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# Russian Public Opinion on Human Rights and the War in Chechnya

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Abstract: Two specialists on Russian society and politics analyze how Russians view human rights and the conflict in Chechnya, as well as factors shaping views on these issues within Russia, based on a survey conducted in October 2001. The authors discuss how their results diverge from the findings of other studies of Russian public opinion on issues relating to democracy, consider several explanations for the patterns they observe, and propose some appropriate policy measures.

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**H**uman rights norms appear to be more deeply entrenched in Europe than they were fifty-four years ago during the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or even twenty-seven years ago at the dawn of the Helsinki process.<sup>2</sup> A growing body of social science literature examines the processes whereby human rights and democratic norms have steadily diffused throughout the international community during the last several decades (Sikkink, 1993; Klotz, 1995; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Risse and Ropp, 1999; Lutz and Sikkink, 2000; Evangelista, 1999; Thomas, 2001). According to this literature, domestic

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<sup>2</sup>The Helsinki process was an outgrowth of the 1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe that produced the Helsinki accords and that placed human rights on the European security agenda. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is generally seen to mark the beginning of the rights revolution.

demand for the protection of rights plays a crucial role: indigenous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) link with international NGOs, which then persuade international organizations and states to pressure regimes that are noncompliant with international rights norms.

While this literature has focused on local NGOs, it has paid scant attention to the role of public demand for the protection of human rights. Thus, this literature yields little understanding of how people inside these targeted states, aside from a narrow band of activists and elites, actually think about human rights. The degree of public support for human rights norms is, however, central to any argument about the diffusion of these norms. This is especially important in a transitional society and state like Russia, where much uncertainty surrounds how people understand their rights as well as the level of governmental protection of these basic rights.

A large literature in comparative politics, however, has measured support within the Russian public for democracy. Many among the legion of studies reporting high public support for democracy in Russia include views on various civil liberties—in addition to elections, parties, and other institutionalized forms of political participation—as measures of democratic norms (Hahn, 1991; Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger, 1994, 1997; Gibson, 1995, 1996; Whitefield and Evans, 1996; Bahry, Boaz, and Gordon, 1997; Carnaghan, 2001; Colton and McFaul, 2001, 2002). In fact, notwithstanding claims to the contrary (e.g., Colton and McFaul, 2002), most survey-based studies defy the older conventional wisdom that portrays Russians as culturally predisposed to reject individual liberties and other democratic norms in favor of collectivism and a strong leader (Keenan, 1986; Laqueur, 1989; McDaniel, 1996). Instead, the majority of studies find the opposite: Russians appear to support democracy.

Optimism with respect to human rights norms is premature. If the international relations literature addresses widely codified human rights norms but fails to measure public views of these norms, then the existing studies in comparative politics measure public views but typically deal with a small number of specific human rights and treat them simply as indicators of deeper democratic norms. They do not focus empirically or analytically on human rights norms as such. In addition, views on human rights are often measured in a wholly abstract manner. For example, Colton and McFaul (2002, p. 104) conclude that support for “civic and personal freedoms” is extremely high among Russians on the grounds that from 70 percent to 87 percent of respondents in a 1999 survey said that freedom of thought, expression, press, and religion are “important” as opposed to “not important.” These questions do not reveal how deeply committed respondents are to the rights in question, because the response categories are coarse and the rights are not balanced against other possible priorities or costs. Moreover, such abstract questions offer little insight into how Russians apply broad conceptions of rights in concrete situations. When more specific questions are posed regarding the extension of such freedoms to unpopular groups, a more pessimistic picture emerges (Bahry, Boaz, and Gordon, 1997).

In order to obtain a more in-depth and variegated picture of how Russians think about human rights, we designed a special battery of survey questions that we included on a "Monitoring" survey conducted by the All-Russian Center for Public Opinion and Market Research (VTsIOM) from September 17 to October 9, 2001 ( $N = 2405$ ).<sup>3</sup> Our questions measure in finer grain how strongly respondents support a wide range of specific rights and ascertain the conditions under which they believe the state can justifiably suspend rights. They also reveal how Russians perceive the war in Chechnya, which we consider to be one important barometer of how Russians apply conceptions of human rights to concrete political situations. In what follows, we present the main findings from our survey. We first describe how the Russian public views human rights "in the abstract" and consider which variables—demographic traits, material standing, and regional characteristics—influence support for rights. Next, we turn to attitudes toward the war in Chechnya. We then consider how closely our respondents' stated views on human rights in the abstract are linked to their views on the war. We conclude by proposing an explanation for the low levels of concern about civil liberties in general and the specific rights abuses in Chechnya we detect in our data, as well policy measures that might rectify the situation.

The picture that emerges from our data is not encouraging for those who believe that the Russian public strongly supports human rights. According to our evidence, Russians firmly support economic rights, but their support for rights of the person is substantially weaker, and their support for civil liberties emerges as tepid at best. A large majority is willing to see rights suspended for the sake of order or national security. Despite increases in state controls on the media and violations of rights by the authorities, few Russians are concerned about freedom of the press or the loss of civil liberties. Contrary to conventional wisdom, younger Russians are no more likely than their grandparents to strongly support civil liberties. The well-educated are only slightly more likely to do so than the least educated. Nor is it the case that material hardship is the reason behind low support for civil liberties.

As for the war in Chechnya, very few Russians support the status quo. They are divided between supporters of more and supporters of less military action. Those who oppose the hostilities are motivated not by

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<sup>3</sup> We prepared the questions in Russian in close consultation with VTsIOM's experts on questionnaire design. Our questions were pre-tested on 20 respondents and the results of the pre-test were incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire. VTsIOM's Monitoring surveys have been conducted monthly or bi-monthly since March 1993. They employ a multi-stage sample design, as well as standard fieldwork and quality control procedures described by Levada (1995). The October 2001 Monitoring included 104 primary sampling units drawn from strata formed on the basis of ethno-political and demographic characteristics using probabilities proportionate to size (with Moscow and St. Petersburg self-representing). Forty-one of Russia's eighty-nine oblasts are represented in the data. The effective response rate was 64.1 percent. Additional technical details on the survey and complete question wordings (in Russian) are available from the first author upon request.

concerns over rights violations, but by alarm at the losses incurred by Russian troops and the economic cost of war. We find at most a very weak association between support for human rights in the abstract and concern over abuses by the Russian military in Chechnya. In our view, the missing link between support for human rights and opposition to the war reflects the concerted campaign of the Putin administration to control the flow of information to the Russian public.

## SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

We began by telling respondents about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, noting that it was passed by the UN General Assembly in 1948 and signed by the Soviet Union. We then asked respondents how strongly they support eight specific rights included in the Declaration, noting first that some hold them sacred, others see them as harmful, and others are neutral. In the order of their appearance in the survey, these were: freedom from arbitrary arrest, freedom of religion/conscience, the right to work, freedom of expression/information, freedom from torture, the right to minimal standard of living, the right to own property, and the right of free association.<sup>4</sup> In each case, we offered five response categories ranging from strong support for the right to strong opposition, and a sixth category for those with no opinion:

- 1) The observation of this right should be a top priority of the state;
- 2) This right should, of course, be observed, but in our current circumstances there are other more important priorities;
- 3) This right is neither important nor harmful to Russia;
- 4) This right might be necessary for other countries, but in our circumstances it might hurt our country's interests;
- 5) This right definitely contradicts the political and economic interests of our country;
- 6) I do not have a strong opinion about this right or I have never thought about it.

Figure 1 illustrates, for each right, the distribution of the weighted adult sample (18 and over) across the following positions: protecting this right is a top priority, it is desirable but not a priority, it is unimportant or harmful, and "no opinion."<sup>5</sup> The rights are arranged in order of decreasing

<sup>4</sup>Respondents were read abridged versions of the respective articles in the Declaration, rather than pat expressions such as "the right to own property." Space does not permit us to present the full wordings of all questions, but we will gladly provide these upon request.

<sup>5</sup>We computed new weights for the data. VTsIOM apparently includes voting behavior among its criteria for weights. We did not wish to incorporate political variables such as voting behavior into our weights, because our key variables of interest are political attitudes. So we calculated our own weights based on age, education, urban residence, and sex, using more detailed classifications of the first two variables.

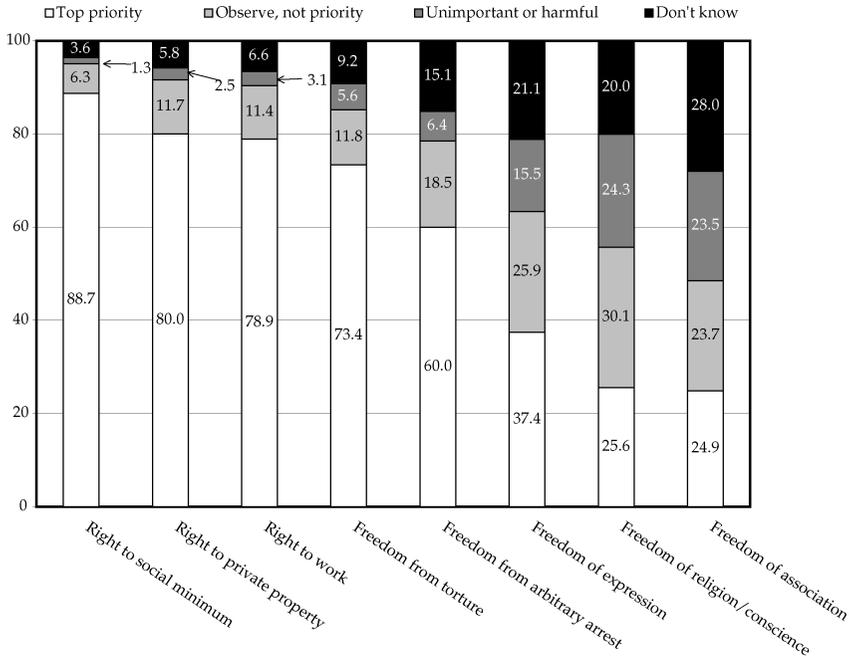


Fig. 1. Sample distributions of views on eight human rights.

levels of overall support, which is measured by combining the first two categories. Over 90 percent support rights concerning a minimum standard of living, private property, and a job, and in each case the overwhelming majority say protecting these rights should be a top priority. Support for freedom from torture is only slightly lower, at 85 percent, and about equally unqualified. The remaining rights enjoy less overall support and more qualified support among supporters. Still, majorities express some degree of support for all the rights except freedom of association (48.5 percent). Non-supporters of a particular right are generally more likely to have no opinion about it than to view it as unimportant or harmful.

### Economic Rights vs. Rights of the Person vs. Civil Liberties

The left-to-right ordering in Figure 1 suggests that economic rights enjoy the highest level of support among Russians, civil liberties the least amount of support, with rights of the person in between. Additional analysis provided more evidence that this is the case, and furthermore that support for civil liberties is even weaker than these numbers indicate.

First, we performed a principal components factor analysis on these eight variables. The analysis extracted three factors. According to the

rotated solution, the first three rights load on the first factor, the fourth and fifth load on the second factor, and the final three load on the third factor.<sup>6</sup> This pattern confirms our view that the individual rights correspond to three distinct dimensions of rights in the following manner: the first three correspond to economic rights, the next two to rights of the person, and the final three to civil liberties. It is especially interesting to note that support for the right to private property—a clearly liberal, “post-Soviet” concept—loads on the same factor as support for the right to a satisfactory job and the right to a minimum standard of living, both of which represent rights associated with Soviet ideology. Our respondents do not share the distinction made by social scientists between Soviet and post-Soviet ideologies. Instead, they distinguish among economic rights, rights of the person, and civil liberties.

Next, we created measures of support for each *dimension* of rights based on the levels of support for the cluster of rights corresponding to it. For example, our measure of support for the economic dimension combines information about the levels of support for social welfare, private property, and work. Rather than create a simple linear scale, which imposes an arbitrary continuity on the underlying constructs we wish to measure and creates dilemmas as to how to handle “don’t know” responses, we created a four-category discrete classification for each dimension.<sup>7</sup> “Strong” supporters of a dimension of rights assign top priority to protecting *all* of the corresponding specific rights. “Weak” supporters advocate, on average, protecting the corresponding rights but do not assign top priority to all. “No support” means that the respondent is, on average, indifferent or opposed to protecting this type of right. Those who “don’t know” have no opinion on all of the specific rights corresponding to that particular dimension.

This coding schema confirms that Russians’ support for economic rights dramatically exceeds their support for civil liberties (Figure 2): while 65 percent say all three economic rights should be a top priority, only 12 percent say the same for all three civil liberties. Moreover, while only 2 percent do not support or have no views on economic rights, 23 percent do not support or have no views on civil liberties. Thus, those who are indifferent, uncertain, or even hostile to civil liberties outnumber strong supporters of civil liberties by about 2 to 1.

An optimist might point to the finding that 66 percent of our respondents are weak supporters of civil liberties, implying that overall 77 percent support civil liberties at least to some degree. This finding, in fact, is comparable to the figures from Colton and McFaul (2002, p. 104) regarding the proportions of Russians who think various civil liberties are “impor-

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<sup>6</sup>The complete results of our factor analyses are available from the first author upon request.

<sup>7</sup>Gerber (2000) discusses in greater detail the methodological and conceptual problems associated with combining ordinal survey items measuring attitudes into linear scales—a common practice in the study of post-Soviet public opinion—and proposes an alternative approach based on latent class analysis.

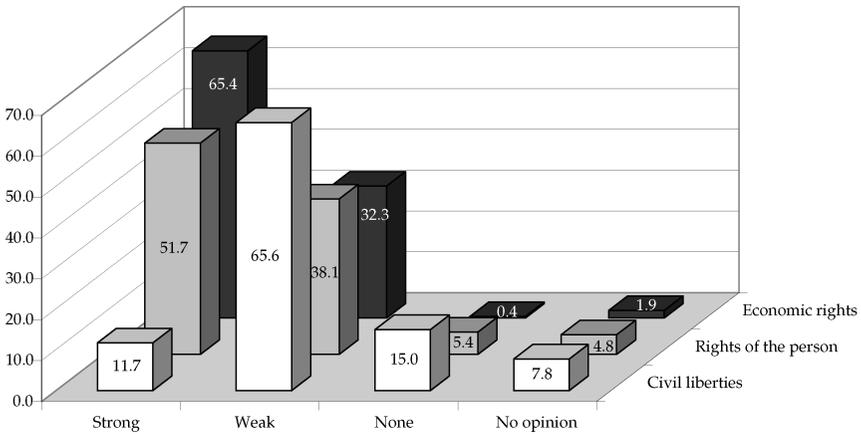


Fig. 2. Levels of support for three types of rights (in percent).

tant” rather than “not important.” But as we will see below, when it comes to applying the abstract principles of support for civil liberties to concrete issues, weak supporters of civil liberties do not differ from non-supporters or those who have no opinion at all. Thus, weak support for civil liberties is just that: weak.

We also find further evidence that support for rights of the person lies roughly midway between support for economic rights and support for civil liberties: by our measure, 52 percent of Russian adults are strong supporters of rights of the person, and an additional 38 percent are weak supporters. But because it is based on only two items rather than three, our measure may overstate the level of strong commitment and understate the level of weak commitment to rights of the person, in comparison to the measures pertaining to the two other dimensions of rights. If we had added an additional item pertaining to rights of the person (for example, freedom from slavery) in this survey, those respondents currently classified as strong supporters of rights of the person who do not strongly support the additional right would be re-classified as weak supporters of rights of the person. However, even if as many as one-third of those currently classified as strong supporters of rights of the person were thus reclassified—the actual proportion is probably much lower—that would leave roughly 35 percent of the sample as strong supporters. So it is safe to conclude that support for rights of the person substantially exceeds support for civil liberties in intensity and trails support for economic rights.

## Suspending Rights

After polling our respondents on the eight specific human rights, we then asked them to indicate up to two general goals and up to two specific threats that would justify, in their view, the suspension of at least some

human rights.<sup>8</sup> We listed six goals (and six equivalent threats) as well as an “other” category and a “none” category:

- 1) To improve the country’s economic situation (worsening of the country’s economic situation);
- 2) To strengthen state power (weakening of state power);
- 3) To re-establish Russia’s role in the international arena (weakening of Russia’s role in the international arena);
- 4) To combat corruption and mafia structures (the spread of corruption and the influence of mafia structures);
- 5) To establish order in society and lower the crime rate (the spread of disorder in society and the growth of crime);
- 6) To combat terrorism (the spread of terrorism);
- 7) Other
- 8) None of these goals (threats) can justify limiting human rights.

Only 19 percent of respondents consistently said that no such goal or threat justifies violating rights. This means that over four-fifths believe it is acceptable for the state to limit human rights in the pursuit of a particular goal or in response to a specific threat.

Three-quarters (75 percent) indicated that considerations involving order and public safety—namely, fighting crime, terrorism, and/or corruption—justified violations of human rights. One-third (34 percent) advocated limiting rights for the sake of improving the economy or halting economic crisis. More than one-quarter (28 percent) saw enhancing the domestic or international power of the state as a legitimate cause for sacrificing human rights.

These numbers suggest that Russians’ commitment to human rights is weaker when they are juxtaposed against concrete concerns than when they are presented in abstract terms. They also suggest that Russians see the main tradeoff for rights as order and public safety—not economic progress. In other words, Russians see an inverse relationship between fighting terrorism, crime, and corruption and the protection of rights.

One possible explanation for the apparent willingness of Russians to sacrifice human rights for the sake of order and public safety is that concerns about terrorism were temporarily inflated by the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States. But the data give us reason to doubt this explanation. A question in the survey indicates that that Russians fear economic hardships more than they fear terrorism. Given a list of 20 problems facing Russian society and asked to choose the 5 or 6 they find most pressing, respondents most often pointed to price increases (62.4 percent) and poverty (58.0 percent). Crime (41.4 percent) and drugs (39.2 percent) follow, then economic crisis (33.6 percent) and unemployment

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<sup>8</sup> We posed the question two different ways—one referring to goals, another to threats—to ensure that the responses did not depend on the wording of the question.

(30.7 percent). The threat of explosions and other terrorist acts in one's place of residence ranked thirteenth (22.4 percent) out of the 20 problems.

These figures suggest that Russians were only moderately concerned about terrorism in the weeks following the September 11 attacks, and that inflated fears of terrorism do not account for the widespread willingness to give up human rights for the sake of order and public safety. Instead, we believe that order and public safety are more closely linked to human rights than are economic issues. Russians see a tradeoff between protecting rights and fighting crime, corruption, and the mafia, but they are less likely to see a tradeoff between protecting rights and improving the economy.

### IGNORANCE IS BLISS? INDIFFERENCE TO THREATS TO HUMAN RIGHTS AND CENSORSHIP

Of the 20 problems presented to respondents, the one evoking the lowest degree of concern was "limitations on civil rights and democratic freedoms (freedom of expression and the press)." Only 1.3 percent of the weighted adult sample listed loss of these civil rights as among their 5–6 greatest fears.<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, we asked respondents to assess the level of government control over press reports on the conflict in Chechnya. Only 17.2 percent said they think government control of media reports from Chechnya is excessive. In contrast, 32.0 percent advocated *more* censorship of such reports. These responses suggest that very few Russians are concerned about limitations on civil liberties.

We believe that recent developments in Russia indicate that those who view the preservation of rights as a priority should be concerned. The takeover of critical media outlets by groups associated with the state, severe limitations on reporting from Chechnya, and official harassment of individuals and voluntary associations that criticize the government all represent a trend toward serious and repeated restrictions on civil and personal rights with the active or tacit approval of the authorities.<sup>10</sup> Grave breaches of human rights by the Russian military in Chechnya are especially worrisome (Moscow Helsinki Group, 2002; Human Rights Watch, 2000, 2001a, 2001b). If Russians were as committed to civil liberties and rights of the person as their responses to the questions about freedoms of expression, religion, and association and freedom from torture and arbitrary arrest

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<sup>9</sup>We note that this contrasts with the marked record of recent rights abuses in Russia. (See Moscow Helsinki Watch, 2002.)

<sup>10</sup>Gazprom, which is largely owned by the Russian state and was a majority shareholder in the Media-Most holding company that owned NTV, *Segodnya*, and *Itogi*, maintained that all three were deeply in debt. The television stations ORT and RTR, as Laura Belin, media affairs observer for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), noted in an exchange on Johnson's Russia List, on May 6, 2001, also have debts with Gazprom but are pro-Kremlin in their coverage. They have not been harassed. In early 2002, TV6, the station to which many journalists fled after NTV came under new management, was ordered to liquidate by the top arbitration court in Russia. For details and a discussion on these and other rights violations, see Mendelson (2000, 2002).

suggest, we would expect a much greater level of concern about these developments than is evident in our data. The low level of concern about censorship and other threats to civil liberties implies either that Russians are even less committed to civil liberties than their responses to these questions imply, or that they remain blissfully unaware of the current threats to these rights and trust the authorities not to trample them.

### **Weak Structuration: Correlates of Abstract Views on Rights**

Studies of public attitudes toward democracy in Russia often report that younger, more urbanized, male, better educated, and better off Russians are more inclined to support democratic norms (Finifter and Mickiewicz, 1990; Hahn, 1991; Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger, 1994; Brym, 1996; Miller, Reisinger, and Hesli, 1996; Bahry, Boaz, and Gordon, 1997; Kulberg and Zimmerman, 1999). If this applies to support for human rights norms, then even if overall support for a particular dimension is weak, there are grounds for optimism because those groups who are more politically active and influential are the strongest supporters. Thus, we were especially interested to see if the standard demographic and status variables affect support for each dimension of human rights. We also hypothesized that regional differences in economic performance could play a role: if economic hardship undermines support for non-economic rights, then the residents of poorer regions should be less likely to strongly advocate civil liberties and rights of the person.

We assess the effects of age, education, sex, self-employment, locality and region of residence, and family income on each dimension of rights using multivariate statistical models. Multivariate analysis is necessary to accurately estimate the effects of each of these variables on support for rights, because the various factors are all inter-correlated. By simultaneously controlling for the effects of all the variables, our statistical models offer a more accurate sense of how each individual variable affects support for a dimension of rights. Because our dependent variables have multiple discrete categories, we use multinomial logistic regression (MLR). Our preliminary analysis revealed no significant effects on distinctions between the "no support" and "don't know" categories for each dimension; therefore, in the interest of parsimony we combined these two categories.

The typical practice of simply reporting regression coefficients, noting their statistical significance, and making broad statements about their sign fails even under the best of circumstances to convey whether statistically significant results have substantively meaningful consequences. Raw MLR coefficients are especially difficult to interpret in a meaningful way, because the dependent variable is the log of the odds of being in a particular category of the dependent variable (e.g., a "strong" supporter) versus some baseline category (e.g., a "weak" supporter.)<sup>11</sup> This implies that a positive

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<sup>11</sup>For details on MLR, see Long (1997).

coefficient on an independent variable does not necessarily denote that an increase in the variable increases the probability of being in the particular category. To guard against misleading interpretations and to render a more helpful picture of the actual impact of the independent variables on attitudes, we report the expected probabilities associated with different values of each independent variable based on our preferred statistical models—i.e., the models including only statistically significant effects (Table 1). These “expected probabilities” are calculated by holding all the other variables constant at their sample means. Thus, comparisons across different values of one independent variable reveal the influence of a change in that variable holding constant the other variables in the model. Readers who are not familiar with the techniques and jargon of multivariate statistical analysis might think of Table 1 as a series of bivariate cross-tabulations that are purged of the confounding effects of other variables that are correlated with both the row and column variables and of non-significant effects.

Broadly speaking, our data provide little support for the conventional wisdom about the demographic, material, and geographic bases of democratic norms. Younger Russians are somewhat less likely to strongly support civil liberties than their grandparents, and the youngest cohort also tends not to strongly support rights of the person, relative to middle-aged Russians. Education has a statistically significant effect on support for civil liberties, but the magnitude of this effect is modest: those with a university degree (i.e., a degree from a *vyssheye uchebnoye zavedeniye*, or “VUZ”) are not quite twice as likely (15 percent vs. 8 percent) as those with less than secondary education to be strong supporters. The effect is even weaker in regard to rights of the person.

This result demonstrates the dangers of relying on statistical significance as the sole criterion for assessing determinants of public attitudes in Russia (or, for that matter, elsewhere). A statistically significant effect should be treated as substantively meaningful only if it proves to be of a magnitude that is sufficient to justify theoretical claims. An adherent of modernization theory might appeal to the result that college education produces a statistically significant increase in the probability that a Russian will strongly endorse civil liberties. But such an interpretation ignores the very modest size of that statistically significant effect: the results imply that if *all* Russians were to receive a college education (while preserving their values on the other variables), the total proportion of strong supporters of civil liberties would grow from .11 to .15, hardly a breathtaking swing in the direction of democratic norms. A similar conclusion applies to the apparent gender gap in support for civil liberties: although it is statistically significant, it is actually quite minimal in substantive terms.

In contrast, one of the more substantial effects we find involves the self-employed, who are considerably more likely than similar Russians who are not self-employed to strongly support civil liberties and considerably less likely to strongly advocate economic rights. The effect cannot be attributed to income, since income is controlled in the models.<sup>12</sup> Other

**Table 1.** Net Effects of Demographic Traits, Occupation, Income, and Residence on Human Rights Dimensions<sup>a</sup>

	Civil liberties			Rights of the person			Economic rights		
	Strong	Weak	None/DK	Strong	Weak	None/DK	Strong	Weak	None/DK
Overall means	.11	.67	.22	.53	.38	.10	.67	.32	.01
Age									
Under 30	.10	.69	.21	.47	.42	.11	.68	.31	.01
30–39	.10	.69	.21	.54	.36	.09	.68	.31	.01
40–49	.10	.69	.21	.54	.36	.09	.68	.31	.01
50–59	.13	.64	.23	.54	.36	.09	.68	.31	.01
60–69	.13	.64	.23	.54	.39	.09	.68	.31	.01
70 and older	.13	.64	.23	.54	.39	.09	.58	.38	.04
Education									
No secondary	.08	.63	.28	.52	.37	.11	.65	.34	.01
Secondary degree	.11	.69	.20	.52	.37	.11	.69	.30	.01
VUZ degree	.15	.70	.15	.54	.40	.06	.65	.34	.01
Sex									
Women	.09	.67	.24	.50	.39	.11	.65	.33	.02
Men	.12	.68	.20	.56	.36	.09	.69	.30	.01
Self-employed									
Yes	.18	.52	.30	.53	.38	.10	.52	.43	.05
No	.11	.68	.22	.53	.38	.10	.67	.32	.01
Locality of residence									
Moscow	.10	.75	.15	.57	.33	.10	.72	.27	.01
St. Petersburg	.26	.60	.14	.79	.12	.09	.72	.27	.01
Other city over 1 million	.16	.64	.20	.57	.33	.10	.72	.27	.01

Small city (400,000)	.12	.65	.23	.54	.36	.10	.69	.29	.01
Large town (80,000)	.09	.64	.27	.52	.39	.10	.67	.32	.01
Small town (40,000)	.07	.63	.30	.50	.40	.10	.65	.34	.01
Rural village (10,000)	.14	.68	.18	.47	.43	.10	.62	.36	.02
Small suburb (10,000)	.05	.61	.33	.47	.43	.10	.62	.36	.02
Family income (quintile means)									
Bottom	.10	.69	.21	.52	.37	.11	.64	.34	.02
Second	.11	.67	.22	.52	.38	.09	.67	.31	.01
Third	.11	.66	.24	.52	.39	.09	.68	.31	.01
Fourth	.10	.63	.25	.50	.41	.09	.69	.30	.01
Top	.09	.62	.29	.47	.45	.08	.69	.30	.01
Regional average wage (logged)									
One SD below mean	.09	.70	.21	.47	.43	.10	.63	.36	.01
Mean	.10	.68	.22	.51	.39	.10	.66	.33	.01
One SD above mean	.12	.66	.22	.55	.35	.10	.68	.30	.02
Regional unemployment									
One SD below mean	.11	.67	.22	.54	.36	.10	.67	.32	.01
Mean	.11	.67	.22	.50	.40	.10	.67	.32	.01
One SD above mean	.11	.67	.22	.46	.43	.11	.67	.32	.01
Regional small-business employment									
One SD below mean	.11	.67	.22	.60	.30	.10	.67	.32	.01
Mean	.11	.67	.22	.55	.35	.10	.67	.32	.01
One SD above mean	.11	.67	.22	.50	.40	.10	.67	.32	.01

<sup>a</sup>Cell entries are probabilities calculated from preferred multinomial regression models where all other variables are held constant at sample means; see text for details.

research shows that the self-employed in Russia are more supportive of market reforms (Gerber, 2001a, 2002). Apparently, in Russia the self-employed live up to their billing as a core constituency for individualist, liberal ideas. Of course, the self-employed represent a tiny fraction of the Russian population—only 2.4 percent of our weighted adult sample. Policies designed to encourage self-employment (see Gerber, 2001b) might not only yield economic benefits, but also help strengthen democracy.

Strong support for all three dimensions of rights appears to be more common among the residents of larger cities. But there are several complexities in the pattern. First, residents of rural villages are more likely to strongly support civil liberties than are residents of Moscow and nearly as likely to do so as residents of the largest non-capital cities. St. Petersburg, not Moscow, is distinguished by the high level of support for civil liberties and rights of the person among its inhabitants.

Family income—a better measure of material well-being than respondent's income—has a curvilinear and substantively trivial effect on support for civil liberties and support for rights of the person. If anything, Russians who are best off materially—those in the top quintile of family income—are somewhat less likely to advocate these types of rights. At the individual level, the evidence contradicts the argument that material well-being is a pre-condition for support of non-economic rights.<sup>13</sup>

At the regional level, however, economic variables have a number of effects that conform to expectations that support for rights is associated with higher economic status. Residents of regions that are substantially above the inter-regional mean in terms of wages are somewhat more likely to strongly support civil liberties and considerably more likely to prioritize rights of the person. They are also more likely to endorse economic rights. Regional unemployment rates have consistent effects: the higher the level of unemployment in a region, the lower the level of support for rights of the person. In addition, the strength of small private business in the regional economy—measured by the proportion of the labor force employed in such businesses—is positively related to the strength of support for rights of person: further evidence that self-employment is an important, yet overlooked, influence on political opinions in Russia.

Altogether, our data analyses show only minor variations in levels of support for civil liberties and rights of the person across categories of the main independent variables examined in the literature. Despite some

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<sup>12</sup>We also checked for distinctive levels of support for the three dimensions of rights among other occupation/employment groups, such as managers and professionals, workers, students, and the unemployed. We found, however, that once we controlled for income, education, and the other variables in Table 1, the only significant distinction was between the self-employed and all others.

<sup>13</sup>We also tested for effects of subjective material well-being on support for rights, using several different composite specifications based on a rich set of individual measures of subjective material satisfaction in the data. In no case did we discover statistically significant effects.

evidence that the most educated Russians lean more heavily toward civil liberties than do Russians with the least amount of education, the “usual suspects” of age, education, gender, and locality have ambiguous or negligible effects on Russians’ support for civil liberties and rights of the person. Civil liberties and rights of the person are indispensable components of a democratic society.<sup>14</sup> Our findings paint a pessimistic picture of the prevailing levels of support for democratic norms in Russia as a whole, and in particular among those Russians who Western observers expected would be the most open to liberal norms.

It is especially troubling to find that the younger generation in Russia is not inclined toward democratic or liberal ideas: if anything, the opposite is the case. Perhaps Russian youths are too concerned about their dismal economic prospects to care much about human rights. In any case, our findings suggest that it is a mistake to assume that the young will instinctively support democratic norms in Russia. Those concerned about the future of Russian democracy should further explore why support for democratic values is so weak among students and other young Russians, who in theory should be a receptive audience for democratic ideals. They should also explore the development of policies and programs that could increase such support.

## Rights Reconsidered

Because norms favoring human rights are a crucial component of democratic values, our findings on how Russians think about human rights portray a less optimistic picture than other recent studies. Russians’ views on human rights are complex; it is not accurate to speak of support for “human rights” as a whole. Instead, there is varying support for different types of rights. Russians are strongly committed to economic rights. But their support for civil liberties is weak, especially when they are asked concrete questions rather than abstract ones.

One plausible explanation for this pattern is that it reflects the dire economic conditions that many Russians have endured in the decade since the collapse of the Soviet system. But although this explanation is intuitively appealing, our data do not really support it. None of the measures of our respondents’ material standing—not their reported earnings, nor several measures of their material standing—consistently increases the likelihood of strong support for civil liberties or rights of the person.

Advocates of market reform should be concerned by our findings. Multivariate analysis shows that those who strongly support civil liberties are 66 percent more likely to support market reforms than those who do not. Supporters of economic rights are only 31 percent more likely to

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<sup>14</sup>Most classic definitions of democratic government include protection of human rights and civil liberties as central components. For example, Robert Dahl (1982, p. 11) includes freedom of expression, freedom of information, and freedom of association among the seven institutions that are distinguishing features of democratic regimes.

support market reforms, even though property rights are one of our three measures of economic rights. This calls attention to the fact that Russians back a cluster of somewhat contradictory economic rights, some of which are at odds with market reform. Russians highly value social welfare, the right to work, *and* the right to own property, and that could pose a dilemma for economic policymakers. While those who want to see free markets in Russia may not be surprised by Russians' support for private property, the continued high levels of support for welfare and jobs suggest that the Putin administration faces challenges in implementing economic restructuring that would increase unemployment or reduce social welfare. High support for contradictory economic principles suggests that the Russian government will be forced to balance radically different economic objectives.

In terms of civil liberties, our news is more grim than that delivered by more optimistic observers (Colton and McFaul, 2001, 2002). Russian and Western human rights organizations have detailed an increase in threats to civil liberties (Moscow Helsinki Group, 2002; Human Rights Watch, 2000). But our data suggest that very few Russians fear these threats. For example, we found solid evidence of the widely reported apathy toward freedom of the press. This apathy was also evident in the lack of public reaction to the takeover of NTV and the dissolution of TV6. Together, the public lethargy and increased control of the media create permissive conditions for violations of human rights. Rights that Russians do care about strongly, such as freedom from torture and arbitrary arrest, are being violated in Chechnya and throughout Russia, but these violations seldom, if ever, make it into the news. Those who monitor human rights have little access to the media, so assaults on rights go largely unnoticed.

The weakness of support for civil liberties in Russian public opinion should be a matter of concern to those who want democracy to flourish in Russia. Democracy requires civil liberties and an independent media. Without them, political parties and elections have little meaning, and laws are easily undermined (since violations can be hidden from the public). Without a public clamoring for the protection of civil liberties, there is little to stop the administration from suspending or violating the civil rights of groups and citizens whenever it suits its political purposes to do so. Moreover, Russian NGOs who encourage international organizations to insist on Russian compliance with international norms have little backing on the part of the Russian population, which weakens their position considerably.

## VIEWS ON CHECHNYA

Since Russian forces re-entered Chechnya in October 1999, there have been numerous reports of abuses of civilians by Russian troops in blatant violation of international norms regulating the use of force. Russian troops have clearly and repeatedly violated the Geneva Conventions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Russian and Western organizations have documented this disproportionate use of force, the indiscrimi-

nate targeting of civilians, and the *zachistki* (“mop-up” operations) that regularly involve looting, ransom, rape, and execution. They have detailed forced disappearances of up to 2000 people, and “filtration camps,” where rebels and civilians are routinely tortured. There is even evidence that the human rights monitors themselves are being targeted and killed by federal forces.<sup>15</sup>

In short, civilians in Chechnya have been unlawfully detained, robbed, raped, tortured, and murdered, as well as victimized by indiscriminate bombardment. If Russians are strongly committed to protecting basic human rights, we would expect reports of such abuses in Chechnya to arouse opposition to the war. Views on the war in Chechnya therefore offer an informative supplement to responses to questions about human rights “in the abstract” for the purpose of gauging the Russian public’s degree of commitment to human rights. Chechnya is an especially helpful gage in understanding Russians’ commitment to a variety of international norms, including freedom from arbitrary arrest, freedom from torture, and issues related to freedom of information.<sup>16</sup>

### Intensify, Maintain, or Abate? Overall Policy Preferences

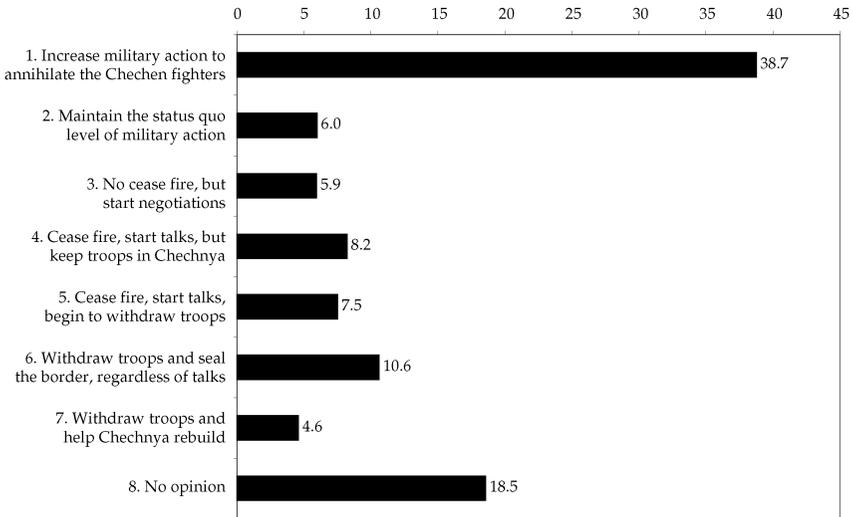
Our first question on Chechnya asked: “In your view, what should be the government’s policy toward Chechnya?” We provided seven policy courses, in order of diminishing military engagement, and a “no opinion” category. The distribution of the weighted adult sample (18 and older) across our categories reveals just how divided Russians are over what to do in Chechnya (Figure 3).

Very few Russians—only 6 percent of our respondents—support the status quo in Chechnya. A large plurality (39 percent) supports the intensification of military action. Thirty-seven percent (combining categories 3–7) favor some form of non-military approach, ranging from negotiations to unilateral withdrawal and assistance to Chechnya. This group is further divided among those who advocate a ceasefire (31 percent, combining categories 4–7) and those who support the withdrawal of troops (23 per-

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<sup>15</sup>Nivat (2000) and Politkovskaya (2001) describe many of these violations of rights. See Nivat (2002b) for an especially vivid description of *zachistki*. Many groups including Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International, Physicians for Human Rights, Memorial, Doctors of the World, and Doctors without Borders have gathered evidence on the abuses by federal forces (see, for example, Human Rights Watch, 2000, 2001a, 2001b). On the targeting of activists, see press releases available at [www.friendly.narod.ru](http://www.friendly.narod.ru) for descriptions of killings by federal forces in December 2001 of several grantees of the (U.S.) National Endowment for Democracy.

<sup>16</sup>Views on the war in Chechnya are, of course, only one possible measure. Other issues for future research might include attitudes toward the trials of alleged spies, such as the environmentalist Alexander Nikitin and national security expert Igor Sutyagin, or attitudes toward the shutting down of newspapers that provide critical coverage of the Putin administration or regional leaders.



**Fig. 3.** In your opinion, what should be the Russian government's policy in Chechnya? (in percent)

cent, combining categories 5–7). Finally, nearly a fifth (19 percent) have no opinion on what the government should do.

## Feelings Provoked by the War

To get more information about the emotional responses Russians have to the war and the basis for these responses, we provided respondents with a list of 12 possible "feelings" prompted by "reports about the activities of federal forces in Chechnya during the last several months." We asked them to choose the two they feel the most often.

The answers to these questions suggest that the war evokes considerably more negative than positive feelings, even if a near majority advocates maintaining or intensifying military action (Figure 4). Most strikingly, 68 percent of Russians express alarm at the large losses of Russian troops. This is the most commonly cited feeling by far, suggesting that concern over the loss of Russian soldiers is widespread. Shame over the inability of Russian troops to "cope with the rebels" and alarm at the excessive cost of the military operations are the next most cited feelings, both chosen by roughly one-quarter of the weighted adult sample.

Clearly, this is not a popular war: only 12 percent take pride in Russia's purported stand against terrorism in Chechnya and a mere 7 percent applaud the military successes of the campaign. But the reasons for the lack of popularity have little to do with concerns over human rights norms: minuscule percentages appear to care about violations by troops and Russia's international reputation, and only 12 percent are worried by restric-

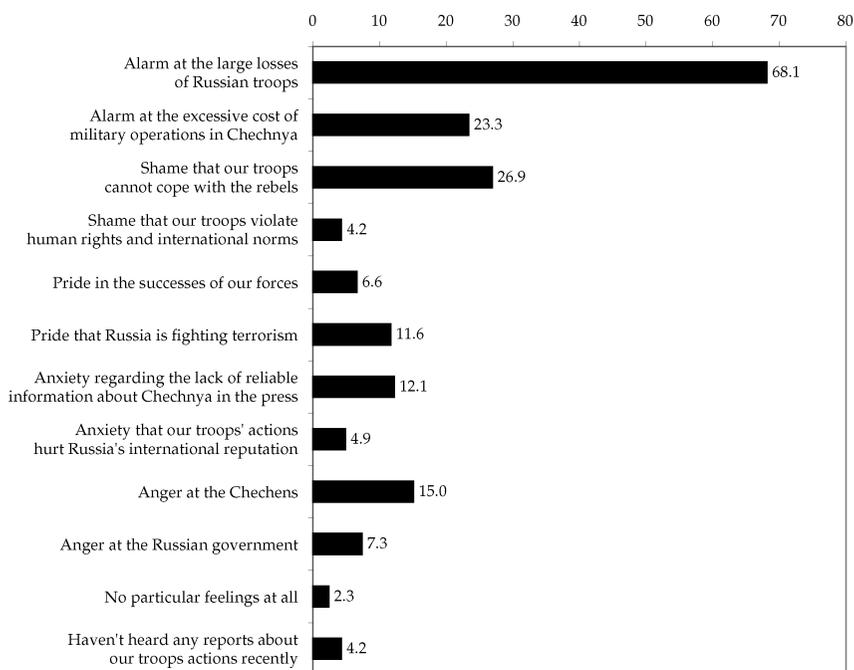


Fig. 4. Percent who experience each feeling (maximum 2) when they hear reports of troops actions in Chechnya.

tions on the press. All told, the war provokes negative reactions among Russians, but mainly because of the loss of military lives it has caused, and to a lesser extent because of economic costs and military failures.

## Framing the War

We also sought to determine what factors influence how Russians think about the war: what frames their perceptions? We asked respondents to rate how important each of seven aspects of the conflict is in shaping what they think about events in Chechnya (Table 2).<sup>17</sup> As we confirmed with a factor analysis of these seven items, our survey suggests that Russians have three principal ways of framing the war. One way they frame it is in terms of national security: large majorities ascribe at least some importance to the necessity to combat terrorists and bandits, battlefield successes, and, to a lesser degree, the territorial integrity of Russia. Another

<sup>17</sup>In the survey, the response categories were offered in the opposite order (compared to the order in Table 2). Also, the original order of the seven items (using the numeration in Table 2) was as follows: 7, 2, 1, 4, 6, 5, 3.

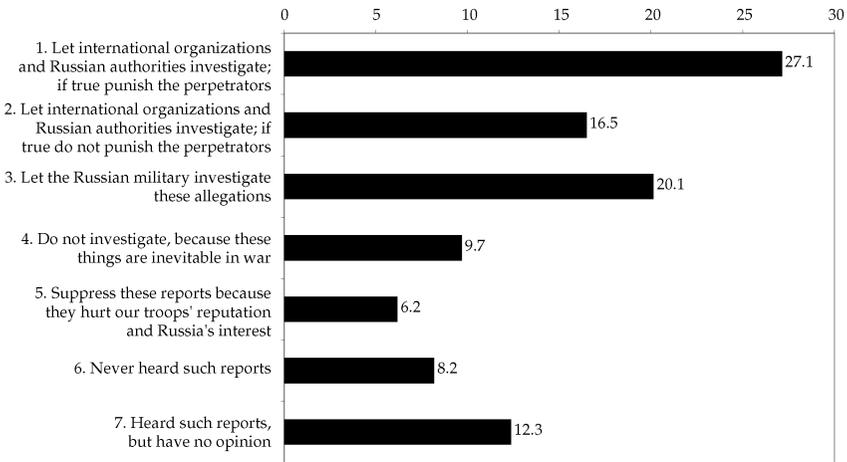
**Table 2.** How Important Are the Following Factors to Your Assessment of What Is Happening in Chechnya? (in percent)<sup>a</sup>

	Very	Fairly	Don't know	Not very	Not at all
National Security Frame					
1. The need to fight terrorists and bandits.	65.5	27.7	4.9	1.0	0.9
2. The success of our troops in Chechnya.	48.0	37.2	10.1	3.1	1.7
3. The territorial integrity of Russia.	38.7	29.9	18.9	8.1	4.4
Economic Costs Frame					
4. The money spent on conducting this war.	41.8	38.7	12.2	5.0	2.5
Human Rights Frame					
5. The "filtering" of reports on Chechnya by our government.	16.4	33.1	32.0	13.4	5.1
6. Reports of human rights/international norms violations by our troops.	15.7	32.0	30.8	14.9	6.7
7. The international community's views.	9.3	24.6	26.9	20.5	18.8

<sup>a</sup>Question and response category orderings differed in the survey; see text for details.

typical frame views the war as a matter of economic costs, which a full 80.5 percent of the sample identifies as fairly or very important. Finally, the least popular frame sees the war through the lens of human rights, with much smaller percentages assigning importance to the censorship of press reports from Chechnya, reports of human rights violations by Russian troops, and the views of the international community.

National security and economic costs are significantly more influential in Russians' thinking about Chechnya than human rights concerns. These results suggest the regime's efforts to frame the war as a struggle against "terrorists and bandits" (see Lapidus, 2002) have been extremely effective, as almost two-thirds say this struggle is a very important influence on their assessment of the war and another 28 percent say it is fairly important. The level of military success on the battlefield also influences the assessments of a large majority, which creates a strong incentive for the regime to take steps to ensure that minimal news from the front reaches the Russian public. Supporters of the war should be encouraged by the relatively strong



**Fig. 5.** Which position regarding the proper response to reports of illegal acts against civilians by Russian forces in Chechnya is closest to yours? (in percent)

resonance of the notion of Russia's territorial integrity. On the other hand, the economic costs of the war also figure in how Russians think about the war: four-fifths indicate that they are at least fairly important.

While Western and Russian human rights groups have issued reports and held press conferences detailing abuses in Chechnya, the responses to this battery of questions provide more evidence that considerations about human rights and civil liberties do not shape Russians' assessments of the war. Although roughly half of the sample identify human rights abuses by troops and government censorship of press reports from Chechnya as important influences, only one-third say such factors are very important. Barely more than one-third assign any importance at all to the international community's views of events.

### **Let's Not Think About It: Views on Allegations of Rights Abuses in Chechnya**

We asked respondents two questions specifically about allegations of rights abuses by Russian troops. First, we noted that there have been reports that Russian forces "violate international norms of military conflict by destroying civilian objects, arbitrarily detaining and interrogating civilians, and using torture and extra-judicial executions." We then asked which of a series of positions most closely captured the respondent's views about such reports (Figure 5).

Notably, 20 percent either have never heard such reports or have no opinion about them. More than two-fifths (43 percent) advocate an inde-

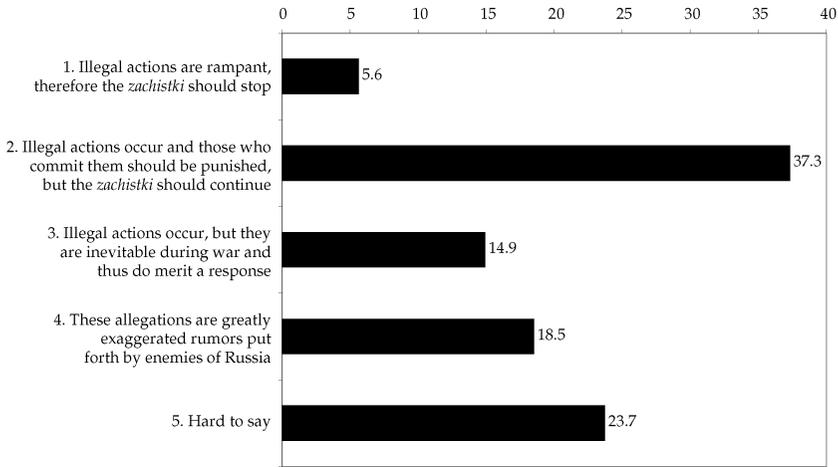


Fig. 6. Which position regarding illegal actions during *zachistki* is closest to yours? (in percent)

pendent investigation of the reported abuses with the involvement of international organizations. Although about 40 percent of these (16 percent overall) do not believe the perpetrators of such acts should be punished, it is slightly encouraging that there is at least some concern in the population that the truth about the military's conduct of the war be revealed. On the other hand, 16 percent of the population do not want the allegations to be investigated at all (positions 4 and 5), and an additional 20 percent want only an investigation by military authorities. Given the condition of military justice in Russia, this may be tantamount to no investigation.

We next referred to reports about marauding and the detention and torture of civilians associated with the so-called *zachistki* and asked respondents which of a series of responses they supported (Figure 6.) Again we encountered a large proportion (24 percent) with no particular opinion on the issue. A mere 6 percent believe the allegations and conclude that the *zachistki* should be stopped. A plurality (37 percent) support holding the perpetrators of illegal acts accountable, but they think that *zachistki* should continue. This position presumes, unrealistically in our view, that such abuses do not inhere in the very practice of *zachistki*. Altogether, 43 percent want some action taken to curtail abuses during *zachistki*. But another 43 percent either deny that such abuses take place or say that nothing should be done about them.

Our questions about specific allegations of human rights abuses by Russian troops in Chechnya reveal a good deal of ignorance of and apathy toward such abuses. Nonetheless, it is also noteworthy that more than two-fifths of the weighted sample wants such abuses investigated or curtailed.

## Policy Preferences in Chechnya and Views on Human Rights in the Abstract

If our survey measures of “abstract” views reflect deeply held principles, then they should be related to policy preferences regarding the war in Chechnya in a straightforward manner: Russians who strongly support the protection of civil liberties and rights of the person should be more inclined to favor a ceasefire, less inclined to favor intensification of military action, and more likely to advocate stopping *zachistki* and punishing soldiers who violate human rights. Moreover, if “weak” supporters of civil liberties and personal rights are truly more devoted to these principles than those who, on the basis of the survey, have no opinion or do not support these principles at all, we would expect the former to more closely resemble “strong” supporters with respect to their views on Chechnya. As for economic rights, the conventional argument that economic rights and civil liberties are competing priorities leads us to anticipate, if anything, a negative association between strong support for economic rights and support for enforcing rights norms in Chechnya.

To see if these expected relationships obtain, we need to control for factors that might simultaneously influence abstract human rights views and policy preferences for Chechnya. We also must control for views on all three dimensions of rights simultaneously, since the positive correlations among them also raise the possibility of spurious findings. Thus, we used the appropriate multivariate technique—binary logistic regression—for situations where the dependent variable is dichotomous. We estimated models for four dependent variables: the natural logarithm of the odds of supporting a ceasefire, intensification of military action, putting an end to *zachistki*, and punishing the perpetrators of human rights violations. For each model, we included the same independent variables as for the models in Table 1 (cohort, sex, education, etc.), as well as dummy variables corresponding to the different positions with respect to each of the three dimensions of rights. We removed the non-significant dummy variables in order to eliminate non-significant effects.

The “cleaned” associations (in the sense that they represent direct associations, purged of confounding effects of other variables and non-significant statistical noise) are presented in Table 3. These results confirm our expectation that “strong” supporters of civil liberties are more likely (holding many other factors constant) to support implementing a ceasefire, ending *zachistki*, and punishing soldiers found guilty of rights abuses. The difference between strong supporters of civil liberties and others with respect to a ceasefire, while statistically significant, is modest in size: the numbers imply that if all Russians were strong supporters of civil rights, then 36 percent would support a ceasefire—only a modest increase over the sample estimate of 31 percent.<sup>18</sup> The other differences are more substantial: 15 percent of strong supporters advocate ending *zachistki* (versus 4 percent among weak supporters and 6 percent of the sample overall) and

**Table 3.** Chechnya Policy Preferences by Views on Rights (in percent)

	Implement a ceasefire	Intensify military action	End <i>zachistki</i>	Investigate violations and punish perpetrators
A. Civil rights				
Strong	35.9	38.0	15.0	39.7
Weak	29.0	38.0	4.1	27.1
None/Don't know	29.0	38.0	2.3	17.4
B. Personal rights				
Strong, anti- censorship	38.0	31.4	8.2	35.3
Strong, not anti- censorship	25.0	42.1	4.0	29.2
Weak	32.7	36.0	4.0	21.6
None/Don't know	32.7	36.0	4.0	21.6
C. Economic rights				
Strong	29.8	41.9	3.4	25.9
Weak	29.8	31.1	6.2	25.9
None/Don't know	29.8	31.1	14.7	25.9

<sup>a</sup>Table reports expected probabilities (in percentages) calculated from multivariate statistical models controlling for age, education, gender, place of residence, and family income.

40 percent are for punishing perpetrators of rights violations in Chechnya (versus 27 percent among weak supporters and in the sample overall).

Weak supporters of civil liberties do not differ with respect to support for a ceasefire from non-supporters and those with no opinion. They are only slightly, though significantly in statistical terms, more likely to call for an end to *zachistki*. The largest difference between weak supporters and non-supporters is in regard to punishing rights violators. But in every case, the differences between strong and weak supporters are considerably more pronounced than the differences between weak supporters and non-sup-

<sup>18</sup>This type of statement assumes that abstract views on human rights are, in some sense, causally prior to policy preferences in Chechnya, rather than reciprocally related. We stress that we do not necessarily ascribe to this view, which cannot be verified with the data we have available. Our purpose in making a statement like this is to provide a more intuitive interpretation of the strength of the associations between abstract views and policy preferences according to our multivariate results.

porters. This finding is important to note, because it shows that only *strong* supporters of civil liberties—who, by our estimate, constitute only 12 percent of the adult population in Russia—can truly be counted as relatively consistent advocates of civil liberties. *Weak* supporters of civil liberties—who constitute 66 percent overall—barely differ from non-supporters in terms of their policy preferences. Thus, the most relevant figure for assessing the overall degree of support for civil liberties in Russia is the 12 percent of strong supporters, not the 77 percent of strong and weak supporters combined—which would be the equivalent of those who say that civil liberties are “important” rather than “not important” (Colton and McFaul, 2002). This analysis shows why claims of widespread support for civil liberties based on blunt measures of support in the abstract (Colton and McFaul, 2001, 2002) may not be reliable. Weak supporters may say that a particular right is “important” rather than “unimportant,” but they will not necessarily apply this view to concrete issues involving rights.

Turning now to personal rights, we encounter an additional complication. When we first performed the analysis, we were surprised to find that strong supporters of personal rights were *less* likely than others to support a ceasefire. As we thought about why this might be, it occurred to us that official accounts of the war, which portray Chechens as terrorists and bandits and suppress most reporting on abuses by Russian troops, create the impression that only the Chechen side is guilty of violating rights of the person. If one believes this to be so, then one might see military defeat of the rebels as the best way to protect rights of the person. But presumably strong supporters of personal rights who view the official account of the war with skepticism would be more likely to advocate a cessation of military action.

We tested this proposition by dividing strong supporters of personal rights into two subgroups: strong supporters who say they think the government exerts too much control over media reports from Chechnya and strong supporters who do not think the government exerts too much control.<sup>19</sup> By our reasoning, the former group should be more likely to favor a ceasefire in Chechnya, the latter more supportive of a military solution. We therefore replaced the single dummy variable for strong support (for personal rights) with the dummy variables corresponding to the two subgroups.

Our prediction is borne out by the results (Table 3, Panel B). Those strong supporters who evince skepticism about the official account of the war by the media (as shown by their objection to state controls of reports from Chechnya) are substantially more likely to support a ceasefire, oppose intensification of military action, and advocate punishing the perpetrators of human rights abuses. They are also more likely to support ending

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<sup>19</sup>As noted above, only 17.2 percent of the total sample said that the government controls media reports from Chechnya too strictly. Among strong supporters of personal rights, the figure is about the same: 18.8 percent.

*zachistki*. Strong supporters of personal rights who trust the government's account of the war are even more opposed to a ceasefire and more supportive of increased military action than weak supporters and non-supporters of personal rights; at the same time they are still more likely to support punishing Russian military personnel who abuse human rights. These findings suggest the important role that government control over information about the conflict in Chechnya plays in shaping public opinion about the war. We explore this further below. We also note that there are no differences in the policy preferences of weak supporters and non-supporters of personal rights. To reiterate, weak support is just that: weak.

Strong support for economic rights has no association with support for a ceasefire, but is associated with *increased* support for intensifying military action, and *decreased* support for ending *zachistki*. The few Russians who support economic rights only weakly or not at all are substantially more likely to advocate putting an end to *zachistki*. Indeed, to the extent that views on economic issues are linked to views on Chechnya, the nature of the associations confirms the view that support for economic rights undermines support for civil liberties and rights of the person.<sup>20</sup>

Altogether, our evidence shows that the link between abstract views on human rights and concrete policy preferences regarding Chechnya—including preferences on issues dealing specifically with abuses by Russian troops—is weak. Strong support for civil liberties is associated with moderately higher support for a ceasefire, for ending *zachistki*, and for bringing rights violators in the Russian military to justice. But in absolute terms, it is hard to make the case that strong supporters of civil liberties consistently apply their convictions to Chechnya: most strong supporters do not support a ceasefire, do not want the *zachistki* to end, and do not say perpetrators of rights abuses should be punished. Strong supporters of civil liberties are no less likely than weak supporters and non-supporters to advocate increased military action in Chechnya. As for strong supporters of personal rights, only those among them who question (according to our measure) the government's account of the war show markedly higher than average support for a ceasefire and opposition to intensification of military action. But if the link between strong support for human rights in the abstract and policy preferences in Chechnya is a faint one, there appears to be virtually no link at all between weak support for rights and policy preferences. If, in the manner of other studies, we failed to distinguish between strong and weak support for a dimension of rights and only asked whether they are "important" versus "not important," we would greatly overstate the true level of support.

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<sup>20</sup>Of course, economic rights are also routinely violated in Chechnya—and elsewhere in Russia—but the rampant use of violence against civilians and the extreme violations of civil liberties have received more consistent attention from human rights groups and critical journalists.

## Policy Preferences, Frames, and Troop Losses

In our view, the weak link between abstract views on human rights and policy preferences for Chechnya stems—at least in large part—from the Putin administration’s ability to control the information about the war that reaches the Russian public. In the absence of critical, independent media, Russians are not presented with any alternatives to the official account of the war as a justifiable struggle against terrorists and bandits. Therefore, they do not hear accounts of the war that focus on human rights violations by Russian troops.

Our explanation assumes that the way the war is framed in the minds of Russian citizens affects their policy preferences. To see if this is indeed the case—and to see if anxiety over the loss of Russian soldiers translates into a particular policy orientation—we ran the same logistic regressions as in Table 3 with the same set of control variables. This time, we included (in place of the measures of views on rights in the abstract) measures of the importance of the frames described in Table 2 and a dummy variable indicating concern over the loss of Russian troops.<sup>21</sup>

Frames clearly shape Russians’ policy preferences regarding the war (Table 4). The greater the influence of the “human rights frame” on respondents’ assessments of Chechnya, the more likely they are to support a ceasefire, an end to *zachistki*, and punishment of human rights violators, and the less likely they are to advocate intensifying military action. The opposite pattern obtains—with greater differences—for the “national security frame.” The effects of the “economic cost frame” are generally weaker and, not surprisingly, pertain only to whether the present level of military activity should be maintained: those who see the war in terms of its economic cost are somewhat more likely to back a ceasefire and less likely to back an intensification of hostilities. Alarm over the loss of Russian troops is associated with increased support for a ceasefire.

## Explaining the Weak Link: The Impact of Media Control

Our findings confirm that the way Russians think and feel about the war is connected to their specific policy preferences. The government implicitly recognizes this, and therefore has actively sought to frame the war as a matter of national security and to limit public awareness about casualty rates, human rights abuses, and the war’s economic costs. Opponents of the war face a difficult task because of the government’s overwhelming control over the media. In our view, the government has wielded

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<sup>21</sup>For each frame, we conducted an additive scale by assigning interval values to the ordinal categories and taking the mean of the items corresponding to that frame (see Table 2). For Table 4, “fairly important” denotes a choice of “fairly important” on all the items that constitute a particular frame, “Don’t know” implies a “hard to say” response on all of the items, and “Not very important” implies that response on all the items.

**Table 4.** Chechnya Policy Preferences by Frames and Alarm Over Losses (in percent)<sup>a</sup>

	Implement a ceasefire	Intensify military action	End <i>zachistki</i>	Investigate violations and punish perpetrators
A. Human rights frame				
Fairly important	33.3	32.4	5.5	35.3
Don't know	27.9	38.9	2.9	23.5
Not very important	23.0	45.9	1.5	14.7
B. National security frame				
Fairly important	32.4	33.2	4.4	26.8
Don't know	48.3	18.6	14.1	31.5
Not very important	64.6	9.5	36.7	36.7
C. Economic cost frame				
Fairly important	28.2	37.9	3.3	25.7
Don't know	22.4	41.0	3.3	25.7
Not very important	17.5	44.1	3.3	25.7
D. Alarm over loss of troops				
Feel alarm about troop losses	30.8	37.5	2.9	25.7
Don't feel alarm about troop losses	25.1	37.5	4.5	25.7

<sup>a</sup>Table reports expected probabilities (in percentages) calculated from multivariate statistical models controlling for age, education, gender, place of residence, and family income.

this control effectively enough to substantially weaken the link between support for human rights and policy preferences in Chechnya.

While readers in the United States and Europe have lots of information regarding abuse and atrocities committed in Chechnya by Russian federal authorities, Russians do not. This is no accident. The Putin administration has implemented a cohesive strategy explicitly designed to prevent information that might undermine its policies from reaching the Russian public. Specifically, the authorities established the PR center, *Rosinformatsentr*, to shape stories about the war. They punished journalists who departed from the sanctioned line, such as Andrey Babitskiy and Anna Politkovskaya. The Minister of Press, Mikhail Lesin, who had ties to *Rosinformatsentr*, worked

with Putin allies inside the Duma to amend laws that made it more difficult to report on the war. Federal authorities carried out several dedicated campaigns, harassing and even taking over media outlets that published critical information about the war. Other news outlets, which also had borrowed money from the state but which toed the line on Chechnya, were left alone, allowing editors and publishers to draw their own conclusions.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast, media coverage of the first war in Chechnya was much more open. Russian journalists were free to roam the front, while Western journalists noted a general absence of policy on war coverage and a penchant of the Russian media to show grisly scenes (Lieven, 1998, pp. 119–21; Gall and de Waal, 1998). Undoubtedly, critical media fueled popular opposition to the war. Although we lack explicit survey data on how centrally human rights concerns figured in that opposition, there is some indirect evidence that such concerns played a role: 77 percent of respondents in a January 1995 survey opposed the bombing of Grozny (Lieven, 1998, p. 196). This level of opposition cannot reasonably be attributed to the risks the bombardment posed to Russian troops, nor to the costs of the ordinance used. A March 1995 survey indicated that over 50 percent of Russians believed that the war harmed Russia's international prestige (Chubukov, 1995).

The lesson of the first war in Chechnya was not lost on the Putin administration: it has clearly attempted to keep Russians in the dark about abuses and failures in the second war by eliminating critical media. Numerous Russian and foreign journalists have spoken about the difficulty of reporting; how Chechnya is treated by editors as if it were a black hole; how one cannot write about what goes on without fear of punishment (Lipman, 2002; Nivat, 2002a). We believe that this absence of reporting is the main factor behind the disconnect between Russians' support for personal rights and their views on Chechnya that we detect in our survey data. In turn, Russians' lack of concern about civil rights enables the Putin regime to crack down on the independent media without suffering a loss of public support: to repeat, only 18 percent of our sample think there is too much control of the media. Over a third think it should be increased.

Another possible explanation for the weak link between strong support for human rights and policy preferences in Chechnya is that Russians simply do not apply the same standards in Chechnya, owing to a general hostility toward Chechens. But in our survey only 15 percent list "anger at the Chechens" as one of the two feelings provoked most often by reports of the war. That does not rule out the possibility that ethnic hostility plays a role, but the "ethnic hostility" explanation does not preclude our own explanation, which focuses on the absence of an independent, critical media. We are skeptical of another possible explanation—that fear of terrorism is what drives indifference to rights violations in Chechnya—

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<sup>22</sup>For further discussion, see Mendelson (2002).

because only 22.4 percent cited fear of terrorism as one of their 5–6 greatest concerns.

## CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Because we found a disjuncture between concern over human rights in the abstract and in specific situations, and because we found little support even in the abstract for a variety of civil liberties, we believe support for human rights is weak in Russia. Demand for the protection of civil liberties is very low. Demand for the protection of personal rights is substantial in the abstract, but minimal in the concrete situation of Chechnya. These findings are discouraging for those who want to see Russia move toward democracy. They show an independent press is indispensable for establishing a society in which the demand for protection of rights is high, the supply of laws protecting rights is high, and the level of abuse is low. Without critical media and the consistent application of laws (which, in turn, requires an independent judiciary), especially within the military justice system, the Russian government has free rein to intimidate its critics—real and perceived—in the media, NGOs, parties, and religious organizations. Apathy toward abuses of power by Russian authorities is likely to remain high so long as illegal arrests and torture are kept out of the public eye.

Russians' views toward abuses of the rights of civilians in Chechnya are not a perfect barometer for their overall commitment to human rights norms. Under conditions of violent insurgency, people who are normally strong advocates of human rights may believe that the threat to personal or national security justifies strong measures by the state. Examples abound of situations in which publics who generally support human rights appear to tolerate certain violations in the name of struggles against separatist groups such as the IRA in Northern Ireland, the ETA in Spain, and Hamas in Israel. Closer to home, heightened concerns over the possibility of terrorist attacks after September 11, 2001 may well have increased the American public's tolerance for various restrictions on the rights of both citizens and non-citizens.

Nonetheless, we believe that how Russians think about the violations of the personal rights and civil liberties of Chechen civilians, who are citizens of Russia, does tell us something important about their level of commitment to these two dimensions of human rights. International humanitarian law expressly addresses the conduct of troops in internal conflicts. Therefore human rights norms clearly should apply to military conflicts like the war in Chechnya that occur within a country.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, in several respects Chechnya is not analogous to the other conflicts men-

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<sup>23</sup>For a discussion on how international law applies to Chechnya see Evangelista (forthcoming). For a general discussion on the Geneva conventions and protocols that cover internal conflict see Roberts and Guelff (2000).

tioned.<sup>24</sup> Despite the Putin administration's attempts to play the "terrorism card," our data show Russians in 2001 were not especially fearful of terrorism. Evidence connecting Chechens to the apartment bombings in 1999 has not been publicly produced. In contrast, insurgent groups in the other countries mentioned all have taken public credit for numerous violent actions that indeed have violated the personal security of innocent civilians. Finally, our analysis suggests that, at the individual level, views on both rights of the person and on civil liberties are correlated—though weakly—with policy preferences with respect to Chechnya. Ideally, we would have survey data from other countries experiencing insurgencies that would permit a direct comparison with Russia of public views on abuses of rights. Also, it would be useful to have data on how Russians view other concrete instances of rights violations. The collection of both types of data should be a priority for future research. In the meantime, however, we maintain that our data on how Russians view the conflict in Chechnya does speak to the question of the priority they place on rights of the person and civil liberties.

Western leaders and publics are well aware of abuses in Chechnya. Consequently, they should avoid the temptation to look the other way in the name of forging an anti-terrorist coalition with Russia. Although it may be awkward to do so, they must acknowledge that Russia's approach to terrorism is starkly inconsistent with how Americans and Europeans have used force and tracked terrorists. As they continue to work with the Russian government on a range of issues, Western governments should dramatically step up their efforts to increase the demand for protection of rights in Russia. There are several ways to do this.

First, international organizations should insist on full investigations of all allegations regarding behavior by Russian authorities that does not comply with rules regulating membership in European organizations to which Russia belongs. It should be done even if the alleged abuses are committed in the name of "fighting terrorism." Our data (see Figure 5) show that Russians may support the involvement of international bodies in investigating abuses. Unfortunately, international support for investigation was undermined at the April 2002 meeting of the UN Commission for Human Rights in Geneva when Chechnya was, at the initiative of the Russian Federation, removed from the list of special priorities that the Commission considers each year. If anything, the need for independent international and national investigations is increasingly urgent, as the number of *zachistki* has grown. The Council of Europe should pursue its

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<sup>24</sup>Nor is the Vietnam war—another comparison case that several colleagues have suggested to us—analogue to the Chechen conflict. The Vietnam war was fought far from American soil, and Vietnamese were not citizens of the United States. In any case, the Vietnam war did provoke enormous opposition in the United States. Although not all this opposition was rooted in concerns over violations of the human rights of Vietnamese by American troops, certainly it played some role, as did sustained media criticism of the conduct of U.S. troops in Vietnam (see FitzGerald, 1972).

mission of monitoring compliance with rights much more aggressively and publicly than it has to date. Its current efforts are superficial and have no impact. Demands by watchdog organizations for the protection of the rights of member states and their citizens can only be positive for Russia. These demands should be explicitly backed in statements by government leaders.

Second, the United States and Europe can help increase the demand for the protection of human rights inside Russia by tripling their budgets for democracy assistance. This assistance should, in fact, be seen as a part of the counter-terrorism strategy; after all, the fight against terrorism is a fight for transparent, open societies.

Third, and more specifically, the issues of human rights and democracy in Russia (and elsewhere) need to have better platforms in the West. Donors that support human rights in Russia should regularly host human rights and democratic activists in major European and North American capitals and thereby raise the profile of these issues.

Finally, while the demand for protection of rights must come mainly from inside Russia, Western donors can help local organizations develop strategies that circumvent the restricted media market in Russia. Without this assistance, Russian NGOs that Western donors have long worked with have tended to speak only to each other. As national elections approach in 2003, it is crucially important that Russian NGOs act now to design strategies for speaking to the Russian public that circumvent as much as possible government control of the media. They need to find ways to get information into the public domain that will increase the demand for protection of rights. They have material to work with: Russians are concerned about casualty rates in Chechnya and about torture and arbitrary arrest. NGOs in Russia must raise awareness of those issues. There are large numbers of Russians who express no opinion on a variety of important issues related to Chechnya and whose opinion perhaps could be shaped with more information. Moreover, political parties favoring military reform might use these data to raise the profile of this issue with the public. Public awareness campaigns have been mounted in places with restricted access to the media, such as in Serbia, and have had direct impact on the political process. Russian activists have much to learn from activists in Central Europe. Western donors can help bring these activists together.

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