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Bureaucratic reform and Russian transition: the puzzles of policy-making process

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ABSTRACT During the two decades of post-Soviet transition, Russia has created a complex system of civil service and public administration. This system was first reformed in the early 1990s and then again in the early 2000s. The analysis presented here fills a gap in the existing literature concerning the dynamic of change associated with Russian civil service reform (CSR). It is argued that the process of bureaucratic modernization in Russia is undermined by the ambivalent nature of policy leadership with its financial, administrative, and technical support, and the ongoing bargain among policy advocates and policy implementers. In order to account for the outcomes reached by policy-makers, the paper presents a detailed analysis of expert interviews collected by the author among research community specialists, federal legislators, and other participants in the reform. The discussion highlights the importance of power dynamics, which resolves conflicting views of CSR among policy formulators and policy implementers. The findings, which consist of identifying necessary and sufficient conditions of the change process, have implications for studies of modern Russian politics, states in regime transition, and world-wide modernization.

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Introduction

Bureaucratic modernization is a difficult concept to grasp. The reason for this is that bureaucracy, on its own, is a sign of modernization, which in turn is a result of the gradual differentiation and specialization of functions that make democracy possible (Przeworski and Limongi, 1997, p. 154).

In Russia, the idea of bureaucratic modernization (the improvement of civil service institutions) has been popular for a long time. However, shaping public policy is a complex and multidimensional process that involves the dynamic interaction between the context in which policy operates and various stakeholders (individuals and interest groups) who are promoting their own vision of a government's agenda. Groups and individuals involved in policy-making often mobilize their resources to affect laws, regulations, and funding priorities through education, mass media, lobbying, and other methods. Needless to say, clandestine actors threaten to interfere in policy implementation efforts, thus undermining the capacity of the state to enforce changes.

The earliest project in Russian bureaucratic reform (the process of civil service organizational restructuring) was launched during the collapse of Communism (1989–1991). Since then, there have been a number of incomplete efforts made by the Russian government to modernize Russian bureaucracy (Huskey 1990, 1999; Brym and Gimpelson 2004). The first wave started during the early years of *Perestroika* (economic reform in the late 1980s), and it coincided with the collapse of the Communist system. This stage included the creation of the new Russian Constitution in 1993 and the development of the Federal law, “On the basic principles of the Civil Service in the Russian Federation” no. 119 (31 July 1995) (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 5 August 1995).

From 1997–2001, the bureaucratic reform agenda (the development of professional bureaucracy) again became one of the key priorities of the Russian government. In 2001, federal powers launched a set of comprehensive policy measures that aimed to modernize the system of bureaucratic organization. In July 2004, the Federal Council passed Law no. 79, “On Civil Service in the Russian Federation” (further Federal Law no. 79), which became the focal point of the reform and its management. This law reinstated some of the existing policy implementation instruments of the civil service organization, which aimed to create a professional body of civil servants.

Beyond the division of public service into the civil, police and military, and components (Law no. 58 in 2003), other important features of CSR legislation included: a new classification system (table of ranks, Article 8–12); the renewed procedures for the recruitment of civil servants' recruitment (Article 22, Law no. 79); the renewed list of performance management tools, such as job descriptions (Article 47); short-term contracts (Articles 23–30); basic examination and certification procedures (Articles 48–49); and finally, guidelines of bureaucratic integrity, including provisions for the enacting of standards of conduct for civil servants (Article 47), conflict of interest regulations (Article 19) and dispute resolution procedures (Article 69–70).

Some of the mechanisms discussed here were not entirely new to the post-Soviet state. However, prior to the current wave of reform (2001–present) they rarely had been implemented (Table 1).

In retrospect, the stage of policy formulation consisted in the enactment of the following conceptual documents:

(1) The Conception [framework] of Public Service Reform, backed by the Federal Plan, which included priority implementation measures connected to the concept of state service reform (adopted by Presidential Decree No. 1496 on August 15, 2001).

(2) The Federal Program, “Reforming the Public Service System of the Russian Federation (2003–2005),” (adopted by

Presidential Decree No. 1336 on November 19, 2002, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, November 23, 2002); and finally,

(3) The Federal Program, “Reforming and Developing the Public Service System of the Russian Federation (2009–2013),” (adopted by Presidential Decree No. 261, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Federal'nyi Vypusk*, no. 4867, March 13, 2009).

The implementation stage involved the enactment of Presidential Decrees that aimed to enforce new rules in recruitment, training, personnel management, and reimbursement of civil service employees. The key implementation documents were Civil Service Law no. 79 (2004) and the Law on the System of State Service (2003).

To date, research has not paid sufficient attention to the model of public bureaucracy that the Russian policy-makers were trying to build. Furthermore, little attention has been given to the importance of policy process, the relationship between the stages of policy formulation and policy implementation, and accordingly, to the idea of measuring and evaluating civil service reform progress.

The key difficulty in explaining the dynamics of the implementation stage in the area of civil service concerns the lack of *reliable evidence on the outcomes this reform* yielded more than a decade after the enactment of the first Action Plan. While the direct measures (evaluation criteria) of bureaucratic reorganization process are non-existent, international research suggests that Russia's regulatory quality and control of corruption indices did not significantly improve for a long time (see Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2017).

Perceptions and attitudes of public officials toward the goals of government-funded reform projects are also difficult to identify, which is a challenge of our research project. Have civil servants been treated as active participants of civil service reform? What role did they play throughout the stage of policy implementation? Public officials' surveys conducted by the Russian Academy of National Economy—the leading institute to train civil servants—suggest that the incentives offered by procedural changes in civil service legal norms do not completely match the structure of public employees' motivation. Specifically, the study suggests that 65% of civil servants' motivation structure consists of material incentives, such as the level of pay, career opportunities, and other social benefits offered by the government (issues that were not fully addressed by the reform for a long time) (Borshevskiy and Mahov, 2011, p. 75). In this context, incentives provided by the program of reform (with its focus on the introduction of New Public Management instruments, in a context of reform scarcity, rather than the development of social protection measures), significantly challenged bureaucratic interests.

In terms of the major trends observed within the structure and composition of civil service institutions, the Federal Statistics Service suggests that the increase of civil service personnel from 1991–2014 constituted nearly 30% (the highest number of people was recorded in 2009: pp. 868, 151). Another important criterion of bureaucratic modernization—the structure and composition of personnel—suggests that the average length of service increased from 5 to 10 years, whereas the number of employees serving for >20 years (tenure) dropped, leading the majority of younger civil servants to perceive their jobs as a temporary stage, which was preparing them for careers in other areas of the labor market (Federal Statistics Service, 2017).

The analytical boundaries of the case of civil service reform in Russia have been difficult to establish due to the presence of multiple reform initiatives that occurred simultaneously during the early years of Putin's Presidency. As an example, Public Administrative Reform (PAR), which aimed to downsize and reorganize the state administration, officially started in 2003

Table 1 Timeline of civil service reform in Russia (a brief overview)**Major developments associated with the process of civil service reform (CSR) in Russia (1990–2010)**

1995: Civil Service Law no. 119 (31 July 1995); introducing a career-based civil service system;
 1997–1998: A new wave of public debate around CSR; formally proclaimed committed to the merit-based system of civil service (democratic principles of openness, accountability, transparency promoted by policy advocates);
 1999–2001: ideas revisited as a part of “Modernization project”; the program of comprehensive policy change;
 2004: Civil Service Law no. 79 (31 July 2004); introducing a mixed model of civil service system;
 2003–2005: The Program of Reforming the Public Service System of the Russian Federation (2003–2005)” (Presidential Decree No. 1336)
 2005–2010: Incremental changes, accompanied by implementation difficulties (the choice of policy tools, mobilization of interest groups, commitment toward the reform process);
 2009–2013: The program of Reform and Development of civil service marked by the change of approach toward the process of civil service reform (Presidential Decree No. 261);
 2014–present: budget cuts reoriented toward the military sector away from civil projects

Source: Author

(at the same time as the civil service reform) with the enactment of Presidential Decree no. 824 “On Implementation Measures of Administrative Reform in 2003–2004” (23 July 2003). However, PAR progressed faster than CSR, due to the scale of resources involved, which resulted in its shorter follow-up reform program (2006–2008).

On paper, civil service and public administration reforms represented separate, though closely related, policy areas. Administrative reform dealt with the core public sector, the administrative side of the government and public management (executive reorganization). The meaning of PAR embraced such concepts as regulation, standardization, downsizing, developing service delivery mechanisms, and civil society engagement. In public discourse, this reform was framed as a package aiming to reduce excessive state regulation, improve the quality of public services, increase the efficiency of government bodies, and reassure information openness. (for more information, see the Ministry of Economic Development web-page).

Civil service reform, by contrast, dealt with the human side of public management and administration, e.g., issues focusing on the formation and management of the civil service in all branches, including issues of bureaucratic recruitment, training, pay, promotion, discipline, and security of tenure. The ultimate goal of CSR—as it was stated in the Conception No. 1496 (2001)—consisted in the formation of a professional and effective system of bureaucratic authority, “taking into account Russia’s historical, cultural, national, and other features” (Ibid).

Considering the unsatisfying amount of research available on Russia’s bureaucratic reform process, this paper aims to contribute to the discussion of the causal processes underlying the formation of a highly protracted implementation stage and the lack of observable outcomes CSR yielded. To account for the difficulties of implementation stage, I refer to the issue of *policy ambiguity* (unclear or contradictory goals accompanied by non-systematic enforcement process) as a *major mechanism* employed by policy-makers to achieve superficial consensus among the variety actors involved in the reform.

The guiding theoretical idea underlying this research suggests that the outcomes of policy implementation are influenced by a variety of different factors, such as policy continuity in a context unsettled elite consensus around policy goals. Actors (decision-makers and policy implementers) are treated as independent agents of change whose capacities are constrained by structural and ideational conditions they face. Ideational factors (policy options and policy proposals, which rely on the existing level of expertise), in particular, influence policy outcomes by shaping actors’ responses to the observable structural conditions they face.

The paper contributes to the growing body of literature in policy process in a non-democratic political setting of Russia

(Fortesque, 2016, Martus, 2017, Taylor, 2014, Khmel'nitskaya, 2015, Treisman, 2018). The outline of this study’s process consists of the review of policy implementation theories, the analysis of the policy formulation and policy implementation stages and the assessment of evidence collected among policy experts to account for the inherent dynamic of civil service reform.

Tackling the case of civil service reform from a variety of policy perspectives

The Russian case of CSR may be reviewed from a number of competing policy perspectives, depending on the analytical focus of the individual researcher. So far, the logic of path-dependence has been the dominant framework for analyzing the trajectory of institutional transformation after the demise of the Soviet Union. This approach, which emphasizes policy continuity, is widely accepted because of its explanatory power and capacity to embrace the sequence and temporality of events (Pierson, 2004). The shortcoming of path-dependence, however, is that it leaves us with unresolved puzzles about the role of actors in shaping policy change processes.

For example, research on the “state after communism,” has demonstrated that many public bureaucracies in former Soviet societies were resistant to any kind of change, and even more so, to wholesale transformation (see Nunberg, 1999). Problems associated with the reform commonly originated in the complexity of “dual” and “tripe” transitions (Offe, 1991), based on the varying logic of democratization, state-building and market reforms in relevant countries (Grzymala-Busse, 2007; O’Dwyer, 2006; Meyer-Sahling, 2009; Taylor, 2011), or the difficulty of achieving change in post-authoritarian settings (see, for example, Remington 2014; Ledeneva, 2006; Kuszniir, 2016).

The literature on democratic transitions in the post-Communist world suggests that the success or failure of institutionalizing merit-based recruitment principles (the most common definition of civil service reform success) has been closely intertwined with the success or failure of democratic transitions. Specifically, it was demonstrated that the process of institutionalizing party competition prior to the consolidation of state bureaucracy has been likelier to result in a more stable, politically neutral civil service (Grzymala-Busse, 2007; O’Dwyer, 2006; Taylor, 2011). Thus, even though the actual linkage between various aspects of reform and the process of democratization was not fully explored, the cases of democratic reform success and bureaucratic modernization process, defined in terms of improving merit-based institutions (legal norms and their enforcement), are found to be mutually reinforcing.

When isolating the problem of the institutional reform dynamic, what do we know about the process of bureaucratic modernization in Russia? Is the field of civil service dominated by

a single player or does it privilege rational advice? How do we explain multiple incomplete efforts made by the Russian government to improve the regulation of civil service institutions?

The lack of academic discussion around policy issues, as well as controversial data available on the personnel management system in Russia, makes it difficult for political scientists to provide a coherent explanation of Russia’s bureaucratic reform (or the lack of it). For example, there still is not a single theory or model that would sufficiently explain the logic behind policy actors’ decisions and consequences of such decisions. In this context, it is important to consider that civil service reform is one of many subfields in the policy-making process that is influenced not only by external factors, such as the nature of the regime, but, as well, by its own endogenous and self-reinforcing dynamic.

This paper considers the intractable outcomes of the bureaucratic reform process in Russia to be an appropriate subject for interdisciplinary research. Therefore, the study gains theoretical insights not only from the literature on democratic transitions that emphasizes the role of non-democratic settings, but also from relevant policy-oriented scholarship, which has the potential to account for the role of various factors in policy process, such as policy leadership, reform strategy, the bureaucratic capacity to absorb changes, and the complexity of the policy-making process. The literature focusing on post-authoritarian transitions and transformations (see, for example, Linz and Stepan, 1996; O’Donnell et al., 1986; Schmitter and Karl, 1994, etc.) did not yet take full advantage of policy implementation research (see Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984; Kingdon, 1984; Matland, 1995; Chakerian and Mavima, 2001; Sabatier, 1986, etc.) or manage to break away from the “transitology paradigm.” This issue may be addressed through a discussion of policy-oriented research that may be relevant to the increasing number of post-authoritarian “mixed” country cases.

Mainstream theories abandon the linear view of policy process where reforms are viewed as a steady progression from one step to another (Lasswell, 1951). Instead, they focus on policy as a cycle, informed by a system of feedback mechanisms (Brewer and deLeon, 1983; DeLeon, 1999), or policy streams (Kingdon, 1984), which reveal the dynamic of change in a wide range of policy areas.

Some of the existing studies strive to develop theoretical insights that move the analytical focus of political science scholars beyond a single issue or a single level of analysis. Most of these insights rest upon various versions of institutionalism theory, applied to the field of public policy and administration. Policy implementation scholarship (described as “third generation”) has recently called for new models that are not confined to a single unit or level of analysis and, which do not reduce policy processes to isolated systems (O’Toole, 1986). This development in the field of policy-oriented research occurred because the discussion between the so-called “top-down” and “bottom-up” theorists of policy implementation process had reached its fruitless end (Matland, 1995, p. 146).

As a reminder, “top-down” methods of studying policy process emphasize the importance of policy planning, including the following: (1) Clear and consistent policy goals (Van Meter and Van Horn, 1975); (2) Limited numbers of actors (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984); (3) Limited scope of the proposed policy changes (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1983); (4) Reform management by an agency sympathetic with the policy’s goals (Sabatier, 1986) (Matland, 1995, p. 147). The alternative view, however, emphasizes target groups and service deliverers, arguing that policy change is in fact made at the local level (see Lipsky, 2010).

When looking into the real problems that policy formulators face, it is quite obvious that clear and coherent legislation is not possible in all circumstances. First, structural and ideational

conditions may prevent policy-makers from setting coherent objectives. Second, the lack of a policy-makers’ expertise may lead to the development of unfeasible reform projects, including the development of policy implementation mechanisms that are insufficiently connected to pre-existing political settings.

Based on the observation of post-Communist scholarship that both institutions and outcomes emerge from similar factors (see Frye, 2012), I suggest that the conceptual model of reform processes in Russia shall take into account *the level of conflict* surrounding CSR development¹. Moreover, the study of policy implementation process shall also consider institutional and structural variables affecting the range of options that are available to policy-makers. The difficulty of reforming civil service, in particular, concerns *the long time frame that is required to achieve substantial improvements, the concentration of costs in the government, as well as the problems involved in mobilizing popular support*. In this respect, the lack of observable outcomes of CSR implementation stage may indicate a lack of political will by the country’s leadership for the implementation of policy objectives or the presence of structural barriers (such as entrenched interests) in the development and realization of relevant projects.

In view of the above, this study observes the relevance of at least two complementary explanations of the change process that will guide our understanding of bureaucratic reform in Russia, to the extent that is possible, considering the preliminary stage of this research. The first explanation rests on the insights of *the conflict-ambiguity model*, which explains the dynamic behind the enactment of policy proposals and the impact of this dynamic upon the stage of policy implementation. This model demonstrates that the stages of policy formulation and policy implementation are interconnected according to the degree of conflict surrounding the reform. Specifically, Matland (1995) suggests that policy ambiguity resolves conflict of values among various participants of the reform during the early stages of policy formulation. As a result, the choice of policy instruments is guided by the following dynamic: the higher the conflict of values regarding policy goals, the more ambiguous policy instruments are employed by the reformers. In this perspective, four implementation modes are possible: (1) low conflict-low ambiguity model (administrative implementation), (2) high conflict-low ambiguity (political implementation), (3) high conflict-high ambiguity (symbolic implementation) and (4) low conflict-high ambiguity (experimental implementation) (145). Each of these types requiring the use of rather specific resources, e.g., administrative, political, symbolic, and experimental resources in implementation stage (Fig. 1).

The second explanation highlights the relevance of the interaction dynamic among various components of comprehensive change process. Chackerian and Mavima (2001), for example,

		CONFLICT	
AMBIGUITY	Low	Low	High
		Administrative Implementation <i>Resources</i>	Political Implementation <i>Power</i>
	High	Experimental Implementation <i>Contextual Conditions</i>	Symbolic Implementation <i>Coalition Strength</i> Example: Community Action Agencies

Fig. 1 Ambiguity-conflict matrix: policy implementation process

		Scale of Resources Required	
		Small	Large
Similarity of Resources	Low	Synergy	Trade-off
	High	Avoidance	Trade-off or avoidance

Fig. 2 Policy interaction types and resources similarity and scale

suggested that various types of interaction effects may occur among reform components (or dimensions of the reform) under conditions of comprehensive policy change. This model goes beyond the decision-making stage outlined earlier and observes various explanations of policy process and policy outcomes, e.g., (1) “synergy” that occurs when reform policies reinforce each other by sharing resources or by multiplying benefits; (2) “trade-off” effects that happen when significant conflict exists between policies, with clear winners and losers and little sharing of resources; and (3) “avoidance of interactions,” which can be placed in between the two instances of synergy and trade-off—this happens when there is minimal resource sharing and competition between them (360) (Fig. 2).

The insights provided by policy implementation theories and models is not likely to be fully explored within the confines of a single article. However, the usefulness of these insights is obvious from the fact that the Russian civil service reform represents a multidimensional process, which is influenced by conflicting and ambiguous goals, insufficient political support (resource scarcity), and rigid institutional boundaries established within the system of public administration. The implementation stage of civil service reform in Russia involves the dynamic interplay among actors and institutions, as well as reform components. Administrative, political, experimental, and other policy instruments are being used to achieve implementation goals.

Taking into consideration, the discussion of CSR as a case of a long-term institutional project, a hypothesize is made that decisions made by the Russian government in the area of bureaucratic reform have responded to the underlying logic of political crisis, including popular discontent with the quality of state bureaucracy during the late 1990s. However, *policy ambiguity (unclear, or even contradictory objectives, that were not followed through with effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms)* has been the dominant feature of bureaucratic reform process, and primarily, of decisions made by the government in a context of unsettled consensus around policy goals. This feature has resulted in a highly protracted implementation stage (the delay in the enactment of regulations, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms) and the intractable outcomes of the reform of bureaucratic institutions (Yuzhakov et al., 2015).

The difficulty of studying CSR concerns the lack of methodological guidelines on variable operationalization through which to account for the willingness and capacity of the executive branch to act upon their official objectives. Some of the existing research originating in the ideas of comparative agendas project (Baumgartner et al., 2006) and the work of political philosophers recently employed by rational choice theorists (Tsebelis, 1990) points to the co-existence of “obvious” and “hidden” agendas of policy actors, which is difficult to track in a complex system of change, such as the case of expert-driven civil service reform. Principle-agent models of organizational behavior have also been usefully employed in explaining the undesirable outcomes of organizational change process.

It is worth mentioning that the case of civil service reform is not typical—it represents a class of phenomena characterized by

the difficulty of mobilizing public support throughout the stage of policy implementation. This type of reform requires systematic government effort in order to minimize resistance from the dissatisfied interested actors and to examine target group behavior (including the amount of change required by the reform) in order to develop a clear vision of cause-and-effect relationship underlying the problems of bureaucratic performance in Russia. The study of CSR sheds light on important issues, such as the place where power resides and the interests that prevail as a result of the implementation stage.

Civil service reform problématique: questions and data gathering techniques

This study combines a variety of qualitative methodology instruments to collect evidence on the key variables underlying the CSR implementation stage. First, the study relies on a collection of 25 semi-structured interviews conducted by the author throughout the second stage of civil service reform in Russia (2009–2013) among various actors involved in CSR policy, e.g., research community specialists, State Duma representatives, City Council members, community leaders, law makers, and other specialists involved in the design of the civil service reform project (see the full list of interviewees in Appendix 1). The criteria for selecting interviewees included expertise measured as engagement in policy planning process, experience of work in civil service institutions, and finally, academic and practice-oriented knowledge revealed through regular publications on the subjects of civil service reform in academic and non-academic journals. Accordingly, most of policy experts who agreed to participate in these interviews were either well-known academics or practitioners who were engaged in public discussions over the fate of Russian transition process throughout the early and mid-1990s.

Each expert interview (further Expert Interviews, by author, 2010–2013) included no less than ten open-ended questions, which were focused on the experience and views of policy-makers regarding the process of CSR implementation. The goal of interviews consisted in identifying competing explanations of bureaucratic change process in Russia and reconciling these ideas as a part of a coherent story. Contact information of experts involved in the reform was accessed from their official websites. The privacy of each interviewee has been respected, based on the protocol that included the use of a consent form in each interview and guarantees of anonymity.

Beyond the analysis of expert interviews, the discussion of civil service reform relied on the method of *process tracing* that was used to elaborate on a range of intervening variables, such as the type of implementation and resource inputs behind major policy changes. These include: (a) clear and consistent objectives; (b) adequate causal theory of bureaucratic incapacity in Russia; (c) coherent legislative framework; (d) implementation processes legally structured to enhance compliance by implementing officials and target groups; (e) reform funding; (f) reform communication strategy; (g) committed and skillful implementing officials; (h) support of interest groups and sovereigns; (i) changes in socioeconomic conditions, which do not substantially undermine political support or causal theory (adapted from Sabatier, 1986, pp. 24–25).

The study of public discourse, which was essential for this work relied on official statements, government and legislative documents, public officials’ surveys, and other sources, offering valuable insights into the dynamic of change associated with bureaucratic modernization initiative (see the Data Availability section).

Surveys and official reports obtained through the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation, the Institute of Legislation and Comparative Law, the Federal Statistics Service, and the Russian

Academy of National Economy and Public Administration were particularly useful, because nearly all of these institutions (including the Federal Statistics Service) were active participants of the reform. All these sources helped in gathering empirical data on the bureaucratic change process, including issues such as legal developments, structural, and organizational features of new programs.

The review of CSR policy cycle: from policy planning to policy implementation

Prior to the discussion of evidence that accounts for the bureaucratic change process in Russia, it is necessary to briefly focus on the dynamics of the policy formulation stage, including the goals and mechanisms employed by the reformers to modernize Russian bureaucracy. This is necessary in order to understand how and why the stage of policy planning influences the results of policy implementation within the subfield of Russian civil service reform.

The current stage of Russian civil service reform (which began in 1999) suggests that the set of actors involved in CSR consisted of (1) policy experts (practitioners and academics) who were engaged in a process of problem identification and agenda-setting; (2) ministers and other career politicians who were engaged in the development of policy options and proposals; (3) Presidential administration (PA)—the key decision-maker concerned with the issue of hierarchical subordination, and finally, (4) the group of policy implementers (career bureaucrats), whose motivation structure, as mentioned earlier, included material and non-material incentives, such as the level of pay or the system of interconnected protections and other possible conditions of their permanent work environment (for more information, see Obolonsky, 2006).

The federal government set generic goals, such as the reduction in the number of civil service employees and the development of legislative bases for the improvement of human resource management procedures (recruitment, education, pay, and promotion of civil service employees). Accordingly, the early Conception of public service reform (Presidential Decree no. 1496, August 15, 2001) offered a long list of policy objectives, focused on the increased level of bureaucratic professionalism, organizational coherency, effectiveness, and efficiency of public bureaucracy.

Since 1999, the organizational core of policy planning process included the Center for Strategic Analysis under the Chairmen of the Government Herman Gref who was a well-known figure of Russian politics. This center, that was in charge of Vladimir Putin's first presidential campaign, observed the selection of Russia's executive system appointees and developed comprehensive policy proposals in Russia's economy, including the reform of state monopolies; the development of favorable environment for Russian business; the reform of Russia's Central Bank; Russia's taxation system reform; and finally, the land reform, including the law on the circulation of agricultural land, which the Communist party did not allow to adopt for a long time, fearing that lands were to be plundered.

In early November 2000, the PA instructed the Government, the Administration of the President and the Security Council of the Russian Federation to prepare (by May 1, 2001) and submit proposals for reforming the civil service system. This instruction was followed by the creation of Inter-Agency Working Group, which consisted of the representatives of the Ministry of Economic Development, the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Justice and the Federal Statistics Service, including the First Deputy Head of the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation, D. A. Medvedev. The head of the first working group was the former advisor to President

Yeltsin Mikhail Krasnov. The conception of Public Service Reform (2001) was, therefore, created as a product of joint efforts under the post-Soviet tradition of inter-agency consultations.

Over time, public committees on administrative and civil service reform were split. These committees were headed by different individuals, and as such, were not closely interconnected. For example, committees on public administration were headed by the leading and visible Russian politicians, such as Boris Aleshin Dmitry Kozak, Alexander Zhukov, and Sergei Naryshkin. One of the them, Deputy Head of Presidential Administration, was in charge of relations between the federal center and Russian regions in the federal government, which, in effect, made regional heads subordinate to the Russian president. In contrast, civil service reform committees were composed, mainly, of academic experts, and they were rarely visited by the top-level bureaucrats (for more information, see Barabashev et al., 2003, p. 174).

Governance discourse in the area of CSR (see the list of presidential speeches at <http://kremlin.ru>) suggests that there have been multiple overlapping considerations for the reform of Russia's bureaucratic system. One of these has been the deteriorating quality of bureaucratic performance, which progressively undermined public trust in government. The second problem concerned the lack of the state's operational capacity (closely linked with the lack of hierarchical subordination), threatening the survival of inherited administrative system. In his Annual Address of 2001, President Putin claimed that Russia "will not have Revolutions or Counter-revolutions" (*Rossiyskaia Gazeta*, 2001, April 4). This claim was accompanied by the discussion of the poor bureaucratic system and was followed by the promise to restore Law and Order in Russian society (Annual Messages and Budget Messages of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, 2000–2018).²

The timeline of the policy formulation stage, under Putin, covered nearly 10 years, and it significantly overlapped with the stage of policy implementation, which consisted of the decrees and instructions issued by the President or by the Government. The Conception and the Programs (for the period of 2003–2005; and for the period of 2009–2013) promised to achieve comprehensive bureaucratic reform with the means of maintaining the organizational coherency of civil service institutions, the development of a professional bureaucratic system tailored toward the goals of state capacity and bureaucratic efficiency "based on Russia's historical, cultural, national and other features" (Conception no. 1496, 2001).

It is also noteworthy, that starting from the early 2000s, the federal reforms in the area of public service and state administration have been guided by the "mixed" strategy, which aimed to "marry" the diverse principles of the neo-Weberian perspective with the principles of the New Public Management paradigm (NPM). The first set of principles of the earliest government package pursued the goal of constraining the discretionary powers of public officials with detailed and narrow regulations. This set of ideas included policy proposals and subsequent choices in favor of regulation and standardization procedures outlining duties and responsibilities of civil servants, as well as their evaluation criteria (this was a long process that took nearly one decade to accomplish with the criteria of evaluation that were not fully applied). The second set of principles encompassed goals such as political decentralization, citizen/customer orientation, community empowerment, and the introduction of market forces in the operation of government bodies. These principles were embraced by the all-encompassing comprehensive public administration reform. The ultimate result of these processes was the introduction of public procurement reform, the opening of multifunctional centers for service delivery, and the development of e-governance projects designed to establish mechanisms

through which the individual responsibility of civil servants could be observed (World Bank, 2006a).

It is well-known that the New Public Management has traditionally focused on administrative modernization, including performance-motivated public management and the use of integrated economic, sociological, and other advanced conceptual models. These ideas have provided a good starting point for the development of innovative policy proposals. However, the realization of innovative policy objectives required significant bureaucratic capacity to “absorb” policy changes. Some projects, such as the introduction of e-governance systems (electronic service delivery mechanisms) lead to the increased accountability of civil servants. Others, such as the introduction of public procurement system, resulted in aggravated corruption that has been difficult to track considering the scale of resources and actors involved in this process (for more information, see World Bank, 2006b).

The Implementation stage of civil service reform, starting from the early 2000s, consisted of the enactment of Law on the System of State Service no. 58 (2003) and Civil Service Law no. 79 (2004), which have been accompanied by the list of regulatory procedures (Presidential Decrees) that aimed to enforce new legislation. One of the major criticisms of the new legislation, in this context, has been the development of a “mixed”, rather than merit-based system of public administration, and the unreasonable number of exceptions to the rule of merit-based recruitment that it included (see Article 22 of Law no. 79), which has been the most significant “trade-off” effects among contradictory policy goals. To exemplify the nature of clandestine conflict surrounding the reform, one of interviewees engaged in policy planning (an expert from the Center for Strategic Analysis) observes that various committees of State Duma introduced 245 amendments to the Draft Law on the System of State Service in order to clarify the principles of merit-based system of state bureaucracy. However, only 39 amendments were recommended by the parent committee responsible for the consideration of this bill (Committee on Federal Affairs and Regional Policy) for acceptance (for more information, see Yuzhakov, 2005).³ The amendments covered such areas as recruitment procedures, transparency, professionalism, service-oriented culture, merit-based pay and promotion systems (Ibid.).

The enactment of Law no. 58 has been accompanied by the discussion of polar opposing ideas, such as the notorious policy proposal to exclude the principle of non-partisanship—introduced in effort to overcome the post-Soviet legacy. A remarkable feature of this discussion was that the hearing process occurred mainly from the standpoint of the presidential program. The Chairman of the Committee on Federal Affairs and Regional policy would consistently ask of the draft offered to the State Duma is consistent with the Conception issued by the Presidential Administration (the key issue on agenda of policy-makers). The Federal Law was subsequently approved, without any significant challenges, but the State Duma, the Federal Council and the President in <2 months of April–May 2003. Political parties that introduced amendments and subsequently approved the new legislation were Unity (Edinstvo 98,8% deputies), OVR (Otechestvo Vsyia Rossiya (100%), Liberal Democratic Party (100%), Group of Deputies of “Narodny Deputat” (100%), “Regions of Russia” (57, 4%), and “Yabloko” (29, 4%).

In April 2004, State Duma rejected the Code of Ethical Conduct introduced by individual members of State Duma. Interestingly, one of the earlier versions of the Code of Ethics had been introduced by the President himself in 2002. This piece of legislation—initially backed by the Union of Right Forces—did not enjoy full support of the State Duma, and it was subsequently rejected by the lower chamber of the Russian parliament in anticipation of Draft Law on Civil Service Reform offered by the Presidential Administration (Barabashev and Klimenko, 2010).

Federal Law no. 79 (Civil Service Law), which dealt with the core issues of civil service, took nearly 9 months to develop (starting from September 2003 until July 2004)—partly due to the changes in State Duma (elections in December 2003) and recommendations made by the head committee during the first round of Parliamentary hearings. This new piece of legislation defined civil service as a professional occupation, which is paid by the Russian budget. Employment conditions were contract-based and performance-oriented. Civil service tenure was no longer guaranteed. Overall, civil service system was reshuffled to comply with the hybrid nature of public management system, which was based on a combination of old (table of ranks) and new (performance management) principles.

Interview findings (Expert Interviews by Author (anonymous), 2010–2013) identify the following major features of CSR policy cycle. One of these has been the lack of agreement among Russia’s academic experts and senior bureaucrats (at the time considered the top-level civil servants) concerning the goals and values underlying bureaucratic modernization effort. The most explicit, in this context, was the ideational split concerning the principles of bureaucratic organization, including the principles of bureaucratic recruitment, promotion and security of tenure.

For example, in view of the ideational split that was driven by the colliding interests and institutional mandates, some Ministries participating in the policy formulation stage, such as The Ministry of Labor, advocated the need to establish a career-based civil service system with clear lines of subordination, a detailed analysis of civil servants’ duties and career incentives that promote the idea of life-long employment. The Ministry of Economic Development, by contrast, advocated the need to incentivize civil servants to work more productively, thus recommending the use of short-term contracts and performance-based pay to improve the operational capacity of civil service organizations (Former Employee of the Ministry of Labour of the Russian Federation (federal level), interview by author, Moscow 2010). The final version of Law no. 79 emerged as a result of consensus among various ideas and interests involved in the reform. Some of the most popular ideas (such as performance-based pay) became part of Law, though conditions for the enforcement of relevant implementation procedures were not created.

The second feature of policy formulation stage that was observed has been the so-called “expedited decision-making” characterized by the lack of public discussion and the tendency of the Russian government to hold its meetings behind the closed doors. This style of policy-making process has been described by interviewees as a notorious part of Russia’s tradition marked by the tendency to “jump over the necessary stages” and limit the scope of public discussion surrounding important decisions (Academic Expert, Higher School of Economics, interview by author, Moscow 2010). However, the choice of such an approach was not purely coincidental, as it revealed the PA’s efforts to outmaneuver the opposition and advance the version of the law according to its own preferences.

An authoritative source occupying the leading post in one of Russia’s think tanks suggests that the key features of Russia’s decision-making process, at the time, included the so-called “departmental” or “agency-based” approach to public administrative reforms. This approach produced useful, yet uncoordinated reform efforts, and as such, resulted in the development of incoherent legislation:

Given our relatively weak civil society and political parties, the main forum for representation and reconciliation of interests is provided by the executive authorities. Accordingly, government agencies and departments are the main actors involved in shaping the political agenda, as well as in

its implementation. But the departmental (agency) approach to reforms is limited by definition. A radical agency project is a breakthrough in one relatively narrow area and is out of line with the general state of the public sector and public management. Such a breakthrough, first, is rarely successful on its own; second, it tends to produce unexpected effects in related areas; and third, it implies “bridge building” between the sector under reform and its environment. Such “bridges” include the numerous amendments to laws, which make them internally inconsistent. In addition, any agency, whether reform-oriented or conservative, tends to try to increase its influence and facilitate the performance of its functions (Member of an Expert Committee within the Russian Government (cross-affiliated, senior role), interview by author, Moscow 2010).

Another authoritative source (former adviser to President Yeltsin), as well, suggests that Russian political institutions—the way they were formed throughout the years of Yeltsin’s Presidency—“have narrowed the scope of freedom for actors other than those from state executive” (Former Advisor to President Yeltsin, interview by author, Moscow 2010). This view is supported by the leading academic experts on Russia pointing out that the model of decision-making, in this country, presents a significant challenge for the possibility to reach an optimal developmental outcome (for more information, see Huskey, 1999).

All things considered, the dynamic of policy formulation stage in the area of CSR has been driven by an increasingly complex reform strategy and the lack of consensus among reform-oriented and “status-quo” interests (Obolonskiy, 2006). The body of expert proposals set the stage for comprehensive reform program (experts acted on the demand of the Federal government seeking expert advice). However, the course of events, which accompanied the creation of Law no. 79, revealed the difficulties of policy proposals that were passing the stage of Parliamentary hearings (Interviews, 2010). The discussion of civil service reform, both in public and in the State Duma (lower chamber of Russian Parliament), during the early years of Putin’s presidency, has been limited (Barabashev et al., 2003). The development of civil service procedures occurred in an expedited mode, which revealed the PA’s control over the stage of agenda-setting in its effort to outmaneuver opposition. Similar developments, at the time, were observed with respect to the Russian anti-corruption legislation package (see Dmitriev, 2006).

Ultimately, many norms contained in Law no. 79 (see Article No. 11 (“The System of Ranks”), Article no. 31 (“Organizational Restructuring of Civil Service Institutions”), Article no. 33 (“Termination of Employment Regulations”), and Article no. 50 (“The System of Pay and Reimbursement”) were so generic that they required additional clarifications and improvements and took the federal government more than a decade to pass (for more information, see Tikhomirov and Gorokhov, 2009).

Analyzing expert interviews: the discussion of policy implementation prerequisites

Interviews conducted by the author in 2010–2013 reveal that nearly all explanations of policy process shared by policy experts belong to at least three distinct policy implementation narratives, which reflect upon the desirable reform prerequisites (conditions of change) that appear to be insufficiently present in the case of Russian civil service reform.

The first narrative identified among the participants of this study revolves around the concept of policy leadership, or the state executive’s lack of political commitment to enforce the bureaucratic modernization process. This narrative suggests that

the success of civil service reform largely depends on the motivation of the reformers and their willingness to enforce civil service legislation.

The most vivid example of this explanation is provided by one of Russia’s academic policy experts arguing that “political leadership is present, yet it is very hectic, unpredictable and sporadic”, making it difficult for experts to understand “how and why certain ideas reach agenda, or why they disappear immediately after elections” (Academic Expert, Higher School of Economics, interview by author, Moscow 2010). The problem underlying the observed narrative is the discrepancy between obvious and hidden agendas of policy-making process largely observed by those involved in policy planning stage. The discrepancy between obvious and hidden agendas may be observed due to the fact that CSR was a convenient tool employed by the top-level political leadership to attract its political supporters among a diverse group of Russian intelligentsia and the Russian public. Obvious agendas (official policy goals), in this context, include a variety of substantial policy goals, such as the need to improve institutional structure or to update legislation in order to maintain legal coherency. Hidden agendas, on the contrary, involve a variety of political considerations: the need to reshuffle the body of bureaucrats, including their roles, functions, selection criteria, and accountability structure. The lack of understanding of why CSR is important is also frequently mentioned by interviewees.

The second major narrative, identified through the interviews with experts (mainly academics), points to the broader organizational conditions of policy change, such as the structural and cultural attributes of Russian bureaucracy (the size, composition, organizational coherency), as well as bureaucratic capacity of the Russian state to absorb changes. This explanation is marked by the discussion of bureaucracy within the academic circles as a “backward-looking, anonymous, and yet influential force” (Expert Interviews, by Author, 2010–2013), whose “intentionality (agency) is demonstrated by the lack of systematic improvement of CSR legislation, and a system of “interconnected protections” surviving the most unpredictable shifts of Russian policy-making process” (Ibid).

The Russian case of CSR offers a valuable source of insight for the type of reasoning that links the delay of policy implementation stage with the culture and structure of bureaucratic institutions, and the regularly observed conflict of interest among bureaucratic and administrative actors. This is due to the set of actors involved in policy formulation and policy implementation stages of Russian civil service reform. During the early stage of the reform (2001–2005), the community of civil service reform actors (policy formulators) was composed of academics and policy practitioners, serving as advisors to Russian President. By contrast, the group of policy implementers was fractured and not heavily involved in policy planning process. Nearly 75% of the higher-ranking civil servants of the federal executive, during the late 1990s, consisted of personnel who were employed after the years of *Perestroika* (economic restructuring in the late 1980s). The remaining group of policy implementers (lower-level civil servants occupying mid-level management positions) included public employees who started their careers prior to the collapse of Communism (Jakobson, 2002). Over time, the split among generations became less important due to the underlying process of elite-settlement. However, the observed cleavage among policy formulators and policy implementers persists to this day, due to the disconnected “cognitive maps” of those planning and executing public sector reforms on the ground.

Finally, the third narrative of policy implementation process (academic and practitioners alike) explains the delay of the policy implementation stage with consequences of regime change that included a lack of clear and coherent “theory of change”, or

conception behind the model of national development and the lack of expertise in the area of human resource management after the demise of Communism. During the Soviet times, the Communist Party (specifically, its multiple local organizations) provided the primary channel for the recruitment of civil service employees. Political loyalty remained one of the guiding principles of the hiring processes, which left the heads of administrative divisions with vast discretionary powers in the application of personnel recruitment norms. When the Soviet system dissolved, the ideological and organizational principles of a stable bureaucratic system quickly vanished, which led to the development of ad-hoc measures that aimed to establish a new legal bases for the Russian system of public administration. Civil Service Law no. 119 (31 July 1995) introduced the idea of a professional career-based system of bureaucratic organization. This law has been criticized due to the lack of coordination in developing relevant policy implementation procedures (see also Krasnov and Satarov, 2004).

It is noteworthy that the total number of public employees (of which civil servants are a minor part) increased sharply prior to the collapse of Communism. In 1985, for example, the total number of people employed by the state, excluding party members, reached nearly 2.3 million people. During the years of the post-Communist transition, the number and composition of state bureaucrats underwent considerable changes, which led to an initial reduction of public employees (Brym and Gimpel'son, 2004). However, the trend of bureaucratic growth resumed rather quickly, leading to the nearly uncontrolled expansion of state bureaucracy (O'Dwyer, 2006). Interestingly, for the period of 1994–2000, the total number of employees of the state machinery grew by no >200 thousand people, while from 2000 to 2009, the number of state employees at the federal, regional, and municipal levels increased by 601.3 thousand people. The total number of state employees, during the period of 2000–2014, increased by 1345.6 people (from 1462 thousand people in 2000, to 2211.9 in 2014), with the biggest surplus observed in years of 2002, (111.7 thousand), 2005 (143.4 thousand), 2006 (115.2 thousand) and 2014 (663.8 thousand people) (see The Federal Statistics Service, 2017).⁴

These numbers appear to be striking, considering that the number of career bureaucrats (civil servants), as opposed to the total number of public employees (non-civil servants, such as

military and administrative staff), under Putin, did not significantly change, and even dropped, starting from 2009 (634,814 thousand) until 2016 (541,452 thousand). The Federal Law no. 79 excluded a large group of doctors, teachers, and other members of Russia's professional community employed by the state from the ranks of civil service employees, aiming at a significant reduction of civil service employees. The process of state expansion has, therefore, occurred at the expense of other types of state employment (such as a new cohort of state corporation managers) (O'Dwyer, 2006; Taylor, 2011). The observed trend suggests that career bureaucrats were generally quite resilient toward the pressure of organizational restructuring and downsizing (see Appendices 2 and 3).

It is worth mentioning that the size of the state does not fully reflect upon the success or failure of civil service reform project. In fact, the size of civil service influences the results of the reform, in Russia, in a less obvious manner than its spatial and organizational characteristics. Geographical cleavages observed by the Federal Statistics Service suggest that, in the beginning of 2001, the number of state officials in various regions ranged from 4 per 1000 population in Ingushetia (Caucasus region) to 58 per 1000 population in the Evenki Autonomous region in the Far North, with the national average standing at 8 per 1000 (Brym and Gimpel'son, 2004, p. 96). The "density" of state officials in a region has been sensitive to budget constraints. The total number of employees per region (size) varied depending on the organization capacities of regional administrations (Tables 2 and 3).

Reconciling policy narratives: agency-based and structural explanations. Conditions of implementation process, observed within the body of empirical evidence, may be split into the categories of agency-based and structural prerequisites influencing various stages of interconnected policy cycle. Agency-based conditions include the nature and quality of actors involved in CSR process (primarily policy leadership). Structural reform prerequisites include the design of Russia's political and administrative institutions, and the influence of parallel reform projects run by the state. It is well-known, for example, that the success of policy implementation depends on the qualities of actors involved in this process. However, the way officials choose to react and respond to the new policies depends on their perception of the reform, as well as on a wide range of formal and informal

Table 2 Summary of policy implementation obstacles	
Implementation obstacles	Problems observed in the Russian case of civil service reform (CSR)
Material variables (technical, target group behavior, amount of behavior required)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Eclectic nature of reform legislation- The lack of methodological support- Unequal allocation of funds- Availability of resources
Structural variables (clear and consistent objectives, adequate causal theory, hierarchical integration within implementing officials, initial allocation of resources, formal access by outsiders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Comprehensive yet unclear objectives- Top-down style of policy implementation- Unclear criteria of reform effectiveness- The structure of agenda setting process- Insufficient feedback and monitoring mechanisms
Contextual variables (public support, socioeconomic variables, support from legislators, commitment from implementing officials)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Policy context: federal-regional arrangements- Reform leadership split over the goals of the reform; lack of commitment- Support of legislators (regulatory capture by interested administrative actors)- Bureaucratic culture and structure- Ideational crisis, co-existing reform agendas; socio-economic conditions
Source: Expert Interviews, by Author, 2010–2013 On the distinction between material, structural and contextual variables, see Matland, 1995	

Table 3 Summary of implementation variables (interview analysis)

Policy leadership	Reform strategy	Contextual variables
(1) Commitment to reforms (ideational, political, or instrumental) (2) Initial allocation of resources (3) Support from legislators (4) Reform management model	Clear and consistent objectives Adequate “causal theory” of bureaucratic incapacity: ▪ Proper evaluation of organizational obstacles ▪ Proper evaluation of bureaucratic motivation structure ▪ Proper evaluation of project feasibility ▪ Engagement strategy Accountability of policy implementers Implementation and Feedback mechanisms	Implementing officials (1) Perceptions of the reform (2) Entrenched interests (supporters and opponents) (3) Norms of compliance (4) Socioeconomic conditions (5) Alternative dimensions of institutional reform (competing reform projects)

Source: Author

Table 4 Overview of civil service reform subsystem in Russia (2001–2017)

Structural variables	Agency-based variables		Structural variables
Decentralized civil service reform management entrenched in Constitution, accompanied by the trend of executive centralization External events 1. Favorable starting socioeconomic conditions (early 2000s) 2. Low level of public engagement 3. Policy decisions in alternative policy fields (administrative, budget, etc.)	Constraints and resources of subsystem actors Actors dominating the system: Presidential administration ↓↑ Bureaucratic actors (implementers)	Actors trying to dominate the system: Academic experts (advocates) ↑ Bureaucratic actors (implementers)	Law on civil service (2004) [decisions] ↓ Selective enforcement [rules] ↓ Implementation protracted over a long period of time [outputs]

Source: Author

institutions, which constrain their choices and behavior (Solomon, 2007, 2008).⁵

An important institutional prerequisite of CSR process, in Russia, cited by interviewees, concerns the structure of Russia's federal-regional arrangements, including the division of responsibility for personnel management across the federal and regional-level jurisdictions (The Constitution of the Russian Federation, 1993). In this context, one of the most important institutional features of all Russian bureaucracy is whether its activities are financed out of federal, regional, and municipal budgets. In Russia, regional and municipal budgets are normally constrained and experience pressure to downsize programs that are being perceived as marginal (DeBardeleben, 2003).

Starting from the early 2000s, the Federal powers interfered in regional affairs more often due to the expansion of government regulation promoting centralization agenda (DeBardeleben, 2003). Mechanisms employed by the Federal powers to incentivize reforms included a mandatory legislative framework and competitive financial mechanisms (World Bank, 2006a). However, regional-level initiatives within the area of CSR, such as the introduction of merit-based system, pay and promotion structure were not strongly enforced (in fact, policy proposals were optional for many regions), whereas the bulk of competition-based transfers were allocated for governance (administrative) innovations, which was an important alternative policy field, gaining prominence due to the introduction of new technology instruments attracting resources from the domain of bureaucratic modernization as a part of a ‘trade-off’ dynamic among alternative reform dimensions (World Bank, 2006a, 2006b). Selection criteria for individual regions were not equally enforced. Performance targets for the achievement of personnel management objectives included, among others: the status of institutional reforms, assessed through the numerical

reduction of the bureaucratic corpus, the level of employee turnover, the use of contract-based systems and the introduction of a performance-based system (*Ibid.*) (Table 4).

Evaluating the organizational obstacles toward the reform process

While the observed explanations of the bureaucratic change process (interview narratives) focus on CSR prerequisites—reform leadership, bureaucratic capacity, and the strategy of the reform process—the relationship among the observed variables of policy implementation is far from being straightforward. Methodological challenges of policy-oriented scholarship, as mentioned earlier, include the difficulties involved in variable operationalization (such as ‘how do we understand or track political commitment?’) and the difficulty involved in ‘assembling’ various pieces of evidence (based on a set of policy narratives offered by interviewees) in order to create a valid and reliable explanation of bureaucratic reform process.

The choice of an appropriate explanation that would help reconciling the diverse and highly fragmented policy implementation narratives is further complicated by the fact that there has been a number of top-level political actors involved in the development of civil service reform proposals, which raises concern about the role of policy leadership in the design of public policy and its implementation. As mentioned earlier, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, policy experts acted on the request of the Federal government, who sought advice on the means of administrative modernization. However, the course of Russia's legal institutional transformation over the last decade suggests that reform leadership (a variety of inter-agency groups and a number of key players within the executive system) has been split over the goals and mechanisms of Russia's bureaucratic

modernization process, which has led to the development of incoherent legislative framework.

The organizational features of bureaucratic reform process in Russia suggest that the following sources of policy ambiguity informed the dynamic of policy implementation stage. Some of these features reflect upon the unresolved contradictions of Russia's "bureaucratic modernization" process, stemming from a variety of institutional, ideational, or interest-based sources.

1. Unclear, yet comprehensive policy objectives aiming to modernize the system of Russian civil service using the so-called "top-down approach" of policy implementation—a clear sign of a preliminary ideational settlement achieved among policy advocates and policy implementers during the early stage of the reform. The Conception [framework] of Public Service Reform no. 1496 (1999) and the Program of Civil Service Reform in Russia (2003–2005) set the goals of the organizational improvement, coherency, professionalism, effectiveness, accountability of civil service institutions. All of these policy goals were highly ambitious requiring comprehensive rather than incremental approach, that was not yet properly matched with the operational and organizational capacities of the post-Soviet state, such as the size of the state and the decentralized nature of the post-Soviet civil service system, or the presence of parallel reform objectives, such as the goal of administrative centralization pursued by the federal government since the year 2000.

2. The unresolved problem of CSR management process: From 2000 to 2017, there has not been a single independent agency responsible for the development of civil service reform as a coherent project. Since 2000, CSR management has been split among at least four alternative centers: (1) Department of civil service management of Public Administration of the President of Russia; (2) the Office of the Government of Russia, in which the functions of managing the civil service were assigned to the civil service department, in collaboration with state and local government; (3) the Ministry of Health and Social Development of Russia (subsequently, the Ministry of Economic Development), and (4) the departments (administrations) or structural subdivisions within the departments of the federal authorities responsible for personnel issues and the management of public service in these bodies. The lack of a single institution or agency responsible for CSR implementation process, resulted in a lack of a coherent vision concerning the goals and values underlying bureaucratic modernization effort. The most explicit, in this context, was the ideational split among a variety of actors with different backgrounds and institutional mandates concerning the organizational principles of Russian bureaucracy (Expert Interviews, by Author, 2010–2013).

3. Finally, the history of reform finance (which is a direct measure of political commitment toward the reform) provides us with a conflicted account of policy-makers' commitment to CSR. Official sources, for example, demonstrate that, in 2 consecutive years (2008–2009), the Federal powers spent around 960 million rubles and 481,600 thousand rubles, accordingly, on the public administration reform program. The Program of Civil Service Reform, on the other hand, was funded in the amount of 539 million rubles from 2003–2005 (see The Federal Program, "Reforming the Public Service System of the Russian Federation (2003–2005)," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, November 23, 2002), and in the amount of 691 million rubles from 2009–2013 (The Federal Program, "Reforming and Developing the Public Service System of the Russian Federation (2009–2013)," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, Federal'nyi Vypusk, no. 4867, March 13, 2009). Thus, the implementation stage of civil service reform has been regularly underfinanced.

The amount of initially allocated material inputs has been significant insofar as it has been effectively spent and distributed.

Evidence on this account suggests two major observations. One of them concerns the unequal share of funds invested in the stages of policy formulation and policy implementation. The lion's share of government finance went to the reform preparatory stage, whereas implementation funds were quite negligible (Barabashev and Kilmenko, 2010, pp. 24–28). The second problem concerned the impact of government expenditure on civil service reform progress: during the early 2000s, coordination mechanisms among budget allocation and civil service reform were not clear, which significantly decreased the chances of comprehensive law enforcement process to take place (Ibid.).

Resource inputs identified by the interviewees in 2010–2013 included not only financial support that was necessary to conduct reforms, but also communication between the decision-makers and policy implementers about the goals of the reform (e.g., a lack of consistency and mobilization effort in the delivery of information). The initial stages of the reform relied on the idea that laws were self-executing documents. Therefore, none of the existing lower layers of public bureaucracy were fully engaged or "aligned" with the reform advocates (Interviews, 2010). Surveys of public officials, which were conducted by the Institute of Legislation and Comparative Law under the Russian Government (<http://izak.ru>), demonstrate that 5 years after the start of the reform, a large pool of lower-level civil servants in Russia did not understand or share the goals of CSR. In 2008, nearly 50% of bureaucrats surveyed reported a lack of awareness about the goals and ideas behind civil service reform. Another 33.3% reported activity that was not in line with the existing legislative norms (Tikhomirov and Gorokhov, 2009, pp. 297–298).

The clandestine nature of bureaucratic resistance suggests that, in some cases, the struggle among the top layers of public bureaucracy took form of *regulatory capture* transforming the scope of legal coverage, or even constraining the enforcement capacity of relevant policy implementation documents. One vivid example of this process, which took form of a seemingly regular discussion in the State Duma, has been provided by the income declaration procedures that aimed to make bureaucracy accountable to the public.

In 2009, for example, the Ministry of Labor developed extensive regulations requiring all civil servants (and their family members), to file their income declarations online in order to allow for their public scrutiny. However, later on, State Duma managed to redraw the draft regulation by excluding adult children from the group of family members of senior bureaucrats. An interesting account of the observed process is provided by the following discussion:

When Dmitry Medvedev announced that the war on corruption was his top priority and initiated the passage of an entire complex of anti-corruption legislation, it's unlikely that Medvedev knew that he would meet with such strong resistance from basically the entire civil and Duma corps... Medvedev ought to be given his due: his idea for the law on declaration of state incomes was progressive. However, in the end, this initiative, like so many of his initiatives, turned out toothless and ineffective. The Duma, which is controlled by the party in power, simply redrew the law and swept aside Medvedev's insistent demands that the legislation be passed in its original form... At first, Medvedev had demanded that declarations of income also be provided by officials' "family members"—this was how it was stated in the draft of the law that was introduced to the Duma at the end of 2008... In response to the draft law, the United Russia Party decided to limit the definition of "family member" to spouses and minor children. Officials agreed to this compromise. The majority of them had adult

children, and thus, this definition suited them. As a result, the Russian public was given the opportunity to learn about the income and property of officials and their spouses only. But even these limited data proved amusing reading (Innocente, 2012).

Generally, some of the observed instances of bureaucratic resistance toward the reform may be explained by the challenging nature of policy proposals and the public discourse surrounding the case of CSR. It is obvious, for example, that the goals proclaimed in the mass media during the early stages of the reform (such as the need to reduce the number of civil servants), threatened bureaucratic interests. From 2008–2012, the case of CSR has been closely linked to Russia’s anti-corruption discourse.⁶ As a result, when reforms commenced, the bureaucracy was unprepared to accept another wave of bureaucratic reform (Interviews, 2010). Policy discourse that focused on the ideas of NPM (effectiveness and efficiency) was hardly useful, as it revealed the tendency of the federal authorities to challenge bureaucratic interests.

The latest years of CSR implementation witnessed the reluctant, yet steady enactment of local law enforcement practices in the area of personnel management and the creation of guidelines for the application of relevant norms at the regional-level (see, for example, Merit-Based Recruitment and Selection Guidelines of Nizhny Novgorod region in Collection, 2015).⁷ The e-governance project in the area of public administration led to the creation of an official website, ‘Gossluzhba’ (<https://gossluzhba.gov.ru>), which publishes information about civil service vacancies and open competitions. The legal practice of Law Enforcement Procedures has been systematized (Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, 2016). However, the process of merit-based recruitment is neither closely monitored, nor fully regulated by the Federal legislation.

Since 2010, the process of reform management and administration shifted to the Federal government and its ministries making proposals and enforcing decisions in a largely decentralized manner. However, the fear of establishing control over the civil service by the interested rival group became an important factor in the rivalry between the structures of the Administration of the President of Russia and the Government of the Russian Federation, which blocked the formation of a consolidated system of public service management. Another important reason for the unresolved nature of CSR management (cited by interviewees) concerned the necessity perceived by policy advisors to avoid the Soviet-era tradition of centralized state personnel management system (Advisor, Center for Strategic Analysis under the President, interview by author, Moscow 2010). Ultimately, the unresolved nature of CSR management—implementation agenda advanced by experts in effort to decentralize the process of reform management in order to escape the Soviet legacy— led to the increased concentration of powers in the PA.

The striking peculiarity of the competitive hiring process in Russia (which is one of many possible outcomes of the reform) is the co-existence of two major routes of bureaucratic employment. One of these is an open competition, which is regulated by Article 22 of Law no. 79 (multiple exceptions to the rule may be observed within the body of law). The second route of competitive recruitment is provided by selection of candidates from the pool of civil service personnel, which is formed as a part of the preliminary examination procedures that are held among pre-qualifying candidates (Article 64 of Law no.79, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, no. 3539, as of July 31, 2004).

Official data suggests that there has been a gradual increase in the number of employees hired on a purely competitive basis in Russia over the last several years. From 2009–2013, the share of

civil servants who officially claimed to join the ranks via competition grew by 30%, whereas the share of vacancies filled from the civil service personnel list increased by 50% (Borshchevskiy, 2014). It is obvious that pre-arranged competitions are used more frequently than the direct competitive procedures under the pretext of efficiency concerns, which allow state organizations to fill positions in a short period of time without accruing additional expenses from competition. The observed trend is a clear sign of a gradual “takeover” of principles officially justified through claims of efficiency, as opposed to the idea of purely competitive recruitment, which is symptomatic of the limitations of civil service regulation. It also represents one of the observable ‘trade-off’ effects outlined earlier by policy-oriented scholarship (see Chackerian and Mavima, 2001), which occur among a variety of co-existing (or competing) policy instruments.

Overall, the stage of policy implementation within the subfield of Russian civil service may be described as a process informed by the dynamic of conflict-ambiguity in policy formulation stage, which affects the quality and degree of policy implementation (symbolic implementation within the area of merit-based recruitment; administrative and experimental implementation in other areas) (Matland, 1995). Finally, the organizational obstacles to policy implementation stage—described as administrative, organizational, and financial resource scarcity—are found to be useful in measuring the role of policy leadership in policy implementation process (Fig. 3).

Empirical and methodological insights

Taking into consideration the dynamic of CSR implementation over the last 15 years, one has to ask some of the following questions: (1) What are the reasons for the lack of coherent and comprehensive regulation in the area of CSR? (2) How do we explain the intractable nature of policy outcomes in the area of bureaucratic modernization? And finally, (3) What implications does the observed case of civil service reform have for the study of policy implementation process in non-democratic political systems?

The observed evidence of the bureaucratic reform process in Russia suggests the importance of contextual factors, such as the role of executive leadership with its financial, administrative, and technical support, and the initial prerequisites of the reform, such

		CONFLICT	
		Low	High
AMBIGUITY	Low	Administrative Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• TABLES OF RANKS, CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM (see Articles 8-12, Law no.79, 2004	Political Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• REFROM MANAGEMENT (COORDINATION) MODEL (see Presidential Decrees no.1496, 2002; no. 1336, 2003; no. 261, 2009)
	High	Experimental Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT• FEEDBACK AND MONITORING MECHANISMS (see Articles 47, 48-49, Law no 79)	Symbolic Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• MERIT-BASED PRINCIPLES OF BUREAUCRATIC RECRUITMENT• REGULATION OF ETHICS (see Articles 19,47, 69-70, 79; Law no.79)

Fig. 3 Ambiguity-conflict matrix⁸ Applied to the Russian case of civil service reform (1999–2015)

Table 5 Summary of implementation variables

Sufficient	Necessary	Necessary and sufficient
Contextual variables <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions of the reform • Entrenched interests (supporters and opponents) • Norms of compliance • Socioeconomic conditions • Alternative dimensions of institutional reform (reinforcing effects) 	Material variables <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislative support • Financial resources • Implementing officials • Implementation and feedback mechanisms • Accountability structure 	Structural variables <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and consistent objectives • Adequate causal theory • Proper evaluation of organizational obstacles • Proper evaluation of bureaucratic motivation structure • Proper evaluation of project feasibility • Accountability of policy implementers • Implementation and Feedback mechanisms

Source: Expert Interviews, by Author, 2010–2013

On the initial distinction between contextual, material, and structural variables, see Matland, 1995

as bureaucratic capacity to absorb changes—condition influenced by the size, composition, organizational coherency, and other features of bureaucratic organization (e.g., the structure and composition of Russia's decision-making bodies and a set of priorities established by the Federal government with respect to the goals of administrative reorganization). However, all of these factors influence the results of CSR indirectly, shaping the outcomes in a less obvious manner than the ongoing bargain among political and bureaucratic actors.

The underlying logic of civil service reform reveals the dynamic interplay among the unequal players of bureaucratic reform. As a result, the early-stage of the reform is characterized by efforts to reconcile opposing ideas and interests among the key actors (presidential administration, government ministries, and agencies of the Russian Federation), whereas the stage of policy implementation is marked by the lack of comprehensive regulation and the unequal enforcement of civil service norms.

To understand the nature of policy implementation practice in Russia, it is important to consider that the field of CSR is sensitive to issues of power, including such questions as where power resides, whose decisions prevail, and which questions get public attention. Therefore, the limits of what government can do are set by the pressure of dissatisfied interests, which inform the bargain and consensus around competing reform agendas.

Thomas and Grindle (1994) suggest that implementation success in policy areas, which require significant government inputs, is influenced by the extent of legitimacy and autonomy of the existing government. First, if a regime is stable, it is more likely to generate wide-ranging support for the program. Second, if it depends on a few extremely powerful interest groups (such as in case of state capture), it would be more difficult to ensure consensus among the top-level political elites concerning the goals of reform (Geddes, 1996; Levi, 1989; Mann, 1986, etc.).

Overall, the assessment of political and administrative resource invested in Russian CSR reveals not only the ambivalent nature of policy leadership with its efforts to limit discussion and avoid excessive resource inputs, but also the informal power of state bureaucrats, who managed to uphold their interests despite the ongoing institutional reform that took place in Russia for nearly several decades. The role of the so-called “anonymous” forces opposing the new legislation is particularly striking in view of persistent failures experienced by policy advocates (researchers and academic community) to enact ethics procedures (that were ridiculed by some actors as an opportunity to return to the Soviet-era “moral police”), and in a convoluted process of government regulation over income declaration procedures.

Co-existing reform agendas, such as the process of administrative centralization and the process of bureaucratic reform requiring consistent application of decentralized management tools, complicate the process of bureaucratic modernization

further influencing insufficient political engagement of CSR implementation process. As the political preoccupation with hierarchical subordination, the government, until recently, has forgone the use of such management tools as clear and coherent evaluation criteria and other important elements of bureaucratic reform process. Significant resources have been invested in alternative reform dimensions, such as the introduction of hierarchical subordination principles into the daily affairs of senior bureaucratic corpus. This “trade-off” of policy principles in favor of administrative efficiency suggests that instrumental and political reasons for bureaucratic reform process prevail when compared to the role of proposals advanced by the tiny group of reform advocates. In this context, the nature of political regime still holds its explanatory power due to the decisive role power arrangements play for the outcomes of Russia's transition process.

The analytical perspective, which follows from the study of CSR in Russia, speaks directly to role of policy leadership (a collection of the decision-making and advisory bodies) in allocating material, technical, and ideational support toward the process of policy implementation process. The role of policy leadership—the study suggests—may be operationalized with the use of material and structural variables, such as clear and consistent objectives, adequate causal theory, proper evaluation of project feasibility, material resources allocated to achieve policy change (Table 5).

The variable of policy leadership is demonstrated to be a required—necessary, but insufficient condition of change process. Contrary to the analytical expectations expressed earlier, the variable of policy leadership is structural, as it reflects upon the system of institutions and the design of reform strategy devised by policy-makers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, civil service reform in Russia, regardless of how little attention it has received, is a deeply conflicted political project that has stumbled over the lack of agreement concerning the future developmental trajectory of the Russian state. The goals of the reform are not fully fixed. Therefore, the key difficulty of the policy implementation stage concerns the problem of maintaining regulatory coherence, while keeping the system of public bureaucracy in check.

This study confirms that variables, which influence the results of CSR implementation (the performance of government bodies) are many and complex and involve the uneven distribution of power among the tiny group of reform advocates (academic experts), top-level officials, and various layers of public bureaucracy. In this context, which is marked by the concentration of decision-making powers in state executive (continuity rather than change), the practice of setting generic (ambiguous) goals represents a common strategy employed by the policy-makers to

reach superficial consensus around policy goals to achieve political settlement. The intentionality of actors is obvious from their role in the policy formulation stage (such as control exercised by the Presidential Administration over the stage of agenda-setting process, or the rejection of policy proposals in State Duma that were not in line with bureaucratic interests). In this context, the unequal share of funds invested in policy planning and policy implementation, the lack of monitoring, feedback and evaluation mechanisms and the unequal enforcement of various reform dimensions suggest that the project of CSR does not enjoy as much attention as it deserves. In this way, the speed of the decision-making stage translates, most obviously, into a protracted stage of policy implementation, which serves the goal of preference articulation (intentionally delayed by the intervening actors) in a context of a continuous bargaining among a variety of policy actors.

This study leads to a conclusion that the civil service in Russia is neither dominated by a single player, nor it is likely to fully accept rational advice. The development of a civil service subsystem is influenced by the discrepancy of ideas and interests entrenched in institutions, and as such, may be characterized by the so-called “conflict-ambiguity dynamic”—the process, which is marked by the conflict of values, and the use of policy ambiguity (unclear or contradictory goals accompanied by non-systemic enforcement process) as a mechanism to achieve superficial consensus among a variety of actors involved in the reform. This study confirms that the endogenous and self-reinforcing dynamic of institutional transformation within the subsystem of CSR informs the intractable outcomes reached by policy-makers. This discussion reveals the importance of actors shaping politics (their capacity to steer the flow of resources) and the increased involvement of non-democratic agents (state bureaucrats) in defining the process and outcomes of Russia’s transition.

Data availability

• The open-source documents used in this study were obtained from:

- The Russian Government <http://archive.government.ru>
- Presidential Administration, www.Kemlin.ru
- Russian Parliament, <http://bar.parliament.gov.ru>
- Supreme Court Archive, <http://www.vsr.ru>
- Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation (2017), State and Public Sector, <http://www.gks.ru>

And the following legal information databases:

- Collection. Legal Information System Consultant Plus, Russia, 2018a, 2018b: <http://www.consultant.ru>
- Collection. Legal Information System Garant, Russia, <http://base.garant.ru/189260/>

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Notes

- 1 Conditions that inform agency-structure debate of post-Communist reforms.
- 2 Unconstrained bureaucracy was later described by President Medvedev, in 2008, as the most dangerous force for the development of Russian civil society (<http://kremlin.ru>).
- 3 For more information, <http://bar.parliament.gov.ru>
- 4 http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/state/#
- 5 For more information about policy implementation variables identified by interviewees, see Appendix 3.
- 6 See Collection of Annual Presidential Addresses, *Consultant Plus*, 2008–2012.
- 7 See <https://government-nnov.ru/?id=170900>
- 8 Matland, R (1995, p. 160).

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