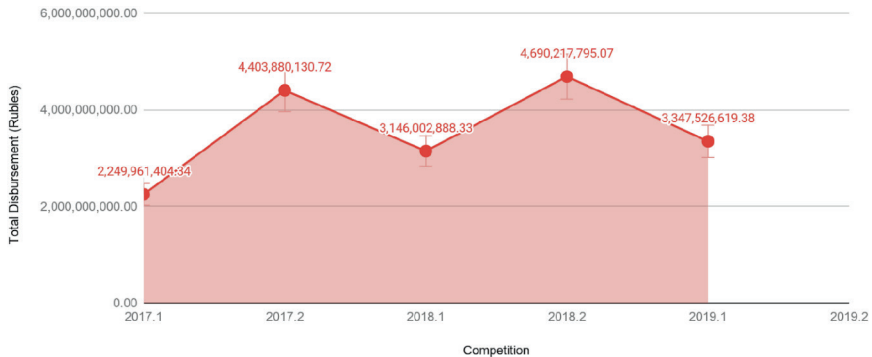


FIGURE 1 Russian Presidential Grant Total Disbursement (2017–2019)
SOURCE: AUTHORS' COMPILATION ON THE BASIS OF DATA FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL GRANT FUND, ACCESSED AUGUST 14, 2019, [HTTPS://ПРЕЗИДЕНТСКИЕГРАНТЫ.РФ](https://президентскиегранты.рф).

To provide a richer analysis of the PGF, we extracted several sets of data from the federal grant website, focusing on the NGOs who won grants in any of the five grant competitions made available online since 2017. In addition to the organizations' names, we analyzed the category of each grant application, region of registration, and the total amount of each award. We were able to determine the top 50 recipients of all 5 rounds of the revamped PGF, as well as observe trends in disbursement and the overall impact of the PGF.

Since its reinvention in 2016, the Presidential Grant Fund has allocated funds on the basis of 12 and later 13 categories ranging from “preservation of historical memory” to “environmental and animal protection.” The best-funded categories are “protection of human and civil rights and freedoms, including the rights of prisoners,” “support for projects in science, education, and awareness,” “protection of public health and promotion of healthy lifestyles,” “development of civil society institutions,” and “preservation of historical memory,” each of which has received between 10 and 13 percent of total disbursements. The thirteenth category, “identification and support of young talents in the field of culture and art,” was debuted in the first competition of 2018. Figure 2 below presents disbursements from 2017 to 2019 by category.

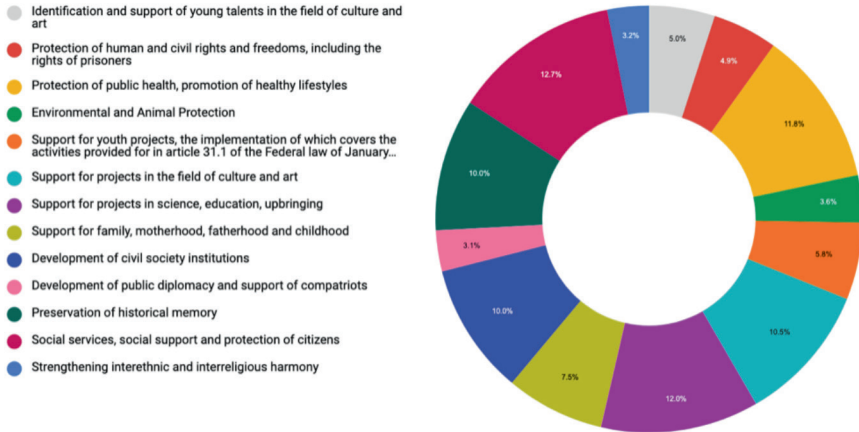


FIGURE 2 Disbursement by Category (2017–2019)
 SOURCE: AUTHORS' COMPILATION ON THE BASIS OF DATA FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL GRANT FUND, ACCESSED AUGUST 14, 2019, [HTTPS://ПРЕЗИДЕНТСКИЕГРАНТЫ.РФ](https://президентскиегранты.рф).

An exploration of PGF data reveals that the distribution of resources is skewed toward particular regions. On a per capita basis, the Central and North Western Federal Districts received a disproportionate share of the competition funds, while other districts were only marginally funded, with the Far East Federal District somewhere in between (see Figure 3). PGF investment in civil society organizations in the Far East are in keeping with Putin’s recent emphasis on Far Eastern regional infrastructure and private sector development.⁶⁵

A deeper look into the largest grants made by the PGF reveals the extent to which geography influenced an organization’s chance of receiving funds. All 10 of the largest PGF awards since the 2016 overhaul went to organizations applying from and operating in Moscow. Of the top 20 awards, 17 went to Moscow-based NGOs, two to organizations from St. Petersburg, and only one (the eighteenth-largest grant) to an organization based in the Tyumen Oblast. What’s more, 40 out of the top 50 grants went to Moscow-based NGOs, five to St. Petersburg organizations, and five to others. Not only do these numbers show that the PGF favors funding Moscow-based organizations, but they also demonstrate that even organizations from St. Petersburg are out of luck when it comes to winning the largest grants. The allocation of resources reflects

65 Robert Coalson, Mike Eckel, Wojtek Grojec, Steve Gutterman, and Carl Schreck, “The Annotated Putin: ‘State of the Nation’ Dissected,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, February 21, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-state-of-the-nation-annotated-2019/29780972.html>; Leonid Bershidsky, “Putin is Losing Russia’s Far East,” *Bloomberg*, September 24, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-09-24/putin-is-losing-russia-s-far-east>.

Russia’s deep regional economic, and cultural biases. However, it is important to note that the larger grant amounts necessitate lengthy and robust track records from NGOs, which tend to be located in metropolitan centers like Moscow and St. Petersburg. Because we mostly considered winners of the PGF, it is yet unclear whether there were proportionally fewer applications from the provinces or whether those organizations were merely less successful at receiving grants from the fund.

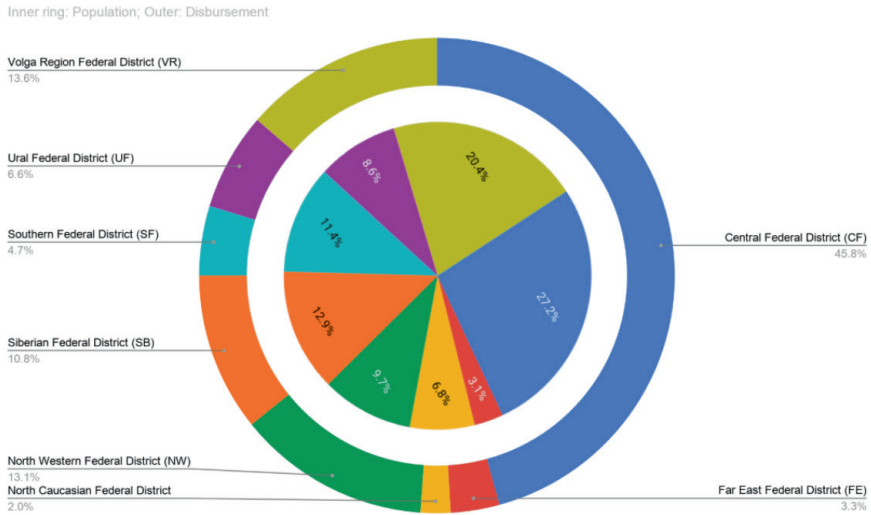


FIGURE 3 Disbursement and Population by Federal District (2017–2019)
 SOURCE: AUTHORS’ COMPILATION ON THE BASIS OF DATA FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL GRANT FUND, ACCESSED AUGUST 14, 2019, [HTTPS://ПРЕЗИДЕНТСКИЕГРАНТЫ.РФ](https://президентскиегранты.рф), AND CEIC, “RUSSIAN POPULATION: BY REGION,” ACCESSED AUGUST 14, 2019, [HTTPS://WWW.CEICDATA.COM/EN/RUSSIA/POPULATION-BY-REGION](https://www.ceicdata.com/en/ruussia/population-by-region).

4 PGF Selective Sponsorship: Charity and Culture

While the Russian government appears, through generous grants, to promote a robust service-oriented civil society, its support is *preferential* and emphasizes two domains considered apolitical: charity and culture.

If one looks at the top 10 recipients of PGF funds (by amount allocated) between 2017 and 2019, it becomes clear that the majority of recipients (eight) are engaged in promoting talented children in music and arts and executing traditional charity projects for people with special needs. The remaining two projects had a more patriotic orientation: the first focused on discovering the

country's small towns, while the second commemorated the Great Patriotic War. If we extend our analysis to the top 20 recipients by value, the proportions remain the same, with eight of the additional projects focusing on talented children and the disabled, and two working to promote civil society and fund a new Law Academy. It is only if we extend the list to the top 50 recipients by value that we see increased funding for more ideological projects. All the same, just 14 of these 50 projects belong to the categories "historical memory" and "civil society development," with the remaining 36 representing more classic philanthropic projects for talented children, special needs, sport, palliative care, and mental health.

If we combine the sections on art, culture, and young talents into one broad "culture promotion" category, this category accounts for 56.7 percent of total disbursements to the top 50 recipients. The newest category, introduced in 2018, "Identification and support of young talents in the field of culture and art," already represents five percent of all disbursements since 2016 (despite having been around for the shortest amount of time) and represents seven of the top ten largest individual grants in all five competitions, nine of the top 15 grant recipients, and 16 of the top 50 recipients. NGOs that serve the disabled population make up 10 of the top 50 recipients.

The awards thus reflect what state institutions consider the goals of the third sector should be. These goals can be divided into two main lines of funding: the promotion of young talents and more classic charity for those perceived to be most in need.

The first line of funding is anchored in the Soviet tradition of sponsoring talented youth. In the Soviet era, the school system played a crucial role in identifying and then developing children with artistic talents through extracurricular activities and/or vocational institutions, from conservatories to specialized schools. Talented youth were also part of Soviet public diplomacy efforts: sports, classical music, and dance constituted key elements of the Soviet Union's international image.⁶⁶ This tradition has been updated in the past decade as the Russian state has reinvested extensively in its branding abroad. In his 2019 State of the Nation speech, Putin explicitly described youth talent as one of Russia's competitive advantages: "I want to speak directly to our young people. Your talents, energy, and creative abilities are among Russia's strongest competitive advantages. We understand and greatly

66 Nigel Gould-Davies, "The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 27, no. 2 (2003): 193–214; Naima Prevots, *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998); Frederick C. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960).

value this. We have created an entire system of projects and personal growth competitions in which every young person, from school to university age, can show what they are made of.” The increase in funding for talented youth may also appear as an indirect response by state organs to the emigration of skilled young people observed since 2011–2012.⁶⁷ Yet the answer is formulated with a traditional Soviet toolkit that stresses “high culture” in its most classical definition and does not consider new forms of culture or other youth talents, such as private entrepreneurship.

The second line of funding relates to a classical definition of charity activities focused on the segments of the population most in need of assistance. In a meeting with selected third-sector representatives on July 26, 2017, Putin underscored the state preference for certain issues over others: “I have always liked meeting with people who spend years doing what you are doing, that is, helping people, in particular, people who need assistance more than others. I am referring to senior citizens, people with disabilities, and children.”⁶⁸ This confirms the aforementioned perspective that the Russian state sees civil society as a way to outsource its responsibility to provide welfare and thus gradually reduce its own duties: PGF funding seeks to foster more autonomous civil society actors who, even if they still depend on the state for a large part of their funding, are also involved in raising corporate and private funds and function not as civil servants but as independent actors providing public services to the needy.

These two lines of funding do more than simply reflect the state’s emphasis on increasing the autonomy of civil society actors and promoting “the best” among youth. They also benefit from and rely on an existing social fabric: the tens of thousands of *obshchestvenniki*, professionals who were already conducting social engagement activities during the Soviet era. Most of them are women in their fifties who have been trained in educating youth or helping the needy. As Anna Sanina showed with the renewal of patriotic upbringing at schools, the state’s strategy meshed well with the values and expectations already prevalent in some professional communities, which are ready to reproduce Soviet-era mechanisms of social embeddedness.⁶⁹

67 John Herbst and Sergei Erofeev, *The Putin Exodus: The New Russian Brain Drain*, Atlantic Council Eurasia Center, February 2019, <https://publications.atlanticcouncil.org/putin-exodus/The-Putin-Exodus.pdf>.

68 President of Russia, “Meeting with Representatives of Socially Oriented and Charitable Organizations and Volunteer Movements,” July 26, 2017, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55130>.

69 Anna Sanina, *Patriotic Education in Contemporary Russia: Sociological Studies in the Making of the Post-Soviet Citizen* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2017).

5 Funding More Ideologically Oriented Projects

While they receive less funds from the PGF than charity and talented-youth projects, more ideological projects can still secure important backing from the Fund. By ideological we refer to projects that are not related to the needs of the population but are state-centric and directly inspired by narratives of Russia's greatpowerness and historical continuity. Here we focus on two main categories: "preservation of historical memory" and "public diplomacy and compatriots."

5.1 *Preservation of Historical Memory*

An overview of the top 100 projects funded under the category "preservation of historical memory" (the first twenty winners of each of the five rounds) gives us a straightforward picture of the state line on Russia's past.

About two-thirds of these projects are directly related to military memory, military professions, and youth military-patriotic education. Among them, memory of the Great Patriotic War (commemoration, museum exhibitions, parades, children's upbringing⁷⁰ ...) dominates, with 24 projects, just short of one quarter of the total. It is followed by search brigades, mourning, and other volunteer activities (19 projects), which are also mostly—though not systematically—devoted to the Second World War. Compared to the latter, other periods of history are less instrumental for military pride: the 1812 Napoleonic War and Alexander Nevsky's battle of 1242 secured one grant each, and the Soviet-Afghan war is mentioned twice among other periods of military bravery. Several projects are devoted to fostering general pride in Russia's military past and heroes among youth, without any specific historical focus. Celebrating military professions (aviation, the Navy, law enforcement agencies) and relaunching the traditional military culture and etiquette of the Cadets academy (military balls, military orchestra) also seems to be in fashion, receiving about a dozen grants.

The last third of the grants were given to more "civilian" projects. In this section, the biggest category (17 grants) relates to regional history (*kraevedenie*), local archeology, urban heritage preservation, regional rebranding, and promotion of the "small homeland" (*malaia rodina*), a notion used to express local patriotism as well as celebrate one or another minority ethnic group. Among the latter, one may notice the prevalence of Siberia (with projects for Krasnoyarsk, Chukotka, the Far East, Altay, and the Sayan mountains, as well as one on Buddhism), followed by Central and Northern Russia, and one

70 In this article we translated *prosveshchenie* as upbringing.

project for Tatarstan—the North Caucasus is totally absent. To this category of regionally-oriented grants should be added seven projects devoted to Crimea, a predominance that confirms, if such confirmation were necessary, the unique status of the peninsula—it is much more of a federal-level interest than a regional one—and the authorities' persistent efforts to activate the historical and tourism potential of the region.

The trend of regional patriotism seems to be growing, with support from both regional institutions and federal authorities. In his 2019 State of the Nation speech, Vladimir Putin proclaimed, "I propose greatly expanding assistance to local cultural initiatives, that is, projects dealing with local history, crafts and the preservation of the historical heritage of our peoples. For example, additional allocations can be made towards this from the Presidential Grants Fund. In addition, we will allocate over 17 billion rubles within the Culture national project for the construction and renovation of rural culture clubs and over 6 billion rubles for supporting culture centers in Russia's small towns."⁷¹

The "regional patriotism" category is followed by broader projects of popularizing history among the general public or the young generations specifically (12 grants), which include funding for a series of cartoons on Russian national heroes, as well as grants for museums, interactive exhibitions, internet resources, and archives promotion. One may notice that some funded projects exhibit a more marginal discursive line. The Church, for instance, managed to secure two grants commemorating the Soviet repressions of the clergy (one for the 1920s and another one for the Butovo memorial complex devoted to the Stalinist purges), and one grant was allocated for a miniseries on Elizaveta Fiodorovna, aunt of Tsar Nicholas II and a Saint of the Orthodox Church. The Fund for the Memory of Victims of Political Repressions (a more state-friendly version of the dissident association Memorial) received funding for online Gulag archives, and two projects are devoted to reconciling "Red" and "White" memory (one on peasants' upbringings during the civil war and one dialogue initiative for "achieving consensus regarding the Soviet past"). A final project is funding a museum in memory of the Chernobyl explosion.

The PGF's funding choices provide evidence of the state's vision of forging historical consensus in today's Russia, stressing the Great Patriotic War as well as preserving the memory of events that were already part of the Soviet pantheon. Here, too, the authorities have a limited toolkit for innovation, prompting them to select projects that reproduce Soviet patterns of social activism, as illustrated by the vocabulary used to present the selected projects. A new-speak of ready-to-use formulas, such as "the actualization of the historical

71 Coalson et al., "The Annotated Putin."

experience” (*aktualizatsiia istoricheskogo opyta*), “the holding of upbringing/awareness work” (*provedenie prosvetitel'skoi raboty*), and “the preservation of historical memory of heroism and bravery” (*sokhranenie istoricheskoi pamiati o geroizme i muzhestve*), appear in many project summaries. Projects commemorating those fallen for the motherland are almost universally described using the term *uvekovechenie*, literally “the rooting into centuries,” illustrating the strength of the bureaucratic language employed by both the state and NGOs. Putin’s reference to relaunching cultural clubs in Russia’s small towns likewise demonstrates how the regime intends to draw on the Soviet experience of a dense network of *kluby* to recreate an ideological link with the population.

5.2 *Public Diplomacy and Support for Compatriots*

For the category “Public Diplomacy and Compatriots,” we look at the first 50 projects—the top ten winners of each of the five rounds. The diversity of projects appears broader, perhaps a sign not so much of the large scope of the definition of “public diplomacy” but of the fact that other institutions, such as Rossotrudnichestvo as well as the Russian World Foundation, are also in the market for grant-giving on these questions.⁷² The PGF is just one actor among many, and this category represents only three percent of its funding. In terms of geographical scope, about 12 grants targeted the post-Soviet region, either in its entirety or with specific reference to the Caucasus, Central Asia, or the Baltic states—no grants were devoted to Ukraine. One grant aimed to promote “Slavic brotherhood,” but without providing any further details about the geographical scope of this commitment, while two were geared toward China. For the “far abroad,” two grants were dedicated to improving the U.S.-Russia relationship and three were devoted to specific projects in Western Europe (UK, Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands).

Thematically, this category can be divided into three main groups of activities. One relates to classic public diplomacy/popular diplomacy/science diplomacy, with projects either very broadly defined as “the formation of a positive image of Russia abroad” (*formirovanie pozitivnogo obraza Rossii za rubezhom*) or more specifically targeting youth, students, and journalists. Some projects had very precise and limited objectives, such as creating small videos on Russia’s history or promoting Russia through space conquest and geographical

72 Mikhail Suslov, “Russian World: Russia’s Policy towards Its Diaspora,” *Russie.Nei.Visions* 103 (July 2017), https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/suslov_russian_world_2017.pdf; Marlene Laruelle, “The ‘Russian World’: Russia’s Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination,” *Center for Global Interests Papers* (May 2015), <http://globalinterests.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/FINAL-CGI-Russian-World-Marlene-Laruelle.pdf>.

explorations. The second category emphasizes the promotion of Russian language and history abroad, with several grants devoted to the preservation of the memory of the Second World War (preparations for the seventy-fifth anniversary of Victory Day, commemoration of the Battle of Stalingrad, etc.) and others referring more broadly to Russia's history, culture, and language, as well as the protection of the Russian historical presence abroad—the latter has become a central activity for many Russian embassies in Europe, involved in an intense effort to protect and promote everything Russian abroad (churches, cemeteries, commemorative plaques, etc.) The third category targets compatriot communities, mostly youth groups, inviting them to activate their relationship to the motherland and promote Russia in their home countries.⁷³ A grant was also specifically devoted to communities of Old Believers.

This overview of the first 50 grants funded reflects the large scope of Russia's renewed public diplomacy, its main “hobbyhorses,” causes, and targeted communities. Here, too, the authorities have updated some Soviet traditions, such as celebrating Russia's tradition of geographical exploration and space conquest, yet the ideological underpinnings of the grants remain uncertain, with no clear orientation toward Eurasian integration, the Russian World, or worldwide public diplomacy.

5.3 *The Emergence of the Orthodox Third Sector*

Another notable feature of this grant bracket is that, contrary to the “preservation of historical memory” category, one may notice the emergence of a new subset of actors of the Russian third sector: the religious NGOs. The growing collaboration of the Russian Orthodox Church with the state in promoting some similar ideological goals is accompanied by the rapid rise of a new ecosystem, that of religious NGOs acting upon a very conservative agenda in the field of family-related issues. The Center for Economic and Political Reform reported, for instance, that organizations close to the Church have been the biggest beneficiary of presidential grants over the past several years, with at least 63 presidential grants worth a total of 256 million rubles (\$3.6 million) between 2013 and 2015.⁷⁴

Within our dataset, we identified among the grantees in the “public diplomacy and support for compatriots” category, the NGO “Big Family” (*Bol'shaia sem'ia*), which defends multi-child families, the NGO “Right to Life” (*Pravo*

73 Irina Molodikova, “Russian Policy Towards Compatriots: Global, Regional and Local Approaches,” in *Post-Soviet Migration and Diasporas: From Global Perspectives to Everyday Practices*, ed. Milana V. Nikolko and David Carment (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 143–161.

74 Brechenmacher, “Delegitimization and Division in Russia.”

na zhizhn'), the Orthodox Gymnasium of Togliatti, the Protopop Avvakum Cultural and Pilgrim Center, and the Charity Fund in support of the Russian Saints of Mount Athos. The NGO "Right to Life" has become one of the most vocal advocates of the pro-life movement in Russia,⁷⁵ while the Mount Athos fund has been at the forefront of Orthodox paradiplomacy toward the Balkans countries.⁷⁶ In addition, "Right to Life" was the only identifiable NGO to also win a grant in the category of "preservation of historical memory" for an obscure project promoting "traditional family values based on the examples of the Ancient Rus."

This penetration of the public diplomacy world by the Orthodox third sector is all the more interesting given that it seems absent from the grant category that seems the most obvious for its activities: "support for family, motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood." To confirm, we checked the first fifty grantees in that category (the first ten winners of each of the five rounds): none of them belongs to an (at least identifiably) Orthodox institution. Moreover, none of the fifty highest-funded projects in that category advance an agenda identifiable as consistent with conservative values. Grants focus mostly on children with health issues and orphans, on combatting domestic violence and alcoholism at home, and on rehabilitating women as mothers and as workers. As in the "preservation of historical memory" domain, the "support for family" sector relies on a well-organized secular institutional fabric inherited from Soviet times, while new domains of state interest such as "public diplomacy and support for compatriots" have been invested more rapidly by Orthodox actors.

6 Conclusions

Still understudied, domestic sources of funding are of growing importance for the third sector. Though Russia's giving culture is new (the notion of charity was deemed a capitalist practice in the Soviet era),⁷⁷ it is nonetheless robust. In 2017, only 57 percent of Russians approved of the way that Putin was handling

75 Maria Antonova, "Russian Orthodox Church Fuels Powerful Pro-Life Movement," *Business Insider*, February 28, 2017, <https://www.businessinsider.com/afp-russian-orthodox-church-fuels-powerful-pro-life-movement-2017-2>.

76 Robert C. Blitt, ed., "Russia's 'Orthodox' Foreign Policy: The Growing Influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in Shaping Russia's Policies Abroad" (special issue), *University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law* 33, no. 2 (2011), accessed August 14, 2019, [https://www.law.upenn.edu/journals/jil/articles/volume33/issue2/BlittBoyd33U.Pa.J.Int%27L.363\(2011\).pdf](https://www.law.upenn.edu/journals/jil/articles/volume33/issue2/BlittBoyd33U.Pa.J.Int%27L.363(2011).pdf).

77 Caroline Hartnell, "Philanthropy in Russia: A Working Paper," Alliance, 2018, p. 3.

civil society,⁷⁸ a figure that reveals that for some, there is a newfound—and growing—space for participation in shaping the civil society realm. And in 2019, just under half of Russians indicated that they had donated money to charity in the past 12 months, compared to 62 percent of American respondents.⁷⁹ The private sector has also grown accustomed to market-oriented corporate social responsibility (CSR). Almost all of the largest Russian companies direct a portion of their profits to CSOs.⁸⁰

As one of the main institutions funding the third sector, the President Grant Fund has become a crucial actor in shaping Russian civil society. The PGF has sought to replace foreign funding and promote a different composition within civil society, one less engaged in confronting the authorities and more interested in collaborating with them. However, the PGF does not altogether prevent opposition or advocacy: some NGOs labeled “foreign agents” were able to receive PGF funds (in 2017, these included the Levada Center, the Levada regional affiliate Samarnaia Guberniia Fund, and the NGO Development Center),⁸¹ a sign of the authorities’ willingness to support CSOs that it previously sought to punish. It could be argued that, with its financial support of some selected “foreign agents,” the state intends to encourage these NGOs to adhere to its policies and desires.

Despite what many Western onlookers might expect, the majority of PGF grant recipients are not only supporting the Kremlin’s ideological narratives of greatpower and the nationalist-minded segment of civil society, but are meeting social needs that were, during Soviet times, taken care of by state services. Through the PGF, the authorities aim to outsource these assistance services to autonomous institutions as a way to shrink public expenditures, but perhaps also to reproduce Soviet patterns of social activism. Looking at the way in which PGF recipients formulate their activities, one can assess that many still represent the social fabric that existed in Soviet times and was revived after the difficult collapse of the 1990s, thanks to the increase of public funding

78 Margaret Vice, “President Putin: The Russian Perspective,” Pew Research Center, 2017, accessed August 14, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2017/06/20/president-putin-russian-perspective/>.

79 Charities Aid Foundation, “Russia Giving 2019,” 2019, accessed August 14, 2019, <https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/publications/2019-publications/russia-giving-2019>; Charities Aid Foundation, “USA Giving 2019,” 2019, accessed August 14, 2019, <https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/publications/2019-publications/caf-usa-giving-2019>.

80 Jo Crotty, “Corporate Social Responsibility in the Russian Federation: A Contextualized Approach,” *Business & Society* 55, no. 6 (2016): 825–853.

81 “‘Foreign Agents’ Given State Funding, While Pro-Kremlin Bikers Shunned,” *The Moscow Times*, August 1, 2017, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2017/08/01/foreign-agents-given-state-funding-pro-kremlin-bikers-shunned-a58550>.

during Putin's terms. The frequent use of terminology such as *prosveshchenie* and *prosvetitel'skaia rabota*—which can be translated into a Western context using terms as diverse as education, Enlightenment, upbringing, awareness campaigns, or popularization—confirms the deep Soviet roots in the realm of assistance activities. New, post-Soviet actors such as the Russian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox NGOs are still relatively marginal among PGF grant recipients, even if their status is growing.

The recent shift in incentivizing issue-driven classic philanthropy, funded more generously than ideological projects reflecting the regime's legitimation strategy, confirms the state's retreat and its delegation strategy of provision of public services to the third sector. Furthermore, it reinforces previous research that envisions the Russian regime more as an ad hoc construction with adaptable ideological content and mostly pragmatic goals than as a well-oiled, top-down pyramid moving according to explicit doctrinal principles.⁸² However, we are left with several questions at the conclusion of this study: what does this positive reinforcement do, if anything, to counteract the growing repressive legislative framework? How significant is this funding in the scheme of civil society more broadly? To answer these questions, a more comprehensive picture of the national, regional, and corporate funding mechanisms, is necessary.

82 See Henry E. Hale, Maria Lipman, and Nikolai Petrov, "Russia's Regime-on-the-Move," *Russian Politics* 4, no. 2 (2019): 168–195; and Marlene Laruelle, "The Kremlin's Ideological Ecosystems: Equilibrium and Competition," *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* 493 (November 2017), <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/kremlins-ideological-ecosystems-equilibrium-and-competition>.