

# RECONSTRUCTING THE STATE

*Personal Networks and Elite  
Identity in Soviet Russia*

GERALD M. EASTER

*Boston College*



PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK <http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk>

40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA <http://www.cup.org>

10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

© Gerald Malcolm Easter 2000

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without  
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2000

Printed in the United States of America

*Typeface* Garamond # 3 11/13 pt. *System* DeskTopPro<sub>UX</sub>® [BV]

*A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data*

Easter, Gerald, 1959–

Reconstructing the State : Personal Networks and Elite Identity in Soviet Russia /  
Gerald Easter.

p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in comparative politics)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-521-66085-8

1. Soviet Union – Politics and government. 2. Elite (Social sciences) – Soviet Union. 3. Policy networks – Soviet Union.  
4. Central–local government relations – Soviet Union. I. Title.  
II. Series.

JN6531.E27 1999

320.8'0947'0904 – dc21

98-53579

CIP

ISBN 0 521 66085 8 hardback

# CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page xi</i>
1 Introduction: Explaining State-Building Outcomes and the Soviet Russian Case	1
<b>Part I Structure and Identity in the Postrevolutionary State Elite</b>	
2 Anatomy of a Regional Elite: The Rise of the Provincial Komitetchiki	25
3 Constructing an Elite Identity: Images of Self, Service, and State	47
<b>Part II Informal Sources of Power in the Postrevolutionary State</b>	
4 Extending the Reach of the State: Personal Networks and Territorial Administration	67
5 The Constraints of Power: Personal Networks and Central Rulership	89
<b>Part III Intrastate Conflict and the Constraints of Power Redefined</b>	
6 Center and Regions in Conflict I: Collectivization and the Crisis of Regional Leadership	109

7	Center and Regions in Conflict II: The Fall of the Provincial Komitetchiki	133
8	Conclusion: State Building and the Soviet Russian Case Reconsidered	161
	<i>Notes</i>	175
	<i>Bibliography</i>	205
	<i>Index</i>	217

## INTRODUCTION: EXPLAINING STATE-BUILDING OUTCOMES AND THE SOVIET RUSSIAN CASE

Throughout the twentieth century, the Soviet Russian state was most often depicted in the West as a modern Leviathan: omnipotent, imposing, and menacing. Yet by the end of the century, this once most feared member of the world community of states had ceased to exist. In its final months, the internal weaknesses of the Soviet Russian state were exposed in a succession of dramatic events: the unraveling of the communist bloc in Eastern Europe, the inept displays of force in the non-Russian national republics, and, finally, the botched palace coup in the capital. In the end, the Soviet Russian state proved incapable of averting its own territorial demise and quietly passed into history with the stroke of a pen.

Among Western scholars, the Soviet Russian state, if not the Leviathan, was certainly assumed to possess sufficient strength to endure well into the twenty-first century. For comparative theorists, Soviet Russia had long stood as a paradigm of successful state building. Leading theorists from both the modernizationist and the statist approaches would concur that, while the means employed were undeniably harsh, the end product was a state that had effectively realized its capacity to rule. Russian area specialists, meanwhile, reinforced this image through their many accounts of the seemingly boundless capabilities of the state to employ coercion, to mobilize resources, and to recast society. The major debates among area specialists were not over strength and weakness, but over the sources of strength. One side in these debates located state strength above in the formal organs of coercion and bureaucratic control; in contrast, another side located state strength below in strategic bases of popular and elite support. For all their

many disagreements, before 1989 few area specialists on either side seriously doubted the long-term survival of the state.

Thus, the sudden and unexpected collapse of the Soviet Russian state called into question the conceptual premises of state strength, which led to the widespread and ultimately mistaken assumptions about its survival. What were the underlying constraints of power that area specialists as well as comparative theorists neglected to include in their assessments of the Soviet Russian state?

This study seeks to answer this question. It argues that state strength in Soviet Russia was most often conceptualized in terms of formal sources of power, while informal sources were generally overlooked. The study does not contend that formal sources of power – coercive and bureaucratic organs – were insignificant; instead, it asserts that these formal sources were constrained by informal sources of power – personal networks and elite identity. State strength, it is argued, was determined by the constraints of power formed by the intersection of formal and informal power resources.

To demonstrate this assertion, the study directs attention away from the events of state collapse and reexamines the process of state building. The seeds of the demise of the Soviet state, it is argued, can be found in the survival strategies devised by state leaders in the early postrevolutionary period. Strategies that were successful in the short term had the unintended effect of contributing to the undoing of the state in the long term.

The study departs from standard treatments of Soviet state building in that the empirical focus is on an elite cohort, rather than central leaders or organizations. In particular, it charts the rise and fall of the new state's first generation of regional leaders. In so doing, it breaks new ground as the first Western study to focus systematically on these particular actors, who played the leading role in extending the administrative and extractive capacities of the new state to the vast rural and non-Russian periphery. The case study shows how personal network ties and elite identity among the members of this cohort served as informal power resources, which in turn had a defining influence on the process of postrevolutionary state building.

The case study is organized into three parts, which address three inter-related sets of questions concerning state building and state strength in Soviet Russia. First, who built the Soviet Russian state? How did they come to hold positions of power in the new state? What was the basis of their claim on elite status? How did they envision their role in the new state? Second, how did the intersection of informal and formal sources of power affect the development of state strength? In what ways was state

strength enhanced? In what ways was it subverted? Third, how did the resulting constraints on power shape intrastate conflicts in the new state? Was it possible to redefine the existing constraints of power? If so, by what means? And how did the constraints of power influence the type of political regime that emerged in the new state?

The answers to these empirical questions provide an explanation to the larger theoretical puzzle about the underlying constraints on the state. The study asserts that it was the tendency to conceptualize power in its formal manifestations that led so many area specialists and comparative theorists to overestimate the strength of the Soviet state. Neither Soviet state building nor state collapse can be fully explained without understanding the way in which informal sources of power intersected with the formal lines of command in the state. Moreover, the reconceptualization of state strength as a manifestation of the intersection of informal and formal sources of power contributes to the ongoing effort of comparative theorists to explain cross-national variations in state-building outcomes. More specifically, the case study demonstrates the mechanism through which micro-level social structures give shape to macrolevel political institutions.

This chapter introduces the theoretical issues raised in the study, including (1) a review of the comparative state-building literature; (2) a review of the Russian area studies literature; (3) an elaboration of the theoretical framework; and (4) a discussion of the methodology.

## I. STATE BUILDING AND COMPARATIVE THEORY

Two decades ago, comparative theorists refocused their attention on the state.<sup>1</sup> What began as an incipient challenge to the field's "behavioralist" postwar status quo soon became the new mainstream, boasting one of the most substantial bodies of literature ever produced in Western social science. Looking back on these efforts, one can discern three phases in the development of comparative state-building theory, broadly distinguished by the conceptual units of analysis. In the first phase, the advocates for "bringing the state back in" reacted against a perceived neglect by comparative theorists of the causal role of state institutional structures in determining political outcomes.<sup>2</sup> The state in these works was conceptualized as a relatively autonomous actor, based on the extent to which it was able to develop its own discrete interests and to act upon them apart from the interests and actions of societal actors. Thus, a strong state was one that had successfully insulated itself from society.

For many, the “statists” appeared to be staking out a claim in the field by exaggerating and polemicizing their differences with the behavioralists of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, state capacity, even if by another name, had been a central concern of some of the best-known works of this earlier period.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the statist’s initial emphasis on a state-society conceptual dichotomy was targeted by critics for its “superficial” and “misleading appeal.”<sup>5</sup>

Despite these criticisms, comparative research on the state thrived in the 1980s.<sup>6</sup> In the second phase, research efforts produced more nuanced conceptualizations of the state as a causal agent and greater sensitivity to the interactions between state and society. Michael Mann’s influential article distinguishing a state’s “despotic,” or decision-making, powers from its “infrastructural,” or implementation, powers provided much needed clarity to the discussion.<sup>7</sup> From this distinction emerged a focus on state capacities, or capabilities, which offered more concrete subject matter for analysis. Capacities referred to the “infrastructural” powers of the state, that is, the early modern state’s functions of territorial administration, military coercive power, and revenue extraction as well as its later developed interventionary social and economic functions.<sup>8</sup>

Studies of state building sought to determine the extent to which central, or strategic, state actors were able to develop enduring institutional forms through which these functions, or capacities, could be realized.<sup>9</sup> Scholars measured capacity in “high-low” terms. States that developed a high capacity to perform these functions independent of society were labeled “strong” states, while states that maintained a low capacity were labeled “weak” states.<sup>10</sup> It was further discovered that most states, in fact, exhibited simultaneously a high capacity for performing certain functions and a low capacity for performing certain others, which in turn made problematic the application of the “strong” and “weak” concepts.<sup>11</sup>

By the early 1990s, it seemed as if scholarly interest in the state had finally been exhausted. New criticisms arose over the inability to explain cross-national differences in state-building outcomes. Why was it that some state-building efforts succeeded when others failed? Why were some states strong and others weak? Until this time, the tendency among state theorists was to stress Gerschenkronian macrolevel causes to explain state-building outcomes. The structure of the international environment was frequently cited as the determining force shaping state-building processes. Accordingly, the more hostile the international environment appeared to centrally located state actors, the greater the likelihood that measures would be undertaken to construct a strong state, or at least a state with well-developed coercive and extractive capacities.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, and often interre-

lated, strong states, it was argued, were more likely to emerge in societies where macrolevel socioeconomic structures acted as obstacles to industrial development.<sup>13</sup> But even among scholars that were generally sympathetic to the approach, these explanations were not sufficient. Barbara Geddes summed up the prevailing dissatisfaction with the literature at this time when she noted that “the short-coming of these macrolevel explanations is that they describe virtually all developing countries.”<sup>14</sup>

In response to this situation, a third phase in comparative state theory unfolded in which scholars moved away from macrolevel concepts and sought out new areas of analysis. Scholarly interest in state building was given an added boost by world events in the late 1980s and 1990s, as a flood of new cases emerged in the wake of fallen authoritarian and communist regimes.<sup>15</sup> While no scholarly consensus has yet emerged from these more recent efforts, agreement does exist on the need to develop new conceptualizations of the state and state strength as units of comparative analysis. In this search, comparativists have moved in three directions: rational choice, state in society, and neodevelopment.

The “rational choice” approach has attempted to explain variations in state-building outcomes by reconceptualizing the state as a microlevel unit of analysis. The focus of inquiry is on individual leading actors, their preferences, and the structural constraints under which they operate. A major step in this direction was taken by Margaret Levi, who called for “bringing people back into the state,” revenue hungry rulers to be more precise. Beginning with the premise that all state leaders share a preference to maximize income, Levi provided a wide-ranging comparative historical study which explained state-building outcomes as a consequence of the strategies calculated by leaders as the most efficient means of enhancing revenue extraction. The rational choice approach was extended further by Barbara Geddes in a study of radical political and economic reform in Latin America. Geddes posited a conceptualization of the state as a collection of politically self-interested individuals.<sup>17</sup> She argued that all state actors share a preference to advance their political careers. Toward this end, they are confronted by the “politician’s dilemma,” in which policy choices reflect the constraints of career advancement. The politician’s dilemma, thus, explained the seemingly paradoxical situation in which state actors willingly undertake reforms that reduce state powers. By refocusing on leadership preferences and microlevel structural constraints, these works offer one solution to the puzzle of varying state-building outcomes.

Wary of the tendency toward reification in the “state as rational actor” approach, Joel Migdal, Atul Kohli, and Vivienne Shue have pushed the literature in another direction. They argued for a “state in society” ap-

proach in order to “disaggregate” the state as a unit of analysis and to resituate its component parts in concrete social settings.<sup>18</sup> The state in society approach attempts to identify the underlying social foundations of political institutions. To avoid the earlier “behavioralist” assumptions, they stress that state–society influences are interactive, not unidirectional. And to move beyond the existing conceptualizations of the state, they reconceptualize the state as a four-tiered structure, including: central leadership, central administration, regional administration, and field offices. Each tier, they argue, provides its own arena within which power struggles are waged among competing state players as well as between state and nonstate players. Ultimately, the overall “patterns of domination” in the state–societal relationship are shaped by the sum of the outcomes of the power struggles in these multilevel arenas.

In a variation on the state in society approach, Peter Evans has devised the concept of “embedded autonomy” to explain why some developmental states are more successful than others in promoting industrial growth.<sup>19</sup> Evans began by revising the concept of state autonomy from meaning simply the degree of insulation from societal influences to indicating instead the extent of organizational coherence and professional standards within the state bureaucracy. But autonomy alone does not lead to enhanced state capacity. He went on to stress that building state capacity requires that state actors obtain information and secure cooperation from societal actors. For this reason, he argued, capacity is enhanced when an autonomous state becomes embedded in society. Social networks are the means by which this “embedded autonomy” is achieved. People and information pass back and forth between state and society along informal network ties. The concept of embedded autonomy represents not only an advance to the state in society approach, but is likely to be considered one of the more significant contributions to have emerged from comparative state theory.

The rational choice and state in society approaches build upon the existing body of literature on comparative state theory. By contrast, the “neodevelopment” approach rejects this theoretical base. In a counterreaction to the statist, neodevelopment proponents begin with the premise that state institutional forms are shaped by societal influences. They cite the recent wave of democratic transitions as vindication of sorts of earlier political development theory. Robert Jackman has leveled the strongest attack on the conceptual foundations of comparative state theory from a neodevelopment perspective.<sup>20</sup> Jackman argued that the conceptualizations of state capacity in the statist literature are flawed and, as a result, provide a distorted measure of state strength. He argued that a more accurate

measure of state strength was “political capacity,” that is, the ability of a state to achieve its policy goals without resort to coercion or bureaucratic fiat. Political capacity indicates the extent to which state institutions are considered legitimate by society. State strength, thus, should not reflect the extent to which functions, such as revenue extraction are realized, but instead should reflect the compliance strategies employed by state leaders to carry out these functions.

This study contributes to the recent efforts to extend the explanatory reach of the state-building literature. It follows the state in society approach by uncovering the microlevel social structures from which emerge macrolevel political institutions. In so doing, a new explanation is offered for one of the most studied cases of twentieth-century state building: Soviet Russia.

## II. STATE BUILDING AND SOVIET RUSSIA

The Russian revolution was notable for the relative ease by which Vladimir Lenin and his small party of radical socialists, the Bolsheviks, came to power in October 1917. The process of consolidating power in new institutional forms, however, was conflictual and prolonged. State capacities were developed incrementally over a period of two decades. Why the Soviet Russian state developed along the lines that it did remains a disputed question in Western scholarship. This debate, as old as the field itself, has produced an assortment of answers, ranging from the structural to the ideological, from the cultural to the institutional, and from the societal to the individual.

A different question, however, is why were Bolshevik state-building efforts successful? The postrevolutionary regime confronted a formidable array of obstacles. Even Lenin at first expressed doubt that the Bolsheviks could hold power for more than a year. For over two decades, Western scholars displayed a virtual consensus on the question of the success of Soviet state building. They stressed strong leaders, coercion, and, especially, formal organization.<sup>21</sup> According to this view, by the early 1920s, the Communist party provided a tightly organized and centralized formal structure by which the state center developed a capacity to administer Soviet Russia’s vast periphery. On top of this structure sat the party’s general secretary, Iosif Stalin, whose hands were firmly secured to the organizational levers of power. “The tentacles of the Secretariat,” it was said, “reached the smallest territorial units throughout Russia.”<sup>22</sup>

This depiction by area specialists of the means by which a strong state

was built in postrevolutionary Soviet Russia became a paradigmatic case for comparative state theory. The conventional view was that Lenin's Bolsheviks embodied a kind of "organizational weapon" that enabled them to triumph over all manifestations of societal resistance and upon which a single-party state was successfully constructed.<sup>23</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s, when established democracies appeared to be increasingly "ungovernable" and transitions to new democracies were as yet unheard of, the single-party state was depicted by comparative theorists as an institutional expedient for would-be state builders in the postcolonial world.<sup>24</sup> Most attractive about the single-party state was the internal coherence and discipline that was presumed to exist within the organizational framework of a Leninist party. Indeed, some of the most influential studies in comparative politics over the past thirty years borrowed directly from the Soviet studies literature to support the larger claim that formal organizational structure was the key ingredient for successful state-building outcomes.

Samuel Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies* preceded the "return to the state" in comparative politics by a decade, but his focus on "political order" is, in fact, a study of the dilemmas encountered by new postcolonial states seeking to develop their capacities to rule. Huntington held up the Soviet case as a model of effective political institution building for other modernizing countries. Just as French absolutism and British parliamentarism had once provided exemplary institutional forms for the rest of the world, Huntington argued, the Soviet single-party state had become the institutional model for twentieth-century postcolonial states. In particular, he stressed the role played by formal organization to explain Soviet Russia's state-building outcome. "The relative success of communist states in providing political order," he wrote, "in large part derives from the priority they have given to the conscious act of political organization."<sup>25</sup>

More recently, Theda Skocpol's *States and Social Revolutions* has become one of the most prominent studies to come out of the "return to the state" literature. Skocpol may have differed with Huntington on a number of analytical and methodological points, but she treated the Soviet case in similar terms. She presented Soviet Russia as one of the twentieth century's most successful state-building attempts. While Skocpol stressed macrolevel international and socioeconomic structures to explain why a strong state emerged in postrevolutionary Soviet Russia, she adopted the conventional area studies argument that formal organization was the means to that end. She noted that the Communist party "consisted of hierarchically ordered cadres subject to appointment and explicit discipline by the top party leadership, thus allowing much more effective central coordination than

the tsar could achieve.”<sup>26</sup> Both Huntington and Skocpol directly cited the earlier area studies literature to support their depictions of the state-building process in Soviet Russia.<sup>27</sup>

Comparative state theory, however, did not keep pace with Soviet area studies. Over the past decade, new empirical investigations have revealed anything but a tightly organized and centrally coordinated party structure for well over a decade after the civil war.<sup>28</sup> In a comprehensive study of local politics in the 1920s, Roger Pethyridge expressed what is now the prevailing view among area specialists concerning the formal organizational structures of the new state in the periphery: “Chaos reigned. Orders arrived from higher bodies in a raw form, [t]hey were not often understood and so ignored.”<sup>29</sup>

But if functioning centralized organizations were the exception not the norm in the Soviet periphery at this time, then a major question is left unanswered for area specialists as well as comparative theorists. How did this “infrastructurally” weak state carry out a comprehensive, state-directed campaign of radical economic transformation? This campaign incurred mass economic dislocation and social resistance, yet not only did the regime survive, but the foundations and framework were built for what became communism’s command-administrative state. It was exactly in this period, when formal organizations were still weak, that the new state’s capacities for territorial administration and revenue extraction were most significantly enhanced. If the earlier scholarly assumptions about formal organization were in error, then what was the missing piece to the puzzle of Soviet state building?

Among area specialists, this question provoked a debate between adherents to the conventional view, who stressed coercion and organizational forces from above, and a new generation of “revisionists,” who stressed class forces from below.<sup>30</sup> Revisionist empirical investigations exposed the explanatory limits of the once conventional explanation of the means of Soviet state building. But the revisionist emphasis on class forces did not form the basis of a new consensus. Commenting on what had become a theoretical impasse in the field, Mark Von Hagen observed that “the boundaries between state and society are not so neatly fixed. This is true everywhere, but it is perhaps especially clear in the Soviet Union.” He urged scholars instead to explore “a large middle ground of social groups and political formations” that directly shaped the Soviet Russian state-building process.<sup>31</sup>

In its attempt to explain the outcome of the Soviet state-building process, this study follows Von Hagen’s advice. The empirical focus is on the new state’s first generation of regional leaders, who are depicted neither

as agents of the state per se nor of society. Instead, they are cast as an intrastate elite cohort, who engaged in strategies of cooperation and conflict with one another as well as with other intrastate actors. The Soviet state-building process, it is argued, was ultimately shaped by these intralite maneuverings, which at times enhanced and at other times constrained state strength.

### III. EXPLAINING STATE-BUILDING OUTCOMES: THE SOVIET RUSSIAN CASE RECONSTRUCTED

This section outlines the analytical framework and defines the concepts employed in the case study. The study offers a new explanation for Soviet Russia's state-building outcome. It is important to stress that the study does not claim that coercive and bureaucratic forces from above or social forces from below were inconsequential to the state-building process. Rather, it suggests that these elements in and of themselves do not satisfactorily explain the outcome. The study asserts that informal power resources – personal networks and elite identities – constitute the missing element that explains how the “infrastructurally” weak Soviet Russian state was able to develop its capacities for territorial administration and revenue extraction in the decade following the civil war. More specifically, it argues that the structure of network ties, as indicated by the way in which informal and formal power resources intersected, was the mechanism by which state capacities were realized in postrevolutionary Soviet Russia.

When applied to Soviet Russia, the concept of the “state” sometimes causes confusion. Soviet Russia was ruled by two parallel political structures: the Communist party bureaucracy and the governmental ministries. In Soviet parlance, the “state” (*gosudarstvo*) sometimes referred specifically to the governmental ministries, distinct from the party bureaucracy. This narrow definition has also been applied by some Western scholars. This study, however, employs the more generally accepted social science definition of the state. The state refers to the entity that makes a monopolistic claim on rule making for the population of a bounded territory. The state maintains this claim through a complex of administrative, coercive, and extractive arrangements. In this study, the state encompasses both the party bureaucracy and the governmental ministries, though the empirical focus is on regional administration in areas where the party bureaucracy played the dominant role. The study also employs conventional definitions for “state capacity” and “state strength.” The study adopts Migdal's defini-

tion, according to which state capacity refers to the functions that are commonly associated with the modern state, such as territorial administration, coercion, and revenue extraction; and state strength simply refers to the extent to which these functions can be executed at the discretion of central state actors.<sup>32</sup>

The study examines the process of postrevolutionary state building in Soviet Russia through a case study of the center–regional relationship. Sidney Tarrow has distinguished three alternative conceptualizations of “center–regional relations” in Western social science: sociocultural, socio-economic, and political-administrative.<sup>33</sup> This study employs the “political–administrative” concept of center–regional relations. In this regard, the study follows along the path of previous scholars, who have enriched the comparative theoretical literature on state building through empirical investigations of the strategies and struggles of central state actors attempting to develop the capacity of territorial administration.<sup>34</sup>

The case study is organized into three parts, which together provide the evidence to the larger assertions about the dynamics of Soviet state building: (1) identifying the regional leaders and their informal sources of power; (2) uncovering the ways in which state capacity was enhanced as well as constrained by the intersection of informal and formal structures; and (3) explaining how the constraints of power in the center–regional relationship were redefined and, in turn, influenced the state-building outcome.

### *STRUCTURE AND IDENTITY IN THE POSTREVOLUTIONARY STATE*

The study is unique in that it examines the state-building process through a case study of the new state’s first cohort of regional leaders. Despite the prominent role these actors played in the construction of the Soviet Russian state, little is known about them in Western scholarship. The study illuminates an alternative perspective on state building by uncovering the informal power resources of this group and demonstrating how they were employed. In this study, the concept of “informal power resources” refers to the personal network ties and the elite identity of the regional leaders. Personal network ties served as a power resource in that they provided an informal social structure by which information was exchanged, resources were obtained, and collaborative actions were planned. Elite identity served as an informal power resource in that these constructed self-images served as a source of status independent of formal position. Perceptions of status among the regional leaders, in turn, influenced their preferences concerning

the allocation of power and demarcation of political roles in the new state. By contrast, the concept of “formal power resources” refers to the state’s bureaucratic lines of command and the organs of coercion.

Personal networks originated in the prerevolutionary underground, but became better defined and more cohesive in the civil war. The major battle fronts of the civil war gave rise to informal groups of fighter organizers, who used their personal network ties to carry out territorial conquest and political consolidation. When hostilities finally ended, these wartime networks were not dismantled but adapted to the new challenges of post-revolutionary regional administration. During the 1920s, center–regional relations were hampered by poorly developed bureaucratic lines and institutional incoherence. Consequently, the center was reconnected to the regions through personal network ties. In the regions, rival networks competed over access to and control over scarce organizational and material resources distributed by the center. Those networks that were most successful in this competition eventually came to dominate the administrative apparatus in their particular region. In the process, their network rivals in the region were either displaced or subsumed by these dominant networks. The first postrevolutionary cohort of regional leaders were members of such dominant personal networks.

The study argues that personal networks played a significantly larger role in the state-building process than has previously been recognized by Western scholars. Of course, scholars of communist systems have long been aware of the workings of personal networks within established political and institutional settings.<sup>35</sup> The role of personal networks in the actual process of institution building, however, has gone largely unnoticed.<sup>36</sup> In this study, the term “personal network” is similar to Warner and Lunt’s definition of a clique: a nonkinship, informal association, within which exists group feeling and intimacy as well as group norms of behavior.<sup>37</sup> David Knoke has distinguished two types of political personal networks: “influence” networks, in which information is exchanged among relatively equal members, and “domination” networks, in which scarce goods are allocated in unequal relationships. Regional leaders in Soviet Russia belonged to networks that exhibited both types of network ties. They included peer type relationships of comradeship, shaped by shared experiences in the underground and the civil war. Later, as network ties became enmeshed with formal organizations in the new state, they increasingly developed hierarchical type relationships of clientelism, shaped by the new state’s personalized system of reward and advancement.

The second informal power resource of regional leaders was elite identity. The elite identity of the first regional leaders was a constructed image

of the services they rendered to the party in its march to power. In particular, regional leaders stressed their service in the prerevolutionary underground and the civil war, portraying themselves as an elite corps of fighter organizers. Participation in these events became a source of elite status in the new Bolshevik regime for the regional leaders as well as other elite members. At this time, the old regime's sources of elite status – noble inheritance, wealth, official rank – were discredited. Since bureaucratic lines of command were not yet clearly established, elite status could not simply be an extension of formal position.

Weber described a status group as a plurality of persons, who within a larger group successfully claim a special social esteem through the appropriation of privileges and power.<sup>39</sup> The participants in these founding events distinguished themselves from other elite subgroups in the new state: the *intelligent* who fled abroad after 1905, rather than continue to serve in the underground; the post-civil war party recruits, who were either too young or too late to participate in the battles of the civil war; and, the former tsarist civil servants, who despite their technical-administrative expertise were tainted by their previous political affiliations. The regional leaders believed that they had earned elite status on the basis of their past services to the party. This perception was formally reinforced by the celebratory and heroic images of these events projected by early party historians, the official mythmakers of the new state. This status image, in addition, was informally reinforced through personal network ties.

But regional leaders were not content with simply the image of elite status. They sought to consolidate their elite status through the formal trappings of state power. Regional leaders contended that the allocation of power and definition of roles in the new state should reflect their elite status. Most significantly, they attempted to secure a proprietary claim on the formal position of regional governor. It is further noteworthy that this particular source of elite status – service records – was conferred independent of the actions or opinions of central state leaders.

### *INFORMAL SOURCES OF POWER IN THE POSTREVOLUTIONARY STATE*

The study argues that the structure of network ties provided a microlevel mechanism that directly influenced the macrolevel administrative capacities of the new Soviet state. Informal personal network ties intersected with the formal bureaucratic lines of command in the new state. As a result of this intersection of informal and formal structures, state strength was both enhanced and constrained. This statement is not a contradiction,

if Mann's conceptual distinction between "infrastructural" and "despotic" state powers is taken into consideration.<sup>40</sup>

The infrastructural powers of the state refer to the capacity to implement policy. State strength in this context is indicated by the extent to which state policies are fulfilled. If a state is routinely capable of administering its territory, extracting resources and employing coercion, then it is considered to be an "infrastructurally" strong state. But all states do not employ the same means to realize their capacities of rule.<sup>41</sup> The varying means by which policies are fulfilled signify the character of a state's infrastructural powers. In a rich comparative study of early modern state building, Thomas Ertman identified two infrastructural types: "bureaucratic" and "patrimonial."<sup>42</sup> A bureaucratic infrastructure resembles a Weberian rational-legal arrangement, distinguished by "a set of standard operating procedures subject to the strictures of a formalized, impersonal administrative law." In this system, the agents of the state are selected on the basis of expertise, and mechanisms exist for their routine removal from office. By contrast, a patrimonial infrastructure refers to a personalistic arrangement, distinguished by the appropriation of state resources by those entrusted with their use. In this system, the agents of the state are selected on the basis of patronage, and mechanisms exist to assure their proprietary claim on office.

In postrevolutionary Soviet Russia, the organizational, financial, and human resources necessary to construct a "bureaucratic" state infrastructure were sorely lacking. In their absence, the new state's capacity for territorial administration was realized through a "patrimonial" infrastructure. More specifically, personal network ties became the means by which the state center was reconnected to the regions. Regionally based personal networks provided an informal social structure along which information was exchanged, resources were allocated and activities were coordinated.

The widespread existence of personal networks in the regions, however, did not in itself ensure the development of a capacity for territorial administration. The study contends that the structure of network ties – the way in which informal network ties intersected with formal bureaucratic lines – influenced state capacity.<sup>43</sup> Two structural features of network ties are especially significant in this regard: the reach of network ties and the location of core network members. First, are network ties limited in reach, mainly concentrated in a host region, or do they extend across the physical or institutional boundaries of the host region? Second, are core network members confined to a host region, or have they relocated to the state center or another strategic position outside the host region? The structure of network ties is outward if they exhibit cross-regional reach and core

network members relocate to the center. The structure of network ties is inward if they exhibit a limited reach and core network members remain within a host region. Outwardly structured network ties provide an informal mechanism by which a state's capacity for territorial administration may be enhanced. By contrast, inwardly structured network ties diminish a state's capacity for territorial administration.

In postrevolutionary Soviet Russia, the inward structure of network ties at first hindered the development of a capacity for territorial administration. In the course of the 1920s, however, this situation was reversed and an outward structure was established: network ties displayed a cross-regional reach and core network members relocated to the center. Network ties provided an informal social structure along which information was exchanged, resources were allocated and activities were coordinated. By such means, the administrative reach of the new Soviet state was extended across its rural and multiethnic periphery. And, the infrastructural power of the Soviet Russian state was strengthened. But the character of infrastructural power in the new state was patrimonial, not bureaucratic, which in turn acted as a constraint on the state's despotic powers.

The despotic powers of the state refer to the rule-making process: Who participates in the process? What is the nature of their participation? Who makes rules for whom? What checks exist on those empowered to make rules? The answers to these questions reveal the character of a state's despotic powers, or its regime type. In Soviet Russia, the character of despotic power of course indicated an authoritarian regime type, but which variant of authoritarianism was not determined until the end of the 1930s. At that time, the places of ruler and elite in the state's rule-making process were finally resolved after nearly a decade of conflict.

In Soviet Russia, the extensive use of personal networks to develop the infrastructural powers of the state had the unintended effect of creating constraints on the state's despotic powers. The despotic powers of the state were formally located in the central offices of the party and governmental bureaucracies; more specifically, in the office of the party's general secretary. But in relations with regional leaders, the center's formal powers were distorted by informal power resources. The central location of core network members provided regional leaders with informal access to the rule-making process. The cross-organizational reach of network ties effectively restrained the enforcement and checking mechanisms of the state center. Moreover, the center was dependent on the regional leaders and their personal network ties to administer the periphery. Finally, the identity of the regional leaders as an elite status group reinforced their belief that they should be included in the rule-making process.

The intersection of informal and formal structures created an underlying constraint on despotic power, defining the parameters of interaction between central and regional actors. In this regard, the constraints of power can be regarded as a kind of institutional arrangement within the new state.<sup>44</sup> But central state leaders were not content with this arrangement. They strove to redefine the constraints of power in such a way that they could more fully realize their claim on the state's despotic powers, which soon provoked intrastate conflict.

### *INTRASTATE CONFLICT AND THE CONSTRAINTS OF POWER REDEFINED*

The constraints of power in the new state were exposed during the 1930s, when central and regional actors clashed over the implementation of agricultural collectivization. If only formal power resources had been operative at the time, central leaders would not have had to engage the regional leaders in this protracted conflict. But in the first half of the decade, the informal power resources of the regional leaders effectively checked the center's formal power resources. At this time, Stalin vented frustration at the constraints on the despotic powers of the state center. Regarding the personal network ties of regional leaders, he complained that "in selecting cadres for their personal devotion, these comrades evidently want to create conditions which make them independent from the center."<sup>45</sup> He also attacked the elite identity of the regional leaders, when he railed against "people who rendered famous services in the past, people who have become grand princes, people who consider that Party decisions and Soviet laws are not written for them, but for idiots."<sup>46</sup>

But the center–regional conflict of the 1930s was more than a dispute about policy implementation. It was a clash over the institutionalization of power and status between ruler and elite in the new state. The resolution of this intrastate conflict had a direct influence on the outcome of Soviet Russia's state-building process. Central and regional actors envisioned alternative regime types for the new state.

In the center, Stalin sought to construct a bureaucratic absolutist state. In this type, the despotic powers of the state would remain personalized and unchecked. The rule-making process would resemble medieval court politics. The ruler's personal discretion would dictate rule-making procedures. Participation in the process and the allocation of power would indicate who was in favor in Stalin's court. But to realize such a system of despotic power, it was deemed necessary to transform the character of infrastructural power from patrimonial to bureaucratic. The system of

administration would be depersonalized, rationalized, and checked. For the agents of state administration, power and status would be allocated strictly in accordance with the formal bureaucratic lines of command.

By contrast, regional leaders sought to construct a protocorporatist regime type. In this type, the overriding concern of regional leaders was to eliminate the arbitrariness of despotic power. The rule-making process would be rationalized and checked. Regional leaders wanted to be included in the state's rule-making process, especially in matters directly relating to their areas of responsibility. In this way, despotic power would be formally shared by the elite, or corporate, bodies within the state. By creating procedural checks on despotic power, the regional leaders hoped to consolidate the patrimonial system of infrastructural power. They asserted a proprietary claim on their formal position as regional governors as well as a patronage claim on other strategic state offices within their jurisdiction. They wanted discretionary power over their internal affairs, including the distribution of organizational and financial resources. They wanted the means of state administration to remain personalized in order to ensure the survival of their political machines.

In the early 1930s, the underlying constraints of power defined the parameters of interaction between center and regional leaders. Neither side at this time was able to realize its preferred regime type. In mid-decade, however, both central and regional leaders made attempts to move outside the existing constraints to achieve their ends. In these efforts, regional leaders failed, while central leaders were ultimately successful. By the late 1930s, the constraints of power were redefined so that the formal bureaucratic and coercive powers of the center could be employed routinely in their conflict with the regions. As a consequence, a regime type emerged that more closely resembled Stalin's vision of a bureaucratic absolutist state than the regional elite's protocorporatist state.

#### IV. ABOUT THE CASE STUDY

The case study focuses on the first generation of regional leaders in the postrevolutionary Soviet state. They are referred to collectively in this study as the *Provincial Komitetchiki*. The Provincial Komitetchiki oversaw the major agricultural and grain-producing regions from the second half of the 1920s until the second half of the 1930s. During this time, they were charged with the task of developing the state capacity for territorial administration across the rural and non-Russian periphery. They led the campaigns to collectivize agriculture, thereby providing the state with the

means for direct revenue extraction from the countryside. But their reign as regional leaders proved shortlived. In the 1930s, the Provincial *Komitetchiki* found themselves embroiled in a conflict with central leaders, which by the end of the decade led to their political and physical demise.

In early Western writings, the Provincial *Komitetchiki* were most often depicted as Stalin's henchmen or unwitting pawns.<sup>47</sup> Over the past twenty years, this view has been displaced by one that to a greater extent recognizes the autonomy of regional leaders in relations with the general secretary.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, some scholars now maintain that it was the Provincial *Komitetchiki* who drove Stalin to adopt a radical policy course in the early 1930s.<sup>49</sup> Despite a growing recognition of their importance, the Provincial *Komitetchiki* have never been the subject of a focused investigation and have remained an obscure group in Western historiography.

In Soviet historiography, the Provincial *Komitetchiki* were virtually erased from the pages of party history in the second half of Stalin's reign. They were officially rehabilitated during the revision of party history in the early 1960s.<sup>50</sup> For more than twenty years, the Provincial *Komitetchiki* were cast as state heroes and the victims of Stalin's machinations. Known as the "Leninist Old Guard," their rehabilitation had been motivated by Nikita Khrushchev's effort to confine the blame for the violent excesses of the 1930s on Stalin and a circle of his closest collaborators without impugning the integrity of the command-administrative state. The current wave of historical revision in post-Soviet Russia is again reassessing the role of the Provincial *Komitetchiki*. These recent depictions present a more critical view of the Provincial *Komitetchiki*, which at times resembles the earlier Western treatments.<sup>51</sup>

This case study is the first systematic investigation of the Provincial *Komitetchiki* in Western scholarship. It rejects both the once pervasive Western caricature of the Provincial *Komitetchiki* as henchmen, the more recent caricature as instigators, and the long-held Soviet caricature as heroes. Instead, the study builds on an observation made by Stephen Cohen over twenty years ago: "As administrators and politicians, they were most often associated with the general secretary. Most of them, however, were not his mindless political creatures, but independent-minded leaders in their own right."<sup>52</sup>

The term "Provincial *Komitetchiki*" was not used by these actors to refer to themselves. It has been coined here since it incorporates two salient traits about the cohort. First, its members, prior to joining the party, during the underground years, in the civil war and in state service, remained provincial actors. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, they emerged as a subgroup within the new state elite, located at the upper stratum of

regional administration. At this time, they served as the intermediary link between the state center and the rural provinces. Second, this cohort emerged from a much larger prerevolutionary group of underground committee workers, or *komitetchiki*. The social and political experiences of the *komitetchiki* were distinct from the older founding generation of party workers as well as the younger postrevolutionary generation. This distinction became an enduring feature of the identity of the members of this cohort.

Most of the Provincial *Komitetchiki* remained party committee workers throughout their careers. In their tenure as regional leaders, they occupied the formal position of first secretary of the regional party committees. This study, however, stresses two informal features of the Provincial *Komitetchiki*: personal network ties and elite identity. In their rise to power and in their subsequent conflict with central state actors, personal network ties and elite identity provided the informal power resources of the Provincial *Komitetchiki*.

The study attempts to uncover the personal network ties and to specify their modes of influence in order to provide a new perspective on the state-building process in postrevolutionary Soviet Russia. Network analysis helps to identify the microlevel social relations that exist within a macrolevel social or institutional complex. According to Barry Wellman and S. D. Berkowitz, “network analysis is neither a method nor a metaphor, but a fundamental intellectual tool for the study of social structures.”<sup>53</sup> Network analysis has grown over the past three decades in Western social science. First elaborated by British anthropologists in the 1950s and 1960s, it challenged existing theories of “mass society” by studying the sociological effects of urban in-migration.<sup>54</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, network analysis gained prominence among American sociologists who used new quantitative techniques to reveal the underlying social ties beneath the “hidden hand” in a variety of economic markets.<sup>55</sup> In political science, network analysis has been employed with success to describe community-level power structures<sup>56</sup> and to explain policy-making processes.<sup>57</sup> These studies, however, tend to focus on network ties in established institutional settings; it is far less common to see network analysis used to study processes of political institution building.

A standard form of network analysis is utilized in the case study to distinguish several of the personal networks that existed within Soviet Russia’s postrevolutionary state elite. The study attempts to uncover the network ties of the Provincial *Komitetchiki*. Network ties are determined by two criteria: (1) evidence of a working relationship (one or more years) in at least one of three milieux (prerevolutionary underground, civil war,

postwar regional administration); and/or (2) evidence of friendship or family relationship.<sup>58</sup> Relational data on the Provincial *Komitetchiki* are drawn from the following source materials: personal correspondences, autobiographical statements, official personnel files, published memoirs, secondary biographies, and histories.<sup>59</sup> The study also employs the concept of core network members to describe those individuals with the greatest number of direct ties among the entire membership.<sup>60</sup> Core network members are crucial figures, playing the role of intermediary between the central and regional leaders.

The study also attempts to reconstruct the elite identity of the Provincial *Komitetchiki*. In this effort, the study relies to a large extent on autobiographical materials (personal memoirs and personal questionnaires) submitted by the Provincial *Komitetchiki* to the Society of Old Bolsheviks. These materials were solicited by the Society when considering an applicant for membership. The Society of Old Bolsheviks served as a kind of fraternity for the prerevolutionary veterans of the party. Membership, more than anything else, conferred status. The society's membership, at first, was small and exclusive, encompassing mainly the pre-1905 intellectuals. Most of the Provincial *Komitetchiki* did not join the Society until the late 1920s and early 1930s. For the Provincial *Komitetchiki*, membership in the Society of Old Bolsheviks was a form of validation of their services rendered to the party and their perceived elite status.

These autobiographical materials have not been used previously in scholarly analysis of the postrevolutionary state elite. They have only recently been made available to Western scholars through the opening of the long closed Communist party archives.<sup>61</sup> These source materials are not used in the case study to reproduce a "realistic" depiction of the life experiences of the Provincial *Komitetchiki*. Rather, they represent a constructed image of an ideal type of party worker. For this reason, it is more accurate to describe the self-image projected in these autobiographies as an "elite" identity, instead of a social identity. The autobiographies emphasize politically desirable personal qualities, social backgrounds and service attributes, which were surely tailored to accommodate an officially sanctioned model. But it was precisely the ability of the Provincial *Komitetchiki* to conform to such a model that supported their claim on elite status in the new state. For this reason, the collective portrait of the Provincial *Komitetchiki* assembled from these materials provides an illuminating glimpse into the value culture of the postrevolutionary state elite.

The case study that follows is organized into three analytically separate parts. Part I includes two chapters, which focus on the postrevolutionary elite. Chapter 2 sketches a collective biographical portrait of the Provincial