

# Do Voluntary Associations Matter for the Spread of Civic Activism in Russia? Matching Technique Applied to Survey Data

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*Objective.* This article develops an empirical model that tests whether in post-communist Russia prior membership in a civil society organization (CSO) motivates civic activism. Revisiting Tocquevillian notions of a nurturing effect by formal civil society organizations of civic activism, we aim to help explain recent research findings showing that civic activism is sustainable and vital in Russia. *Methods.* To test the main hypothesis of the study, we use the cross-sectional survey of Russians aged 18 and older in the fall of 2014 ( $N = 1,500$ ) representing 43 regions conducted by the Russian Civil Society Monitoring Survey of the Higher School of Economics' Centre for Studies of Civil Society and the Nonprofit Sector (2006–). We use the propensity score matching (PSM) technique to estimate the main effects. We also show that the effect of unobserved factors on our PSM estimates is limited using Rosenbaum bounds analysis. *Results.* The PSM analysis suggests that for all four indicators of civic activism, that is, willingness to integrate with other members of society, participation in tenant meetings, engagement in charity activities, and engagement in home improvement, CSO participation positively impacts civic activism. The impact varies from a 7.2 to 15.8 percent higher propensity of civic activism for CSO participants. *Conclusion.* We conclude that prior participation in a CSO can have a motivating influence on civic activism such as charity work, residential home improvement, willingness to integrate with other members of the society, and participation in tenant meetings.

Revisiting the Tocquevillian concept that formal civil society organizations (CSOs) can nurture civic activism, we use survey data to help explain participation in civic activism in contemporary Russia (Sobolev and Zakharov, 2018). The concept of associations as a learning place for civil society has long been criticized for lacking hard evidence. Notably, Van Der Meer and Van Ingen (2009:302) observe that there is “universal, strong and positive correlation between civic participation and political action,” but there is little empirical proof of a “nurturing” effect. Empirical support is provided here at the individual level for Russia, one of the recently democratized post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe by the propensity score matching (PSM) technique (survey data, 2014) to demonstrate that prior membership does have influence on willingness to engage in community action. We follow Minkoff (2016), the first study in the literature that explored the relationship between participation in voluntary associations and political/civic activism

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using the PSM framework for mature Western democracies. Since this method relies on the assumption that unobserved factors have limited impact on the PSM estimates, using the Rosenbaum bounds analysis, we also show that the effect of unobserved factors on our PSM estimates is quite limited.

Our 2014 data analysis captures civic activity after the economic and social transformation of the 1990s through Russia's early 20th-century economic expansion, recession in 2008, and recovery; it traces activity for several years after the implementation of the 2012 amendments to laws that require political NGOs with international funding to register as "foreign agents." Recent research by Sobolev and Zakharov (2018)<sup>1</sup> shows that despite economic shocks and curbs on foreign funding of political NGOs, "trust in others" has come back after the turn of the century and is now at normal levels for advanced countries.<sup>2</sup> Political structures that depend on civic activism have been put in place.<sup>3</sup> That Russian civil society is sustainable is a view contrasting with much recent research reviewed in Greene (2014), which emphasizes obstacles to the spread of civil society in political controls, including the cooptation of activists and crowding out by supportive family networks.

Our findings confirm the evidence of the sustainability of Russian civil society in Sobolev and Zakharov (2018) and show organizational productivity, as does Minkoff (2016) for advanced democracies. Self-selection, as in Minkoff (2016), can include organizational influence. Following Minkoff (2016), we limit our conclusions to internal (individual-level) behavior, leaving external (macro political or societal level) benefits of associational activity for a future research agenda. Our approach, PSM, tests the impact of having been a member of a CSO on willingness to engage in civic activities to isolate the individual behavioral result in the composite of self-selection factors. Our database is the National Research University-Higher School of Economics sampling survey (2014) for Civil Society Monitoring in post-communist Russia,<sup>4</sup> which is a nonexperimental survey.<sup>5</sup>

We recognize that a significant challenge of any causal inference based on nonexperimental data is estimating the "true" effect. To estimate the "true" effect, observations for a comparison group should be properly identified—in our case, citizens who were not participants of CSOs. Though our survey includes many observations of CSO nonparticipants, some observations cannot be used as proper counterfactuals for the observations of the alternative group consisting of CSO participants since observations across groups can differ for many reasons other than CSO participation. Consequently, we take additional steps to construct the proper comparison group (common support condition) through econometric techniques such as PSM (see "Data and Methods" section).

Use of the PSM method has both pros and cons. The main object of the analysis is to create counterfactuals for the observations of the treatment group (Dehejia and Wahba,

<sup>1</sup> See (<http://fom.ru/>).

<sup>2</sup> Sobolev and Zakharov (2018:252), based survey data from the Russian Public Opinion Foundation (FOM): "Focusing first on just countries' positions on the horizontal scale, which measures trust, we see that Russians are by no means unusually suspicious. In fact, the country is slightly above average on trust: 27.8 percent of Russians thought that most people could be trusted, compared to 23.2 percent in the average country surveyed." One contribution of Sobolev and Zakharov (2018) was to provide a more full description of civil society activism than has been reported in the literature; our work assesses the impact of organization on that activism.

<sup>3</sup> Activism is not, alone, a basis for assessing democratization; see Weimar Germany as an example of a strong civil society not supportive of democracy (Berman, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Federal project funded at the National Research University-Higher School of Economics, Social-Economic Strategy conditional independence assumption and show of Russia to 2020, survey based on face-to-face interviews, conducted in the respondent's residence, and drawn on questionnaires created by the Center for Research on Civil Society and the Non-Profit Sector at NRU-HSE.

<sup>5</sup> See ([https://directory.esomar.org/country146\\_Russian-Federation/r123\\_Public-Opinion-Foundation.php](https://directory.esomar.org/country146_Russian-Federation/r123_Public-Opinion-Foundation.php)).

2002). The propensity score is a function of variables that characterize the actual selection mechanism by observed factors. Thus, a failure to account for any important variable in the specification of the propensity score (the conditional independence assumption) can significantly bias results and lead to incorrect inferences. In a separate analysis, we test the conditional independence assumption and show that our PSM findings are not substantially driven by factors that are not accounted for in the model. PSM has one advantage over the alternative methods, ordinary least square (OLS) or instrumental variables (IV); it is a nonparametric technique and thus free of specification bias. In this way it contrasts to OLS or IV, where the common support requirement is not expected: PSM analysis compares the outcomes of comparable subjects. Any differences between methods here, therefore, will be either due to the common support requirement in PSM or the linearity requirement in OLS and the choice of instruments used in IV. We show in this article that OLS estimates are biased upward relative to PSM estimates. When we utilize the IV approach (IV that capture region-level heterogeneity in CSO participation such as distance from Moscow to the regional center, percentage of urban population in 2002, number of NGOs, and economic crimes per 100,000 citizens)—results not reported in the article but available upon request—the estimates of effect are significantly biased upward.

The article is organized as follows. In the second section, after this introduction, we briefly review the literature, first, on Russian civic activism and then on self-selection and organizational nurturing.<sup>6</sup> The third section is about data and methods where we introduce the models, and describe the dependent and control variables. The results and robustness checks follow in the fourth section; the conclusion follows in the fifth section. In our analysis, we find that participation in CSOs does nurture civic activism and readiness to participate. We specify, however, that civic activism effects are not the same in all types of activities: estimates are qualitatively stronger on CSO experience fostering participation in charity activities. With somewhat weaker estimates, we show influence on general participation in collectives, or, for example, tenant improvement activities. However, the lowest effect of CSO participation, we find, is on willingness individually to aid others in a difficult situation

## Literature Review

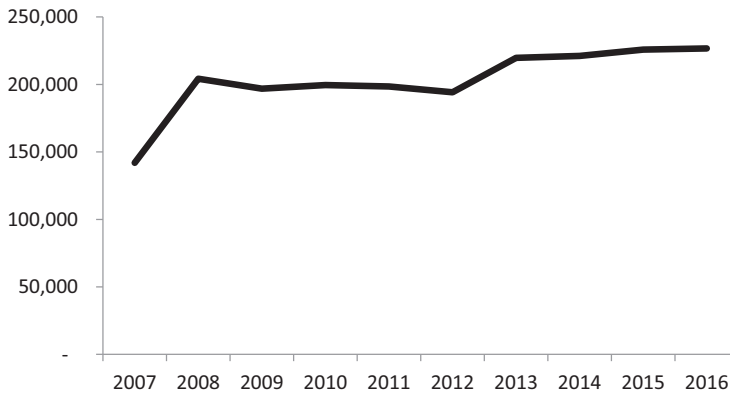
### *Russian Civic Activism*

Urbanization and rising income from the 1970s were background factors as civil society activism emerged under Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Communist Party (1985–1991), who fostered voluntaristic and charity activities (Reisinger et al., 1994:187; Jakobson and Sanovich, 2010).<sup>7</sup> Activism spread from the dissident movement, the rise of ethnic and nationalist sentiment, and grassroots initiatives by Soviet trade unions (Aliyev, 2015). Levels of trust in the late Soviet era were assessed at 56 percent in 1989 (Yasin, 2007:17) in comparison to the 39.5 percent for the United States recorded in the first

<sup>6</sup>Stolle and Hooghe (2003) find both effects in CSOs. Dalton (2008) and Armingeon (2007) conclude, in a consensus view, that there can be at best marginal spillovers for the public sector from encouraging CSO activism.

<sup>7</sup>CIVICUS Civil Society Index Report for Russia (2007) (<https://www.hse.ru/data/2011/10/24/1268873654/CIVICUS%20ENG.pdf>); see also findings from Soviet emigre surveys, to be treated, however, with caution (Millar, 1987).

FIGURE 1  
Number of CSOs in Russia, 2007–2016



SOURCE: Data from the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation; available at (<http://unro.minjust.ru/NKOs.aspx>).

wave of WVS (1981–1984).<sup>8</sup> Change increased in pace after the breakthrough to electoral competition and the end of communism in 1991.<sup>9</sup>

Measured “trust in others” then declined after persistent economic crisis in the 1990s (Dmitriev and Treisman, 2012; Jakobson and Sanovich, 2010); generally, economic recession diminishes general trust, a force needed by institutions created to foster social power, freedom, and agency (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Arrow, 1972). WVS for 1995–1999 (Wave 3) reports levels of trust in Russia (23.2) at the low end of averages found across the transition region (35–25 percent), by contrast with 30 percent for the United Kingdom and 35 percent for the United States. After the 1990s, the next decade of fast-paced economic growth is associated with the expansion of civic activism (Auzan and Zolotov, 2007). By Wave 5 of the WVS (2005–2009), trust of others had risen somewhat in Russia to 25 percent.<sup>10</sup> Official membership numbers in Russian CSOs (those employed or serving as volunteers) are sustainable (see Figure 1), but, as in other transition countries, remain below levels in Europe and the United States (Howard, 2003). In the 1990s, CSO members in a charitable/humanitarian organization reached just under 2 percent of the economically active population and by Wave 5 (2005–2009), 6.6 percent for Russia, roughly the same across the transition region. Informal participation increases that number to 19 percent.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, CSO membership is 31.4 percent of the economically active populace in the United Kingdom and 31.6 in the United States, a gap explained largely by initially low levels and slow growth by widespread avoidance of membership in formal organizations after the end of the discredited Communist Party, government-organized nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the Soviet Era, and pro forma membership in official labor unions.

<sup>8</sup>World Values Survey. 2014. *All Rounds—Country-Pooled Datafile Version*. Madrid: JD Systems Institute. Available at (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWVL.jsp>).

<sup>9</sup>Political and attitudinal change occurred at “a dizzying and historic pace” (Gibson, Duch, and Tedin, 1992:329; see also Yasin, 2012).

<sup>10</sup>See Figure 29, “Most people can be trusted,” Scanlon Foundation surveys, 2007–2017, in Andrew Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion National Report*. Available at ([scanlonfoundation.org.au/research/surveys/andmonash.edu/mapping-population](http://scanlonfoundation.org.au/research/surveys/andmonash.edu/mapping-population)).

<sup>11</sup>Including those who report attending/being influenced by events (2014;  $N = 1,500$ ).

NGOs have improved their capacity to mobilize supporters and volunteers and to raise cash through contributions. There are increasing numbers of activists signing petitions, respondents who make cash handouts, and adherents of trade unions, sports, and religious groups (Sobolev and Zakharov, 2018:259–60). The concept of civic activism<sup>12</sup> has not spread widely among the general population, and is still new in some regions of Russia. Only 41 percent of respondents in the Baikal region, for example, are aware of what CSOs do, by contrast with 89 percent in St. Petersburg and 91 percent in Samara (Mersianova and Korneeva, 2013). The steady expansion of membership, albeit within this better educated and more urban settings is confirmed by the organizational growth chart shown in Figure 1.<sup>13</sup> The numbers of CSOs in Russia shows no decline since 2007.

Most Russian CSOs are not political; only 7 percent in national surveys have a strong interest and only 30 percent have “some interest” in politics.<sup>14</sup> Nor are they particularly oppositional. Core political beliefs place a high valuation on “state paternalism” with continued support for communist views. Seventeen percent favor the concentration of power in the hands of a strong leader.<sup>15</sup>

CSOs mainly are associated with social, labor, and other nonpolitical spheres such as sport and leisure activities (Greene, 2014). One-third comprise labor union members (14 percent of the population).<sup>16</sup> Preference for type of organizations reflects a higher valuation of social issues (fewer labor hours, more free time, work rights) than for political “rights” (Petukhov, 2007; Gorshkov and Tikhonova, 2013).<sup>17</sup>

### ***Self-Selection and Organizational Impact***

Minkoff (2016) divides the productive potential of CSOs into micro and macro effects for behavioral study. Classical treatments of the effects by Almond and Verba (1965) and Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti (1994) focus on the latter and have come to be viewed as the Tocquevillian core of governance, sometimes as a vital third sector of service providers, encouragement of which is important, especially in the developing world. The third-sector view implies that CSOs can influence communities while expanding welfare-oriented services by organizational outreach bridging CSOs to the larger community (Putnam, 2002), but discussion of outreach is beyond the scope of this article.

On an individual level, self-selection is the obvious force within communities for uniting individuals with common interests. In the background of the self-selection literature, as Knack and Keefer (1997:1252) show, is the shaping effect of income and education, background factors that elevate trust and form emerging norms of civic cooperation. Without directly responding to the challenge of how promising the current neo-Tocquevillian line

<sup>12</sup>Defined in Sobolov and Zakharov (2018:250): “By civic and political activism, we mean the actions of citizens who organize to pursue collective and humanitarian goals or to demand changes in state policy. Civic activists focus mainly on social issues (including local affairs, ecology, human rights, and the defense of vulnerable social groups), while political activists aim to change both government policies and, often, government personnel.”

<sup>13</sup>A social monitoring survey of CSO participation for 2010 finds 23 percent of respondents with university degrees, 11 percent with a secondary education, and only 7 percent with less. In cities above 1 million, one-fifth are participants in CSOs, by contrast with one-tenth in rural Russia.

<sup>14</sup>Levada Center, 2016, Public Opinion—2015. Almanac, p. 56. Available at (<http://www.levada.ru/cp/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/OM20151.pdf>).

<sup>15</sup>See (<http://www.levada.ru/23-09-2013/politicheskie-vzglyady>).

<sup>16</sup>Officially, 21 million members, but actual numbers are much smaller due to lapsed membership; see (<http://www.fnpr.ru/n/252/4890.html>).

<sup>17</sup>However, surveys report concern with deficiencies in the enforcement of rights (Mersianova and Korneeva, 2013).

of research is, Minkoff (2016) tests the association of active and passive participation with other factors that might be considered part of self-selection. Even on an individual micro level, the question about the impact of organizational initiatives on civic activism is significant in policy considerations; the world's current 193 countries include 118 newly formed states with declared aspirations for democratic institutions. For some of these, longitudinal data on voluntary associations (Voorpostel and Coffe, 2012; Houtzager and Acharya, 2011) show a contribution in Latin America where an individual can gain access to basic public goods and services. But in emerging democracies, Fox (1996) shows the importance of the "thickening of civic society" for rural Mexico and the "scaling up" of participation in rural Mexico, independent of whether a local action by a CSO results in political change. Uhlin (2009) on Latvia finds nonpolitical, or recreational, CSOs productive of other kinds of civic activism. Again for a larger research agenda, finally, there is some evidence for Central Europe that the mainly nonpolitical CSOs may contribute on a macro level to civil society expansion in respect to skill development, including the articulation of interests and of state accountability.<sup>18</sup>

Without focusing here on particular values or on the generation of social capital, the model here attests to outreach and networking within the Russian ecosystem that has allowed CSOs to develop. Independent of other factors, the result of participation is greater willingness to participate. We add this point to this literature by developing a model based on HSE monitoring data for Russia.

## Data and Methods

### *Survey Data*

The data are a cross-sectional survey conducted by the Russian Civil Society Monitoring Survey of the Higher School of Economics' Centre for Studies of Civil Society and the Nonprofit Sector (2006–) (Jakobson, 2008). The survey is a stratified random sample of Russians aged 18 and older in the fall of 2014 ( $N = 1,500$ ) representing 43 regions. The survey uses a geo-rating methodology designed by the Public Opinion Foundation (Fond "Obshchestvennoe mnenie") to assess participation in civil society.<sup>19</sup>

CSOs are legal "public associations" including informal "initiatives." By Russian law, the term "public association" is inclusive, even of organizations that mostly provide commercial services, use no volunteers, and have virtually permanent membership. We would have preferred to use only voluntarist CSOs, or registered nonprofit partnerships, autonomous nonprofit organizations, or foundations. Even if it were possible to capture this smaller group, however, it would be difficult to label them authentically voluntarist. In any case, our broadly inclusive data do not undermine the objective of our study;<sup>20</sup> we assume that our estimates are the *upper limits* of socializing effects of CSOs in Russia.

<sup>18</sup> See also Bădescu et al. (2004).

<sup>19</sup> For the project, funded by the federal government for the Social-Economic Strategy of Russia to 2020, interviews were face-to-face, conducted in the respondent's residence; the questionnaire was created by the team at the Center for Research on Civil Society and the Non-Profit Sector at NRU-HSE, headed by L. I. Jakobson and I. V. Mersianova.

<sup>20</sup> Sobolev and Zakharov exclude state-organized structures (2018:249).



### Propensity Score Matching

Similar to Minkoff (2016), to quantify the CSOs and civic activism gradient, we use the PSM approach. Suppose that the total number of respondents is  $N$ . For each respondent ( $i$ ), we observe the outcome of civic activism ( $Y_i$ ), whether the respondent participated in CSOs ( $C_i$ ), and the set of observed characteristics that predicts his participation in CSOs ( $X_i$ ). The conditional independence assumption of PSM requires that vector  $X_i$  contains all the factors that explain the participation of individuals in CSOs. The factors included in  $X_i$  are discussed in the next subsection.  $i$ th respondent's civic activism has two outcomes that vary with participation in CSOs:  $Y_{1i}$ , if the respondent participates in CSOs, and  $Y_{0i}$ , otherwise. Thus, the actual observed outcome,  $Y_i$ , depends on these two outcomes:

$$Y_i = Y_{0i} + (Y_{1i} - Y_{0i})C_i. \quad (1)$$

After some algebraic rearrangement, the average effect of CSOs on civic activism can be described as the combination of two terms:

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta &= E[Y_i|X_i, C_i = 1] - E[Y_i|X_i, C_i = 0] \\ &= E[Y_{1i} - Y_{0i}|X_i, C_i = 1] + \{E[Y_{0i}|X_i, C_i = 1] - E[Y_{0i}|X_i, C_i = 0]\}. \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

The first term in Equation (2) is the average participation effect on the participants, average treatment effect on the treated (ATET), and the second term is a bias term that will equal zero if conditional on a set of observed characteristics given by  $X_i$ , participation in CSOs is random (conditional independence assumption—all variables affecting the individual's decision to participate in CSOs are included in  $X_i$ ). After dropping the second term, the ATET is the expectation of differences of expected outcomes of participating or not participating in CSOs:

$$\Delta^{ATET} = E[Y_{1i} - Y_{0i}|X_i, C_i = 1]. \quad (3)$$

The PSM computes ATET using a single covariate  $p(X_i) = E[C_i|X_i] = P[C_i = 1|X_i]$ , a propensity score of participating in CSOs for each respondent estimated using a logit regression. In case of a single nearest neighbor matching algorithm without replacement, ATET becomes:

$$\Delta^{ATET} = \frac{1}{N^C} \sum_{i=1} [Y_{1i} - Y_{0j}], \quad (4)$$

where  $N^C$  denotes the number of CSO participating respondents and for every CSO participant  $i$ , a matching counterpart  $j$  is selected based on the value of the propensity score such that  $\delta > p(X_j) - p(X_i)$ , the distance between the propensity scores is within the imposed tolerance level ( $\delta$ , radius). Thus, in PSM, the closest counterpart in terms of the propensity score is selected as a counterfactual for a CSO participant. To ensure robustness of our results to the choice of matching algorithm, we compute ATET using other matching algorithms such as a smoothed radius matching with varying levels of radius and weighted smoothed kernel matching assuming an Epanechnikov kernel function. In this study, we use the user-written STATA program, PSMATCH2, developed by Leuven and Sianesi (2003).

PSM assumes that the unobserved factors in  $X_i$  play no role in the selection for treatment. Rosenbaum (2002) bounds are presented to show to what extent the main estimates are sensitive to the presence of unobservables. The consistency of PSM depends also on the common support requirement; for every covariate included in  $X_i$ , there are both participants and nonparticipants of CSOs. A problem arises if a good number of matches is not produced during matching. As evidence of compliance with the common support requirement, we present a number of balancing diagnostics for both unmatched and matched samples.

### ***Measurement of $C_i$ , $Y_i$ , and $X_i$ and Their Descriptive Statistics***

*Participation in CSOs,  $C_i$ :* This is based on the following survey question: “In what activities of which public associations and other nonprofit organizations, voluntary civic initiatives have you taken part, and in what public organizations are you a member?” The participation is 1 where the respondent indicated at least one organization or initiative, and 0 otherwise. Of 1,500 respondents participating in the survey, 285 respondents or 19 percent of the sample is identified as participants of CSOs.

*Civic activism,  $Y_i$ :* The dependent variables are measured on a dichotomous scale and take the value “1” where there is the presence of willingness to participate and “0” otherwise. The variables show a range of “participatory” activities customarily associated with civic activism. “Integrate” indicates whether the respondent is willing to get together with others for a joint action when his/her ideas and interests coincide with others. “Participate in a collective” indicates whether the respondent participated in tenant meetings last year. “Charity” indicates whether the respondent helped anybody on his/her own initiative, made an action to improve anybody’s welfare, engaged in charity during the past year beside in regard to his/her family or nearest relatives. “Home improvement” indicates whether the respondent participated in any volunteer events to clean up the building where he/she lives, his/her courtyard, or city (village, town) last year.

*Covariates,  $X_i$ :* We break down covariates in  $X_i$  into three groups: *sociodemographics*, *individual-level perceptions*, and *regional-level factors*. *Sociodemographics* include gender, age, education, income, religion, and urban residence. *Individual-level perceptions* measure a respondent’s social view, his/her perceived level of social and political responsibility and attitude to having an impact on social, economic, and political life, his/her motivation and desire to spend time on solving public problems. *Regional-level factors* include the variables based on respondent’s region of residence that capture significant diversity in the reform orientation of regional authorities, electoral preferences, and quality of governance that affect population surveys of regions (Leonard, Nazarov, and Il’ina, 2019; Leonard, Nazarov, and Vakulenko, 2016).

## **Results**

### ***Propensity Score***

In this subsection, we discuss the major factors that predict individuals’ participation in CSOs (Table 1). We use these estimates to compute propensity scores of participation in CSOs and to construct the balanced sample of participants and nonparticipants by observed factors.



TABLE 1  
Determinants of Propensity of Participation in Civic Organizations

Variables	Coefficient	SE	p-Value
Individual-level characteristics			
Male	-0.088	0.150	0.559
Age	-0.152	0.103	0.140
Age <sup>2</sup>	0.004	0.002	0.106
Age <sup>3</sup> × 1,000	-0.026	0.015	0.087
Education (high school and below)			
Technical schools	0.196	0.180	0.276
College and above	0.442	0.204	0.031
Income (no or nonreport of income)			
0–10,000	0.525	0.257	0.041
10,000–20,000	0.669	0.229	0.003
20000+	0.971	0.244	0.000
No major religion groups	-0.261	0.182	0.152
Urban resident	0.413	0.169	0.015
Region-level heterogeneity			
Distance × 1,000	-1.896	0.552	0.001
Distance <sup>2</sup> × 1,000,000	0.180	0.105	0.087
Urban × Distance × 1,000	0.023	0.007	0.001
Urban × Distance <sup>2</sup> × 1,000,000	-0.002	0.001	0.118
Number of NGOs per 100,000	0.007	0.002	0.001
Economic crimes per 100,000	-0.011	0.006	0.049
Individual-level perception			
Motivation	0.356	0.050	0.000
Expectations	0.453	0.147	0.002

NOTE: Estimates are from the logit model. Number of observations—1,500 respondents with 285 respondents reporting participation in civic organization.

*Sociodemographics:* Among sociodemographic factors, the strong predictors of CSO participation are education, income, and urban residence. College graduates and individuals in the highest income bracket are substantially more likely to participate in civic organizations than their counterparts. The weaker associations we observe for age and religion. Starting with the youngest respondents, participation in CSO first decreases with age, then after reaching a certain point increases, and for the oldest subpopulation, it decreases again. Association with one of the major religion groups increases the respondent's participation in CSOs. Finally, we find no association for gender.

*Individual-level perceptions:* As is expected, both individual motivation and expectation variables are strongly and positively associated with the propensity of participation in CSOs.

*Regional-level heterogeneity:* Most regional-level factors are strong predictors of CSO participation. As we move from Moscow, participation in CSOs first decreases and then increases in the remote regions. The interaction terms of distance variables with the percentage of a region's urban population reveal that urbanization has a positive impact on CSO participation as we distance from Moscow. For the remote areas, urbanization may have some negative impact on participation; however, the result is not statistically significant at most conventional significance levels. As expected, the number of NGOs per population is associated positively, and number of economic crimes negatively, with CSO participation.

### ***Validity of Common Support***

The consistency of the matching approach depends on a common support condition. In Tables 2 and 3, we report a series of diagnostic tests to show that we meet this requirement, with tests based on a smoothed radius matching with a radius of 0.01.

Table 2 demonstrates that the matching approach significantly reduces the difference in observed characteristics between treatment and comparison groups, which renders the two respondent samples comparable. Using the 10 percent significance level, the conventional *t*-test reveals that in the unmatched sample the average representative of the treatment group and the average representative of the comparison group differ qualitatively in 10 of 19 observed characteristics. After matching, no substantial difference is observed for any variable. In the unmatched and matched samples, the mean and median biases drop from 15.6 and 13.2 percent to 3.1 and 3.6 percent, respectively. A positive bias reduction is achieved for all but two variables: age and an education dummy of technical school as the highest educational attainment. The *t*-test shows, however, that after matching, balancing is still preserved for these two factors.

Table 3 and Figure 2 demonstrate that there is significant unbalancing in the unmatched sample, but after employing the matching procedure we achieve a substantial overlap across select observed characteristics in the matched sample. For example, the absolute standardized difference of the means of the linear index of the propensity score in the treated and nontreated group is 13.6 (Rubio's *B*), which is well below the recommended level of 25. The ratio of treated to nontreated variances of the propensity score index, 0.82, is within the recommended range of 0.5 and 2. The likelihood ratio test confirms that the two groups of individuals are balanced in terms of observed characteristics. Figure 2 demonstrates that propensity score densities of CSO participants and nonparticipants in the matched sample are similar with the propensity score range for participants between [0.039, 0.813] with a mean of 0.266 and a standard deviation of 0.146. For nonparticipants the range is [0.039, 0.860] with a mean of 0.273 and a standard deviation of 0.158.

### ***Impact of CSOs on Civic Activism***

In Table 4, we report results for the relationships of CSO participation on four outcomes of civic activism. We report results for three different matching algorithms and compare these results with results from the unconditional differences in outcomes between two subgroups of respondents and conduct a regression using the same set of covariates as in  $X_i$  and the main regressor—indicator of CSO participation.

The unconditional difference in the first measure of civic activism, such as willingness to integrate with other members of society, between two groups of respondents is 21.2 percent points. In the OLS regression, after adjusting for differences  $X_i$ , the gap decreases to 9.3 percent. In PSM, the gap varies insubstantially across different matching algorithms. The lowest values, 7.2 and 7.6 percent, are produced by the weighted smoothed kernel matching algorithm. The most conservative estimate implies that participants of CSOs can have a 7.2 percent higher probability of integration with other members of society than nonparticipants.

The unconditional difference in the second measure of civic activism—participation in tenant meetings—between two groups of respondents is 20.3 percent points. In the OLS regression, the gap decreases to 13.6 percent. In PSM, the gap varies substantially across different matching algorithms but in all case it is statistically different from zero. The lowest

TABLE 2  
Balancing Diagnostic Before and After Matching

Variables	Unmatched Sample				Matched Sample			
	Participation	Nonparticipation	% Bias	t-Test	Participation	Nonparticipation	% Bias	t-Test
Male	0.425	0.456	-6.3	-0.96	0.430	0.426	0.8	0.09
Age	44.71	45.23	-3.0	-0.45	44.73	43.83	5.2	0.63
Age <sup>2</sup>	2,282	2,367	-5.1	-0.75	2,284	2,206	4.6	0.58
Age <sup>3</sup> /1,000	128.4	137.7	-7.0	-1.02	128.4	123.0	3.9	0.50
Education								
Technical schools	0.449	0.435	2.9	0.45	0.455	0.436	3.7	0.44
College and above	0.312	0.215	22.2	3.51	0.301	0.306	-1.2	-0.14
No major religion groups	0.196	0.258	-14.6	-2.16	0.197	0.182	3.5	0.44
Urban resident	0.775	0.647	28.6	4.18	0.771	0.780	-2.0	-0.26
Income								
0-10,000	0.186	0.207	-5.2	-0.78	0.190	0.187	0.7	0.09
10,000-20,000	0.393	0.374	4.0	0.61	0.391	0.392	-0.3	-0.03
20,000+	0.298	0.182	27.5	4.41	0.294	0.290	1.0	0.11
Distance	1,796	1,629	8.3	1.35	1,818	1,918	-4.9	-0.52
Distance <sup>2</sup> /1,000	8,132	5,870	14.0	2.35	8,286	9,020	-4.5	-0.45
Distance(2002) × Distance/1,000	134.1	113.9	13.2	2.18	136.0	144.4	-5.1	-0.22
Urban(2002) × Distance <sup>2</sup> /(1 million)	613.3	420.1	15.6	2.64	624.7	684.2	-4.8	-0.48
Number of NGOs per 100,000	96.89	93.60	8.5	1.31	96.91	96.47	1.1	0.13
Economic crimes per 100,000	66.74	70.05	-21.2	-3.02	66.70	66.14	3.6	0.24
Motivation	1.354	0.602	54.7	9.21	1.258	1.294	-2.6	-0.27
Expectations	0.509	0.340	34.6	5.35	0.502	0.477	5.0	0.57
No. of observations	285	1215			279	279		
Mean			15.6				3.1	
Median			13.2				3.6	

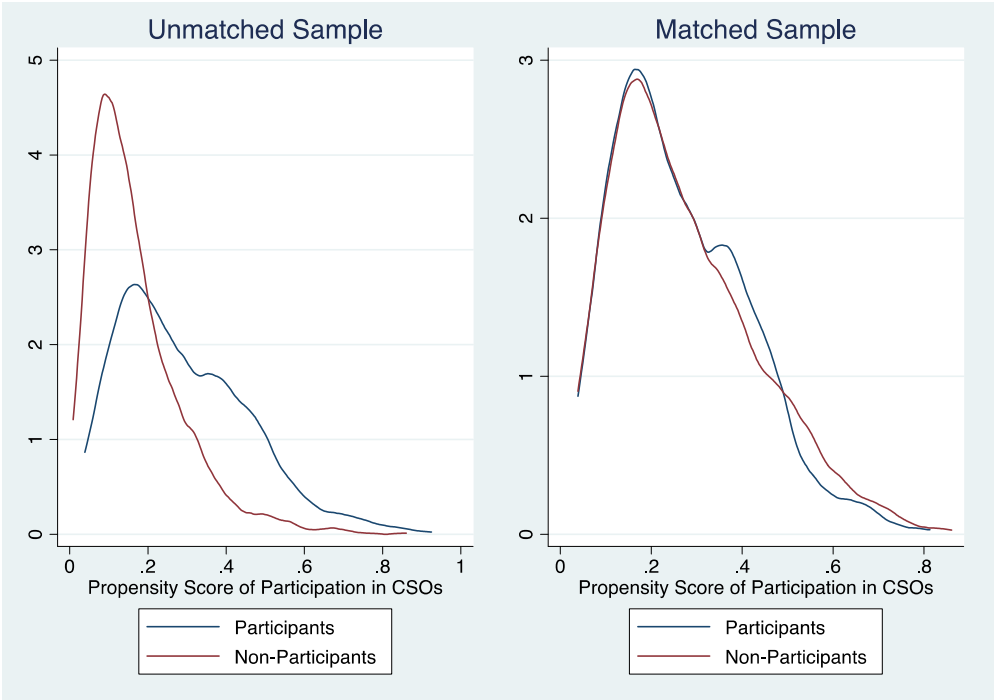
NOTE: "Matched Sample" is obtained using smoothed radius matching with radius 0.01.

TABLE 3  
Balancing Tests Before and After Matching

Description	Unmatched Sample		Matched Sample	
	Statistics	<i>p</i> -Value	Statistics	<i>p</i> -Value
Likelihood ratio $X^2$	173.94	0.000	2.58	1.000
Rubio's <i>B</i>	89.4		13.6	
Rubio's <i>R</i>	1.06		0.82	

NOTE: "Matched Sample" is obtained using smoothed radius matching with radius 0.01.

FIGURE 2  
Propensity Score Densities for Unmatched and Matched Samples



value, 9.0 percent, is produced by the 1-nearest neighbor algorithm. This estimate implies that participants of CSOs have a 9 percent higher probability of participation in tenant meetings than nonparticipants—a 56 percent reduction in bias from the unconditional estimate.

For the third measure of civic activism, engagement in charity activities, we reach the most consistent estimates across various matching algorithms. The lowest value, 14 percentage points, or a 14 percent higher probability of engagement in charity, we obtain with the 1-nearest neighbor matching algorithm. The unconditional difference is the highest among all measures of civic activism, 29.6 percent, and a reduction in bias due to utilization of PSM is 53 percent.

TABLE 4  
Results from Matching and Nonmatching Models

Outcome	Unmatched Sample			1-Nearest Neighbor Without Replacement			Smoothed Radius Matching			Weighted Smoothed Kernel Matching		
	Unadjusted		OLS		Est.		Est.		t-Stat	Est.		t-Stat
	Est.	t-Stat	Est.	t-Stat	Est.	t-Stat	Est.	t-Stat		Est.	t-Stat	
Integrate	0.212	6.6	0.093	3.1	0.098	2.5	0.076	2.2	2.0	0.099	2.1	2.1
Participate in a collective	0.203	8.1	0.136	4.5	0.091	2.3	0.123	3.7	4.3	0.120	2.7	2.7
Charity	0.296	9.2	0.181	5.7	0.140	3.4	0.169	4.8	4.4	0.144	3.0	3.0
Home improvement	0.237	8.4	0.152	4.6	0.125	3.0	0.128	3.6	3.4	0.130	2.8	2.8
No. on support	<b>285</b>		<b>285</b>		<b>264</b>		<b>279</b>		<b>272</b>	<b>284</b>		

For the final measure of civic activism, engagement in home improvement, PSM results produce a range of 12.5–13.0 percentage points with the most conservative estimate from the 1-nearest neighbor matching algorithm. The unconditional difference is 23.7 percent and a reduction in bias due to utilization of PSM is the lowest, a 47 percent reduction. OLS produces an estimate 2.7 percent higher than the most conservative PSM estimate.

In summary, the PSM analysis suggests that for all four measures, CSO participation positively impacts civic activism. The impact varies from a 7.2 to 15.8 percent higher propensity of civic activism for CSO participants. However, these estimates are only credible under the conditional independence assumption.

### ***Validity of Conditional Independence***

The PSM estimator assumes that the factors that are not included in the specification of CSO participation play no role in the selection for treatment. In examining the validity of this assumption, suppose first that this assumption is not valid. That is, the propensity score is both a function of observed variables in  $X_i$  and of some unobserved variable  $u_i$ ,  $p(X_i, u_i)$ . The odds that the  $i$ th respondent in the CSO participation group participates in CSO treatment is  $p(X_i, u_i)/(1 - p(X_i, u_i))$ . Likewise, the odds that the identical respondent  $j$  from the comparison group participates in CSO is  $p(X_j, u_j)/(1 - p(X_j, u_j))$ . Given that both respondents have identical covariates, and assuming the logit distribution for  $p$ , the odds ratio between two matched beneficiaries becomes:

$$\frac{p(X_i, u_i)(1 - p(X_i, u_i))}{p(X_j, u_j)(1 - p(X_j, u_j))} = \exp(\beta(u_i - u_j)), \quad (5)$$

where  $\beta$  is the parameter associated with the effect of the unobserved variable on the propensity of CSO participation. Following Rosenbaum (2002), the bounds for the odds ratio that matched pairs of respondents participate in CSOs are:

$$1/\Gamma \leq \frac{p(X_i, u_i)(1 - p(X_i, u_i))}{p(X_j, u_j)(1 - p(X_j, u_j))} \leq \Gamma, \quad (6)$$

where  $\Gamma$  is a degree of departure from the conditional independence assumption. Suppose  $\Gamma$  has value 1.10; this would imply that the unobserved variable,  $u_i$ , increases the CSO participated respondent's propensity to participate in CSOs by 10 percent relative to a nonparticipant's propensity, holding all other observed factors in  $X_i$  constant.

In the sensitivity analysis performed in this subsection, we compute the  $p$ -value of the hypothetical treatment effect for the assumed degree of departure from the conditional independence assumption. If the  $p$ -value is above the conventional threshold level (0.1), then we can conclude that for the given degree of departure from the conditional independence assumption, the hypothetical treatment effect is not different from zero. Thus, if the  $p$ -value is above 0.1 for a relatively low level of  $\Gamma$ , say 1.1–1.2, we can conclude that our ATET is upward biased due to our failure to control for some important factor in computation of propensity scores. Following Becker and Caliendo (2004), we use the Mantel-Haenszel test to compute the  $p$ -value of the hypothetical effect on the probability of propensity of CSO participation<sup>21</sup> and report results in Table 5.

<sup>21</sup>User-written STATA command “mhbounds” is used to implement the Rosenbaum bounding analysis.



TABLE 5  
*p*-Values of Rosenbaum Bounds

Gamma	Integrate <i>p</i> +-Value	Participate in a Collective <i>p</i> +-Value	Charity <i>p</i> +-Value	Home Improvement <i>p</i> +-Value
1	0.009	0.010	0.001	0.002
1.1	0.032	0.034	0.003	0.009
1.2	0.081	0.084	0.011	0.030
<b>1.3</b>	<b>0.165</b>	<b>0.166</b>	0.032	0.075
<b>1.4</b>	<b>0.279</b>	<b>0.277</b>	0.073	<b>0.152</b>
<b>1.5</b>	<b>0.412</b>	<b>0.406</b>	<b>0.141</b>	<b>0.258</b>
<b>1.6</b>	<b>0.530</b>	<b>0.537</b>	<b>0.233</b>	<b>0.384</b>
<b>1.7</b>	<b>0.404</b>	<b>0.418</b>	<b>0.344</b>	<b>0.515</b>
<b>1.8</b>	<b>0.294</b>	<b>0.309</b>	<b>0.463</b>	<b>0.434</b>
<b>1.9</b>	<b>0.204</b>	<b>0.219</b>	<b>0.494</b>	<b>0.321</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>0.137</b>	<b>0.149</b>	<b>0.386</b>	<b>0.228</b>

NOTE: Estimates with *p*-values above 10 percent are in bold.

Results show that for outcomes “integrate” and “participate in a collective,” the ATET can be biased upward due to the presence of some unobserved factor for the relatively moderate level of  $\Gamma$ , 1.3 and above. For the other two outcomes of civic activism, the *p*-values surpass the threshold level, 0.1, at relatively higher levels of  $\Gamma$ , suggesting that the ATETs for most outcomes are less likely to be significantly affected by something that has not been accounted for in the computation of propensity scores.

One should note that we present the *p*-values of treatment effects for different  $\Gamma$ s only in the presence of positive nonrandom selection into CSOs. Thus, we assume that the high value of  $u_i$  leads to the higher propensity of CSO participation and higher civic activism. For example, a highly motivated respondent is more likely to participate in CSOs and more likely to be civically active. Since we control for respondent’s motivation, our results of sensitivity analysis just confirm that our specification of propensity score is quite accurate and accounts for the possible effect of motivation on the respondent’s decision to participate in CSOs. The negative selection sounds less theoretically plausible since it is hard to come up with any unobserved factor that may increase participation in CSO but reduce civic activism. Results of sensitivity analysis do not reveal any drastic variations in *p*-values for different values of  $\Gamma$  in the case of negative selection, supporting this presumption.

### *Sensitivity to Model Specification and Sample Selection*

In this subsection, we report the results from several sensitivity analyses. In Table 6, we compare the main results from “Baseline Specification” with the set of controls discussed in the “Measurement of  $C_i$ ,  $Y_i$ , and  $X_i$  and Their Descriptive Statistics” section with three alternative specifications. In Specification 2, a four-category measure of income is substituted with a continuous measure of income to capture the varying impact of income on CSO participation. In Specification 3, to the baseline specification, we add the regional income per capita to account for the heterogeneity in standard of living across Russian regions. In Specification 4, we drop from the sample respondents who have difficulty in answering two civic activism questions, “charity” and “integrate,” who are coded as nonparticipants in the “Baseline Specification.” All specifications are estimated using the 1-nearest neighbor matching algorithm.

TABLE 6  
Sensitivity Analysis with Different Model Specifications

Outcome	Baseline Specification		Specification 2		Specification 3		Specification 4	
	Est.	t-Stat	Est.	t-Stat	Est.	t-Stat	Est.	t-Stat
Integrate	0.098	2.46	0.082	2.03	0.091	2.28	0.060	1.57
Participate in a collective	0.091	2.32	0.161	4.14	0.091	2.30		
Charity	0.140	3.41	0.200	4.78	0.133	3.23	0.177	4.25
Home improvement	0.125	3.00	0.169	4.01	0.152	3.65		
No. of participants on support	<b>264</b>		<b>255</b>		<b>263</b>		<b>248</b>	

Our results, first, show that the use of a continuous measure of income does not qualitatively change the initial findings. Despite the loss in degrees of freedom (the reduction in the number of observations used in the analysis because of losing respondents who refused to reveal or did not know their exact income), the estimates are stronger in a statistical sense. Second, accounting for regional differences in per capita income has no implication on the PSM estimates. We already control in our model for the direct impact of income on CSO participation. What regional difference in income may capture is the impact of differences in social norms across Russian regions. Since social norms and income vary substantially across Russian regions (e.g., Republic of Ingushetia and Khanty-Mansiysk autonomous okrug) in unpredictable directions, the association between regional per capita income and CSO participation is expected to be weak. Third, a more rigid sample selection strategy, eliminating respondents who did not identify whether they participated in certain civic activities, does not substantially change our results.

## Conclusion

In government and in population surveys in Russia, there is a widespread expectation that the third sector will increase over time (Jakobson, 2012), and that the populace would like nongovernmental nonprofit organizations to represent them in interactions with the public sector and anticipate that future CSOs will compete with public sector (as in most democracies). Over one-third of respondents surveyed in 2013 would like CSOs to supervise the work of state health, education, cultural, and social institutions; more than a quarter would like these organizations to provide education and health services (Yasin et al., 2013). We conclude that CSOs are self-sustaining and can continue to expand in Russia.

Using PSM, we present evidence that prior participation in a CSO can have a motivating influence, although heterogeneous, on further charity work, residential home improvement, willingness to integrate with other members of the society, and participation in tenant meetings in Russia, accounting for a nonrandom selection of respondents into CSOs. Our propensity score analysis shows that the decision to participate in civic activities is influenced by social, economic, and demographic characteristics of respondents. The findings support the notion that a CSO can be a “learning” organization about voluntarism in transition countries where voluntary civic activism was previously discouraged.

The numbers and diversity of CSOs has been steady and growing, along with civic activism, through 2018. Our study addresses the willingness of survey respondents to participate in further charity activities, which suggests a role for policy in support of voluntary associations for the spread of charity networks in civil society. *Ceteris paribus*, in view of the relative weakness of civil society in transition countries, there may be a high marginal effect of effort.

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