

Russian Patronal Politics Beyond Putin

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Abstract: Russian politics from the tsars through Vladimir Putin has been shaped by patronalism, a social equilibrium in which personal connections dominate, collective action happens primarily through individualized punishments and rewards, and trends in the political system reflect changing patterns of coordination among nationwide networks of actual acquaintances that typically cut across political parties, firms, nongovernmental organizations, and even the state. The “chaotic” Yeltsin era reflects low network coordination, while the hallmark of the Putin era has been the increasingly tight coordination of these networks’ activities around the authority of a single patron. In at least the next decade, Russia is unlikely to escape the patronalist equilibrium, which has already withstood major challenges in 1917 and 1991. The most promising escape paths involve much longer-term transitions through diversified economic development and integration with the Western economy, though one cannot entirely rule out that a determined new ruler might accelerate the process.

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While its seventy years of Communist rule often steals the limelight, Russia’s weightiest political legacy is arguably something even older and more stubborn: *patronalism*. Russian political actors experience patronalism as a particular kind of social environment in which they operate. In this environment, direct personal connections are not just useful, but absolutely vital to succeeding in politics and actually accomplishing anything once one secures office. These interpersonal connections can involve long-term relationships of diffuse exchange, as between close friends and relatives, but also elaborate systems of punishments and rewards that are meted out to specific individuals. The rule of law is typically weak, and what many call “corruption” or “nepotism” is the norm. People can and sometimes do rally for a cause with others with whom they share no personal connection, but this is the exception rather than the expectation. Indeed, when push comes to shove for individual actors in the system, personal connections tend to trump issue positions, ideology, or even identity. This is a world of

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patrons and clients, patronage politics, and the dominance of informal understandings over formal rules – all features well documented by historians of Russia from its very origins.¹ The rare disruptions in these patterns have been just that: rare disruptions of an enduring normality. And the implications have been powerful for Russian politics. These include cycles of authoritarian consolidation punctuated by “chaotic” moments of openness and competition that are widely understood locally as “breakdowns.”² True liberal democracy always seems out of reach somehow.

But just because something has endured for a millennium does not mean it can never change. Vladimir Putin has proven to be a master practitioner of patronal politics, but is it possible that he or a successor will eventually break Russia’s legacy of patronalism? We must concede that this is possible. Even those states that are today seen as paragons of the rule of law, impersonal politics, and liberal democracy emerged out of patronalistic origins not so long ago, arguably only in the last century or two.³ A few countries, such as Singapore, appear to have made such a transition much more quickly in recent times. Could Russia in the late Putin or post-Putin era chart a similar course?

The following pages discuss the implications of patronalism for Russian politics and explore different pathways through which change is conceivable. The conclusions are sobering, at least in the near term. Transforming society in the way that would be required takes not only the right conditions, but also a great deal of time, at least a generation or two. Patronalism, it would seem, is likely to remain a powerful environmental condition shaping Russian politics for the rest of the Putin era and likely well into the next.

In precise terms, patronalism is “a social equilibrium in which individuals organize their political and economic pursuits pri-

marily around the personalized exchange of concrete rewards and punishments, and not primarily around abstract, impersonal principles such as ideological belief or categorizations that include many people one has not actually met in person.”⁴ The centrality of personalized, as opposed to impersonal, exchange explains why phenomena like patron-client relations, patronage politics, weak rule of law, nepotism, and corruption all tend to be common in highly patronalistic societies. Highly patronalistic societies also tend to feature patrimonial (or neopatrimonial) forms of rule and low levels of social capital in the sense popularized by political scientist Robert Putnam.⁵ It is unsurprising that Russia features these things in generous measure, as generally do all post-Soviet states outside the European Union.⁶

One central implication of patronalism for politics is that the primary collective political “actors” are usually not formal institutions like political parties or interest groups, but rather extended networks of actual personal acquaintances. That is, collective political action occurs mainly through chains of people who directly interact with each other – regardless of whether the interaction occurs in a formal or informal framework – with each link largely activated through expectations of personal benefit or sanction. These arrangements need not be *quid pro quo*. In fact, actors can benefit by establishing extended networks of trust and long-term mutual benefit bound by close personal relationships. In Russia, such relationships commonly involve family bonds (including marriage and godparentage), growing up or living in the same neighborhood, being classmates in school (*odnokashniki*), regularly working together, friendship, or introduction by individuals who share such relationships with both parties. These relationships matter in all societies, but they assume overwhelming importance in highly patronalistic societies, typi-

cally trumping formal rules or convictions about policy issues as sources of expectations for how someone else will behave politically when the stakes are high. The long-term bonds by no means feel mercenary; instead, individuals tend to feel them very deeply, considering them a source of great personal enrichment and satisfaction (or great emotional distress when they sour or rupture).

Russian politics can appear unstable, including oscillations toward and away from authoritarianism and democracy, because a coordination problem governs how the major power networks in a society relate to one another. As personal connections are paramount, political-economic networks need direct, personal access to power to obtain the resources they require to survive and thrive. Indeed, because they are unable to rely on the rule of law or the impartial application of state power to protect their interests, it becomes imperative for them to extend their own personal connections to key centers of power or, at the very least, to avoid being on the losing side of any struggle for supreme power and to avoid alienating whichever other network wins. Of course, these networks' chief patrons do have preferences for different coalitional arrangements, and the decisions of the biggest networks regarding which coalition to join or how to hedge their bets impact each coalition's chances of winning and the distributional arrangements within that coalition. The coordination problem occurs, therefore, because all major networks are facing this same situation simultaneously.

One very important implication, then, is that the factors that facilitate networks' coordinating around a single patron tend to promote political closure. Would-be regime opponents will find it hard to obtain financing or media coverage since the most powerful networks are likely to avoid activities that might irritate the patron even without being explicitly told to do

so. This is the hallmark of a *single-pyramid system*, in which a country's most prominent networks are generally coordinated around the authority of a single patron or become marginalized (or are liquidated). At the same time, factors that complicate network coordination around a single patron tend to promote a robust but highly corrupt pluralism as networks jockey for position and compete with each other for influence, each interested in providing political cover for critics of their rivals – that is, a *competing-pyramid system*.⁷

While myriad factors might complicate or facilitate networks' coordinating around a single patron's authority, two appear particularly important in the post-Soviet region. First, a presidentialist constitution facilitates network coordination around a single patron by creating a symbol of dominance (the presidency) that only a single network can hold at any one time. Such single-pyramid systems can be expected to break down, however, when succession looms and different networks in the pyramid start jockeying to influence the succession in the direction they most prefer. Second, networks that wield the most popular support are likely to have special advantages in a succession struggle because they can potentially mobilize more (and more ardent) supporters both at the ballot box and in the streets. Recognizing this, networks trying to decide where to place their bets are more likely to support popular networks and less likely to support unpopular ones. In other words, high popularity promotes network coordination around an incumbent chief patron while low popularity tends to undermine such coordination. Periods when unpopularity coincides with succession struggles are likely to be most conducive to the breakdown of single-pyramid politics.

Macrolevel Russian political history since the breakup of the USSR can largely

be understood as successive periods of movement toward and away from single-pyramid and competing-pyramid systems. From this bird's-eye perspective, Putinite Russia is not fundamentally different from Yeltsinite Russia; the country during these two periods just happened to be at different stages of regime cycles that are typical of countries with presidentialist constitutions and varying degrees of public support for the incumbents.

Overall, the dominant dynamic in post-Soviet Russia's regime, ever since Boris Yeltsin defeated his parliament in the violent clashes of fall 1993 and then installed a presidentialist constitution in the December 1993 referendum, has clearly been a slow, net slide toward greater political closure. Russia's most powerful networks, all well represented in the spheres of both business and politics and cutting across formal institutions like parties or branches of government, have generally come in three types: "oligarchs" (those growing mainly out of the corporate world), regional political machines (typically led by governors), and state-based networks (extending primarily out of state structures). These were highly uncoordinated in the aftermath of the USSR's demise,⁸ but Yeltsin pulled out all the presidential stops to cobble together a (barely) winning coalition for his 1996 reelection, persuaded to do so rather than cancel the election by "privatization tsar" Anatolii Chubais.⁹ This coalition included a motley mix of state-based networks, some key regional machines (such as vote-rich Bashkortostan and Tatarstan), and most oligarchs (who supplied slanted media coverage that gave Yeltsin a major advantage). Indeed, this feat was arguably the first to demonstrate the power of the patronal presidency to generate an electoral win through network coordination because he had so little else upon which to rely, with his support in the single digits just months before the election and the

betting money favoring Communist Party leader Gennadii Zyuganov.

After Putin was elected president in 2000, Russia entered a new period of gradual closure of the political space. This involved not only eliminating some networks that had initially opposed his rise (as with oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky's network), but also by co-opting others (such as Yurii Luzhkov's Moscow machine) and then steadily finding them all niches in the system that simultaneously gave them room to prosper while also limiting their ability to engage in unwanted spheres of activity (for example, Putin's reported 2000 deal with the oligarchs and the elimination of direct elections for governors in 2004–2005, while reappointing most of them). By 2007, when Putin announced he would leave the presidency for the prime ministership, his Kremlin had developed an elaborate system to regulate oligarch participation in elections and had brought the three most influential television stations almost entirely under de facto state editorial control. Putin's return to the presidency in 2012 resumed the trend of political closure, with an expansion of his own personal networks' role in controlling mass media and more aggressive use of the criminal justice system to selectively persecute those who dared oppose him. With the seizure of Crimea and the start of the war in the Donbas in 2014, the political screws tightened still further. His 2016 decision to create a National Guard reporting to him personally, and binding to it the brutal network of Chechnya strongman Ramzan Kadyrov, is perhaps the latest major step in this process of increasingly tight coordination of Russia's major networks around Putin as chief patron.

That said, the gaps in the chronology just presented (in particular 1997–1999 and 2007–2012) belie the notion that Russia's path to political closure has been monotonic. Indeed, these periods all reflect moments when uncertainty regarding presi-

dential succession underpinned periods of pronounced political ferment in Russia that involved certain sorts of political opening. The period leading up to the 1999–2000 election cycle was a classic competing pyramid situation brought about by Yeltsin's expected departure from politics, with the primary battle being fought by two roughly equal coalitions of oligarchs, regional machines, and state officials angling to succeed Yeltsin: the Fatherland-All Russia coalition led by Luzhkov and former prime minister Yevgenii Primakov versus the Kremlin's coalition in support of Putin. It is important to remember that Putin was not initially considered a favorite in this race. He became the presumptive winner only after his strong military response to a series of deadly apartment building bombings in September 1999 led to a surge in his popularity, and after the pro-Putin Unity bloc's strong second-place finish in the December 1999 Duma election proved that he could convert his popularity into officially counted votes.

Acute tensions among networks again emerged with the 2007–2008 election cycle, when Putin fostered expectations that he would leave the presidency without giving a clear idea as to whether the succession would lead to a real transfer of power. The key difference between this first "succession" from Putin and the succession from Yeltsin is that Putin (unlike Yeltsin) was in robust health and at the height of his popular support. Because polls throughout 2007–2008 showed that large shares of the electorate would vote for whomever Putin endorsed, Russia's political-economic networks had little incentive to mobilize popular opposition and push for more democracy, instead struggling both overtly and covertly to influence Putin's decision and to better position themselves for whatever new arrangement would emerge. It was during this period, for example, that competing networks with roots in rival securi-

ty services resorted to tactics that included arresting each other's representatives and exposing each other's misdeeds in media outlets.¹⁰ Once Putin made clear that he would retain a hold on formal power as prime minister and leader of the United Russia Party but cede the presidency itself to a close associate with a more "liberal" reputation, Dmitrii Medvedev, the resulting uncertainty as to where future power would rest fostered a noticeable opening of the political space (some called this period a "thaw")¹¹ even as Medvedev presided over a continued contraction of ballot-eligible alternatives, replaced some of the most powerful governors, and lengthened presidential terms from four to six years effective in 2012.

When Putin and Medvedev once again put succession on the table by declaring they would switch positions for the 2011–2012 election cycles as their popularity was weakening in the wake of the 2008–2009 financial crisis, a new political opening emerged when slapdash efforts to boost the United Russia Party's vote through fraud and crude pressure in the December 2011 Duma election sparked massive protests in Moscow and other major cities. The regime's initial response, interestingly enough, was not an immediate crackdown but instead a retreat. Controls on media were relaxed, and opposition figures previously denied coverage appeared as commentators or even the subjects of neutral news coverage. Video cameras were installed in virtually all polling places for the 2012 presidential election. Direct contested elections, at least of some sort, were restored for governors. And rules for registering parties were relaxed, resulting in many opposition forces gaining official recognition. Once Putin was safely reelected and the "new" old patron once again firmly in place, the regime took a decidedly more authoritarian turn. Those who had ventured the furthest in flirting with op-

position politics from 2008 to 2012, such as oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov, increasingly found themselves under pressure to fall more firmly back into line, especially after 2014, when Putin's popularity soared into the stratosphere.

It is not impossible for Russia to escape the social equilibrium of patronalism in the foreseeable future. What might a non-patronal or "low-patronalism" Russia look like? In general, it would be a country where individuals coordinated their activities around formal rules and laws as a matter of course; where violators would routinely suffer either legal or social sanction regardless of their personal connections; where people's personal convictions on broad policy issues would normally trump the interests of their networks; where merit according to formalized criteria would typically overrule personal or family ties when a valued position is at stake; where revelations of corruption are shocking rather than wryly accepted as the norm; and where people would frequently join and contribute money to organizations led by people to whom they have no extended personal connection but with whom they share certain values or valued characteristics.

This would certainly be a very different Russia, though it would not necessarily be a democratic one. Nazi Germany, to take perhaps the most extreme example, was not organized on patronalistic principles. And to offer a much more benign example, Lee Kuan Yew successfully broke Singapore's patronalistic equilibrium, making it one of the least corrupt countries in the world, but the regime he created shows how formal rules and policy commitments can underpin authoritarianism. The majority of low-patronalism countries from Canada to Sweden, however, are liberal democracies. Indeed, to be a fully liberal democracy surely requires that formal procedures trump the politics of person-

al connections and personalized rewards and punishments.¹² Thus, if Russia were to make such a transition from patronalism, its prospects for full democratization would radically improve.

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What are the chances that Russia could realize such a transition? The chief problem is that patronalism is not simply a habit that a good media campaign could get people to kick. Instead, it is much better understood as a complex, deeply entrenched equilibrium in how people relate to one another when it comes to political activity. Accordingly, it can be very difficult to shift the realm of politics to a different equilibrium.

Let us reflect a little more on why this is the case. People everywhere generally oppose things like "corruption" and "nepotism" and want to be able to rely on the law to protect them. But what drives the equilibrium is the pervasive *expectation* that these behaviors are the norm rather than the rare exception in important spheres of life. And when they expect virtually everyone to practice corruption and nepotism and believe that they cannot rely on others to obey or enforce the law, then they face very strong incentives to engage in the very same practices themselves if they want to get anything done – even good things.

A few examples help illustrate the force – and morality – behind patronalism's endurance. A mayor who completely eschews such practices – refusing to make any payoffs, to maintain a "favor bank" with powerful higher-ups, or to pressure the right people using the resources at her disposal – might well find herself unable to get a company to build a factory in her city that would create much-needed jobs. Without some connection to the mayor, this factory would likely just go to another city where the mayor "plays ball." While the honest mayor might be considered a hero in Western societies for standing up to her corrupt surroundings, to her constituents who de-

pend on her to land jobs for their city, she would likely be considered ineffective and even incompetent. Ironically, these same constituents might all the while feel angry at the rampant corruption in their society. Moreover, when people do not expect others to observe the rule of law, appointing one's relatives as your deputies or awarding a state contract to a close friend makes sense as a way of ensuring you are not cheated, which can better position you to do your job effectively. Or, at least, it guarantees that if you are cheated, the lost resources go to someone you like who might do you a solid later. Bribe-taking can also be useful for something other than satisfying greed since participation in elaborate rent-seeking schemes can signal one's loyalty to the system, while also giving its practitioners resources that can be used to achieve whatever goals that individual needs to achieve, including the goals of the organization the person represents.¹³ Of course, coercion is also frequently part of such arrangements, and a weak rule of law has long been argued to facilitate companies' turning to mafias to enforce contracts. These mafias, of course, are also widely known for generating their own demand for "protection."¹⁴ Overall, in highly patronalistic societies, such things are frequently seen as "just the way things work here," words often accompanied by an ironic smile and a sigh. And so the equilibrium is continuously reproduced.

This helps explain why patronalism has been so tenacious in Russia over centuries, not just decades. Arguably emerging with the first human communities that were small enough for everyone to know each other and in which the most natural way to govern was through personal connections, patronalism is best thought of as the world historical norm, with the West being a highly contingent exception.¹⁵ Even a cursory look at works on politics and society in precommunist Russia makes quite clear that patronalistic practices, including

pervasive patron-client relations, were the norm centuries before the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917; so this cannot be blamed on Communist rule.¹⁶ The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution can, in some sense, be understood as an antipatronal revolution, an attempt to replace the old "corrupt" politics with a new future governed by socialist principles and formal organization, treating people not according to who they knew but who they were and what they believed and valued. But it was not long before a new leader emerged who realized he could undermine the true reformers like Nikolai Bukharin and Leon Trotsky by resorting to the old, hard practice of patronal politics, crushing them with the Communist Party machine he constructed based on personal connections in the 1920s and 1930s. Hope was likewise dashed with the defeat of Mikhail Gorbachev's effort to create a democratic and prosperous socialism, and the choices that post-Soviet leaders made to consolidate power through the temptingly available tools of patronalism; this was essentially the lesson that Chubais taught Yeltsin in the course of winning reelection in 1996.

The key to successfully and significantly reducing the degree of patronalism in politics is to somehow create a pervasive and durable expectation across the whole of society (though especially elites) that people will no longer engage in the same practices as before. And this belief must be sustained not only during a moment of revolution, but throughout the initial years of a new regime when disillusionment can arise and a leader can be sorely tempted to resort to patronal politics to stay in power. For this reason, not only have very few leaders anywhere in the world seriously tried it, but even fewer have stuck with it and succeeded.

Only in Georgia after the Rose Revolution did a post-Soviet leader make a notewor-

thy effort to reduce the scope of patronalism in politics. But most now agree that despite certain impressive reforms, including ridding the traffic police of corruption, Mikheil Saakashvili's efforts did not go nearly far enough, with his regime retaining and vigorously engaging a solid (if less outwardly visible) patronalistic core. One can also find a few limited spheres where patronalism is firewalled out in a highly patronalistic society, as political scientist Juliet Johnson has shown occurred with Kyrgyzstan's central banking system under the pressures and incentives supplied by the international financial community. Johnson also shows, however, how difficult such bubbles of formality can be to sustain.¹⁷ In a country where it dominates the highest levels of politics, patronalism abhors a vacuum. For such reasons, Lee Kuan Yews – and even Mikheil Saakashvilis – are rare.

Russia's prospects for true antipatronal transformation, therefore, seem slim indeed in the next decade or two. Its direct involvement in conflicts from Ukraine to Syria could create pressures to improve effectiveness by reducing the degree of patronalistic practices in the military.¹⁸ But history suggests it would be unlikely to spread to other spheres without concerted leadership effort. Perhaps Putin could one day wake up and decide to use his immense authority to truly remake Russian society.¹⁹ But it is hard for leaders to break up and rebuild anew the very boat on which they float, and there are strong arguments that he would face a great risk that an impartial legal system could put him (or at least his close friends) in danger of imprisonment.²⁰ If his successor comes from inside his system, he or she would likely face the same risks.

An antipatronal transformation, therefore, may be most likely if oppositions come to power who are somehow credibly committed to thoroughgoing reforms, either in an actual revolution or in an election victo-

ry that feels revolutionary (the latter being less painful for Russians). There is a strong case to be made that this is what happened in Georgia, with Saakashvili's party-building strategy being key to his credibility as a reformer.²¹ But too many revolutions have had their patronalistic Thermidors to inspire much optimism in Russia.

It is at least conceivable that certain more gradual changes could begin and accumulate in the next decade or two that could weaken patronalism. One could be robust economic growth, as has arguably facilitated the transition from the strongest forms of patronalism in much of Western Europe and North America. Economic development holds the potential to help individuals feel less dependent on more powerful patrons for their well-being, encouraging them to engage in more activities based on their beliefs in spite of pressures that might be applied to them. The rebellion of Russia's "creative classes" that was part of the massive street protests against election fraud and Putin's return to the presidency indicates that this path is not completely unrealistic for Russia. Indeed, these protesters were not simply expressing their dislike of a particular individual or even their objection to a particular instance of election fraud. They were also expressing their hope for a new kind of future for Russia, one without corruption or political manipulations.

For economic development to bring that kind of change, it would have to come not simply from a rise in energy prices, which would leave individuals as dependent as before on higher-ups linked to the state, but from a broad diversification of the economy that empowers something like an independent middle class. The problem is that those who hold resources today have incentive to prevent this from happening, primarily by seeking to control any "diversification" themselves either from the outset or through predatory "raiding" practices.

Whether emerging independent economic actors will be able to form the alliances necessary to protect themselves from such encroachment on a large scale remains to be seen, and will be difficult given the strength of their foes. At best, it would probably require more than a generation for this process to take a sufficiently sturdy hold to create expectations of a new social norm emerging.²² The path of economic development may in fact be Russia's most promising, but it is a very long and contingent one at best.

It is also possible that patronalism could become overwhelmed by the emergence of strong political partisanship or the development of deep ideological commitments that could start to overpower the pull of patronal networks. That is, perhaps people in Russia will start to buy into certain belief systems so deeply that they become (*en masse*) more willing than before to break with the demands of their own friends and family and withstand individualized rewards and punishments. Political scientist Stephen Hanson, for example, shows how initially marginalized ideologues have often gone on to create the most powerful parties, since their deeply held personal commitments lead them to adopt a long time-horizon until the point at which their time arrives and they expand their base to transform society. To be sure, almost since the beginning, Russia could boast brave individuals willing to take on enormous risks and pay the highest of personal prices in order to stand up for their beliefs, ranging from tsarist-era revolutionaries to Soviet dissidents to hard-core street protesters in the late Putin era. They have rarely, however, managed to get the buy-in of large numbers, remaining marginalized and sometimes even ridiculed by average citizens. It would seem likely to take a major national trauma to generate the kind of competing belief-systems necessary to completely restructure politics away from

patronalistic practices. And even when such an effort initially succeeds, as was arguably the case one century ago when the Bolsheviks seized power and attempted to impose ideological rather than patronalistic practices of rule, history suggests that it is likely to succumb before long to the temptation to resort to patronalism, as with Stalin's rise to power.

We should also not rule out that Russia could chart a path away from patronalism through democracy. For example, if Russia were to experience some kind of reform that systematically complicated the coordination of its highly patronalistic networks around a single chief patron, the resulting political competition could over time provide at least some incentive for politicians actually to follow through on campaign promises to combat corruption. One such reform could be a shift to a nonpresidentialist constitution, a shift that sometimes occurs when an outgoing president does not trust his or her likely successors and thus tries to weaken the office they would inherit, or when a coalition takes power and decides to cement a power-sharing deal with constitutional change. One problem is that research into the causes of corruption indicates that it can take many decades for democratic competition to noticeably dampen corruption.²³ And other research has found that democratic competition in highly patronalistic societies can actually increase demand for corrupt practices as politicians seek to use every tool in their arsenal to win struggles for power.²⁴

One final possibility deserves mention. Russia might one day integrate far more strongly into the international political economy than it has so far. Since this international political economy is still dominated by the West, such integration could gradually serve to weaken Russian patronalism by providing increasingly important and lucrative environments for surviving and thriving without patronalistic practices.

And even if this integration primarily goes not through the West but via Asia-Pacific centers of growth where patronalism is the norm, this could still mean that Russia's biggest patronal networks would gain strong interests outside of Russia. In this case, even if these international centers of growth do not insist on democratization, the effect could be liberalizing because it would weaken the dependence of Russia's chief economic actors on their patrons back at home. From the vantage point of 2017, however, this seems very unlikely to happen in the next decade. Russia has been sanctioned by the international community for its seizure of Crimea and support for an insurgency in the Donbas, and the recent trend has been toward Russia's isolation from, rather than integration with, the world economy. While reversal is quite possible in the next ten years, the process is likely to be slow and nowhere near extensive enough in the next decade to translate into a significant reduction in Russian patronalism.

Overall, at least for the next decade or two, it would appear that the Russian Federation is unlikely to escape the social equilibrium of patronalism that has shaped politics in that part of the world for centuries. By no means does this imply Russian politics will be static. To the contrary, while patronalism itself is stable, its politics are highly dynamic and sometimes volatile, with seeming authoritarian stability often masking a deeper fragility. Where exactly Russia will be in its regime cycles at any given moment ten or twenty years down the road is hard to say. But a conservative prediction based on the signs as of 2017 would hold that Russia is likely to continue to experience the same patterns of constant change in how its political-economic networks are arranged, with specifics governed by lame duck syndromes, the ebbs and flows of public support, and leaders' own innovations in how to manage the whole process in a changing environment.

ENDNOTES

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- ⁷ Hale, *Patronal Politics*, 10.
- ⁸ Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970–2000*, 2nd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- ⁹ On Yeltsin and the Yeltsin period more generally, see Timothy J. Colton, *Yeltsin: A Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).
- ¹⁰ For an excellent forensic analysis of the complex network struggles during this period, see Richard Sakwa, *The Crisis of Russian Democracy: The Dual State, Factionalism, and the Medvedev Succession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- ¹¹ See, for example, the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, “The Medvedev Thaw: Is It Real? Will It Last?” June 23, 2009, 111th Cong., 1st Sess. https://www.csce.gov/sites/helsinkicommission.house.gov/files/The%20Medvedev%20Thaw%20-%20Is%20it%20Real,%20Will%20it%20Last_Compiled.PDF (accessed May 24, 2016).
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- ¹⁵ North, Wallis, and Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders*.
- ¹⁶ See, for example, Keenan, “Muscovite Political Folkways”; LeDonne, “Ruling Families in the Russian Political Order, 1689–1825”; Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*; and Ransel, “Character and Style of Patron-Client Relations in Russia.”
- ¹⁷ Juliet Johnson, *Priests of Prosperity: How Central Bankers Transformed the Postcommunist World*, 1st ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2016).
- ¹⁸ Brian Taylor, *State-Building in Putin’s Russia: Policing and Coercion after Communism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- ¹⁹ On the challenges leaders face effecting reform on even a lesser scale, see George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- ²⁰ Dawisha, *Putin’s Kleptocracy*; and Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013).
- ²¹ Bret Barrowman, *The Reformer’s Dilemmas: The Politics of Public Sector Reform in Clientelistic Political Systems* (Ph.D. diss., The George Washington University, 2015).
- ²² Stanislav Markus, *Property, Predation, and Protection: Piranha Capitalism in Russia and Ukraine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- ²³ Daniel Treisman, “The Causes of Corruption: A Cross-National Study,” *Journal of Public Economics* 76 (3) (June 2000): 399–457.
- ²⁴ Maria Popova, “Political Competition as an Obstacle to Judicial Independence: Evidence from Russia and Ukraine,” *Comparative Political Studies* 43 (10) (October 2010): 1202–1229; and Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, *Political Consequences of Crony Capitalism inside Russia* (South Bend, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 2010).