

# CARNEGIE PAPERS

## **Overmanaged Democracy in Russia:**

Governance  
Implications of  
Hybrid Regimes

Nikolai Petrov  
Masha Lipman  
Henry E. Hale

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*Can autocratic  
governments that  
incorporate elements  
of democracy provide  
good governance?*

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## Summary

Can autocratic governments that incorporate elements of democracy provide good governance? The authors approach this question with an inductive study of Russia, which is widely regarded as a leading hybrid regime and an innovator in the field. They argue that for most of the past decade, and especially during Vladimir Putin's second term as president, Russia has been characterized by a hybrid regime that strongly resembles those in many other Eurasian states, as well as Venezuela and Iran. This type of regime combines a high degree of state centralization with the gutting of democratic institutions, and their systematic replacement with *substitutions* that are intended to serve some of their positive functions without challenging the incumbent leaders' hold on power.

The label chosen for this system, *overmanaged democracy*, reflects three central findings. First, this system has enabled Russia's leaders to govern more by a *non-participation pact* with society than by outright repression—though some very repressive elements play a role. Second, the more centralized this system becomes, the more likely political outcomes are to diverge from social ideals, and the more vulnerable the regime becomes to shocks. The survival of the regime depends heavily on the personal reputation and skill of the top leaders, who must increasingly exercise manual control over the system. And third, political outcomes in a hybrid regime are closer to social ideals and the system is less vulnerable than would be the case in a regime that relies primarily on outright repression—allowing no political opposition to exist and creating no substitutions to serve any of the functions of democratic institutions. But the authors conclude that while overmanaged democracy may be stable in the short term, it will not last in the long term. In Russia's case, the system is unlikely to survive Putin himself.

Many studies now document and explain the existence of hybrid regimes, political systems combining elements of both democracy and autocracy.<sup>1</sup> Few, however, systematically explore their consequences for anything other than democracy itself, which hybridity compromises by its very definition.<sup>2</sup> The exceptions have largely been studies of important things (such as state failure and business confidence) that happened to find important correlations with regime hybridity.<sup>3</sup> In this study, we address the following question: What are the implications of regime hybridity for governance, which we generally define as the capacity of the state to perform for the benefit of its citizenry?<sup>4</sup> We approach this question inductively by examining the case of Russia, widely recognized in the 2000s as an innovator and even a leading “global supplier” in subverting democratic content without establishing full-fledged dictatorship.<sup>5</sup>

For most of the 2000s, especially during Vladimir Putin’s second term as president, Russia has been characterized by a particular type of hybrid regime that strongly resembles regimes in other Eurasian states such as Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, as well as in Venezuela, Iran, and other countries beyond post-Soviet Asia.<sup>6</sup> This type of regime combines very high degrees of state power centralization with the gutting of democratic institutions, and it systematically replaces these institutions with or converts them into *substitutions*. These substitutions are not “fake” or “virtual.” They are in fact intended to serve some of the positive functions of real democratic institutions, such as providing the regime with societal feedback on pending legislation—but without holding authorities fully accountable before the public and without putting rulers’ hold on power at risk in the way that true democratic institutions would.<sup>7</sup> One example of this is the Public Chamber (*Obshchestvennaia palata*) introduced by then-President Putin in 2004 in part to substitute for Russia’s “domesticated” parliament, which was no longer an adequate channel for policy innovation coming from society. The Public Chamber brings together a handpicked set of civil society representatives for consultation; Putin later even gave it a formal role in drafting legislation.<sup>8</sup>

Our label for this system, *overmanaged democracy*, reflects our three central findings: This system has enabled Russia’s current leaders to govern more by what we call a *non-participation pact* with society than by the outright repression of society—though some very repressive elements play a role; the more excessive the centralization in this system, the more likely policy outputs are to diverge from the social ideal and the more vulnerable the regime becomes to shocks; and this divergence and vulnerability are less than would be the case with a regime that relies primarily on outright repression, allowing no political opposition to exist and not even creating substitutions that serve at least some of the functions of democratic institutions. In the pages that follow, we walk readers through this logic as it relates to Russia, concluding with implications for comparative theory as well as the endeavor to understand Russian politics

under Putin and his formal successor as president, Dmitry Medvedev. In particular, we suspect that the system is unlikely to survive Putin himself and is likely—even under his watch—to devolve into either outright dictatorship or a more democratic system, with national election cycles likely punctuating any such development.

## The Concept of Overmanaged Democracy

Overmanaged democracy is a political system with three features: highly centralized state authority concentrated in the executive branch; formal institutions of democracy, including room for at least some candidates to oppose incumbent authorities on the ballot in elections to powerful posts; and the systematic gutting of these institutions and their frequent functional replacement by substitutions—often either outside the constitutional framework or in violation of the spirit of the constitution—that are created by and highly dependent on central authorities. What distinguishes overmanaged democracy from more run-of-the-mill “managed democracy” are its higher degree of centralization, its narrower space for genuine political competition, and the central role of substitutions.<sup>9</sup> We conceive of overmanaged democracy as a Weberian “ideal type”: While it does not exist in any country as a pure (“ideal”) form, it distills and thereby highlights an essential regime logic approximated to varying degrees by polities in multiple countries. A number of countries, as noted above, have developed systems that resemble the overmanaged democracy model we describe, but Russia’s most closely approaches the ideal type.<sup>10</sup> Other countries are also clearly borrowing from the Russian model as they move closer to this ideal type, as with Kyrgyzstan’s recent centralization of power that included, among other things, the establishment of a “Public Chamber” in December 2008. All this makes Russia particularly useful as a theory-building case study.<sup>11</sup>

The creation of a whole network of substitutions is perhaps the most prominent, interesting, yet understudied feature that distinguishes overmanaged democracy from other types of hybrid regimes, including ordinary managed democracy. Many works that recognize such substitutions portray them as nothing more than window dressing, intended only as a kind of Potemkin village to deceive the international community and perhaps a regime’s own population into thinking the country is more democratic than it really is.<sup>12</sup> No doubt such arguments have some validity, because “substitutions of democracy” are surely intended at least partly to create a democratic appearance and thereby enhance regime legitimacy.

But there can also be an important sense in which the substitutions are not merely “fake” or “virtual.” In particular, they frequently represent efforts by the regime to reap the benefits for state authorities that true democratic

institutions provide—without the authorities subjecting themselves to the risk of losing office and the intensified need to respond to public sentiment that democratic institutions bring by their very definition. We elaborate below on just what benefits these are and just how substitutions are intended to compensate for them.<sup>13</sup> We conclude, though, that the net effects on governance are at best mixed, even from the rulers' perspective.

Our use of the term “overmanaged democracy,” naturally, does not mean that we are pronouncing Russia a form of democracy. Instead, it is a kind of hybrid regime in which, among other things, the authoritarian elements generally overshadow the democratic ones. Our inclusion of the word “democracy” in the term “overmanaged democracy” (instead of adopting a term like “undermanaged autocracy”<sup>14</sup>) is based on three considerations. First, there is a historical consideration arising out of our inductive study of Russia. Russia has moved to overmanaged democracy from the more democratic side of the regime spectrum by steadily increasing state efforts to control (“manage”) a political system that had previously been more liberal (if still far from the democratic ideal) rather than by liberalizing a previously more authoritarian system. In fact, this movement provides the primary empirical basis for comparison in evaluating the impact of overmanaged democracy on Russia. Moreover, we observe that many other countries—including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Venezuela—that have developed something similar to Russia's overmanaged democracy system have likewise done so by moving from a political system that was clearly more open.

Second, part of what is interesting about overmanaged democracy is precisely that the ruling authorities may not actually want to give up democracy: They just want always to win and to be confident that this will continue. Eliminating democracy's uncertainty obviously removes the very core of democracy.<sup>15</sup> But the rulers of Russia and most of the other countries we categorize in this way have not yet attempted to go all the way to full authoritarianism, and we posit that this is because democracy provides certain benefits to a regime that it endeavors to preserve.<sup>16</sup> That is, overmanaged democracy can be thought of as an effort by incumbent authorities to have their democratic cake and eat it, too.<sup>17</sup> This also makes the conceptual reference point of democracy appropriate to employ here at the same time that we recognize that the regime is clearly, by the most authoritative definitions, not democratic.<sup>18</sup> We elaborate below on exactly what democracy's benefits are to rulers.

Third, because of these systems' rulers' efforts to reap the benefits of democracy and their unwillingness to follow China or Turkmenistan in scrapping contested elections altogether, these regimes are forced to pay at least some attention to public opinion, the *demos* in democracy. That is, it is significant that authorities in overmanaged democracies have generally not, as a whole,



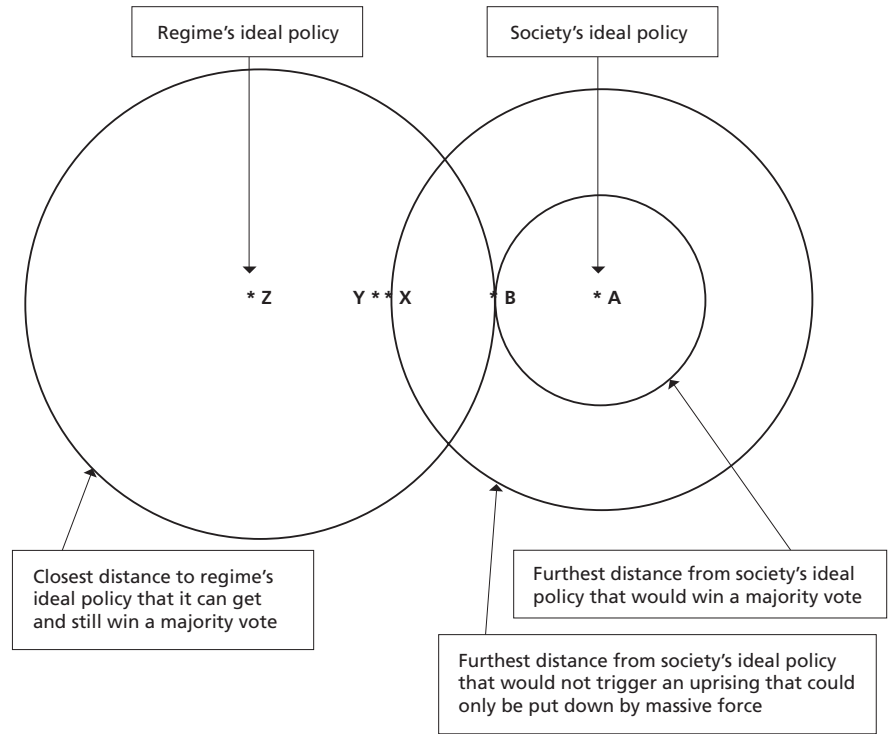
ridden roughshod over public opinion to the extent that a fully authoritarian regime might do.<sup>19</sup> In fact, in Russia, some observers have noted that Putin and his strategists are almost obsessed over his standing in public opinion, leading one analyst puckishly to dub Russia a *ratingocracy*.<sup>20</sup> While all regimes have an interest in at least some public support, Russian leaders' extreme attention to it seems to bespeak an important feature of the political system.

We now turn to elaborating exactly how all this is so, developing a framework for understanding the broad implications of overmanaged democracy in three important realms of governance: leadership accountability before society; the generation and dissemination of information needed for policy making; and the development of state policy-making capacity. We do not attempt an exhaustive treatment here, leaving that task for a longer analysis that is in progress. Instead, our goal here is the most modest one of demonstrating the plausibility of our argument with extensive use of examples from Russia.<sup>21</sup>

## Accountability Before Society

A starting claim is that overmanaged democracy does in fact provide for a certain leadership accountability before the citizenry, but that the more it excises competition and uncertainty from formal democratic processes and the more it replaces autonomous institutions with centrally controlled substitutions, it tends to result in policies further from the social ideal and to create a significant long-run risk of crisis in the system. The Venn diagram in Figure 1, while obviously a gross simplification, helps us see how this is the case. It conceives of a space defined along two abstract policy dimensions, with point A being the particular policy on those two dimensions that most benefits the whole of society and point Z being the point that best serves the interests of state rulers.<sup>22</sup> The inner circle around society's ideal point A represents the set of points farthest from that ideal point for which a majority vote could be found in a referendum or election in a free and fair contest. In a democracy, incumbent authorities hoping to be reelected generally offer voters policies somewhere within that inner circle; otherwise, they will lose to opponents who can make such an offer. Incumbents will thus generally seek to offer voters the policy at point B, the point closest to the rulers' ideal point that would get a majority vote of support. If they fail to do so, the incumbents are replaced by an opposition party according to generally agreed rules with relatively little disruption—just the effort required for individuals to put a mark on a ballot and the transaction costs involved in peaceably handing off the reins of leadership to a new party.

**Figure 1. State and Societal Policy Preferences in a Two-Dimensional Issue Space**



### Making Elections More Manageable

In an overmanaged democracy, incumbent authorities seek to escape the limits imposed on them by free and fair elections, hoping to get society to accept something outside of the inner circle defined by point B, something that would not win a democratic majority vote. They do this by manipulating election laws, corrupting the electoral process, and/or finding other, imaginative, ways to strongly “tilt the playing field” toward incumbents. The Russian case is instructive as to how a creative regime can emasculate the electoral process even while leaving some genuine opposition in the race, allowing the regime to offer policies much closer to its ideal than to society’s.<sup>23</sup> Without attempting an exhaustive treatment, we highlight six general trends observable in the 2000s, especially after Putin began his second term as president in 2004:<sup>24</sup>

(1) *Depersonalization*. Personal representation by a single deputy held accountable by elections to a specific territorially defined set of constituents has been eliminated in the State Duma. Starting in 2007, single-member-district elections were replaced by a closed-list, nationwide-ballot proportional representation system. The personal electoral connection between state officials and

voters had earlier been weakened when, starting in 2005, governors ceased to be directly elected at all, instead being appointed by the president subject to confirmation by the regional legislature.<sup>25</sup> And since 2003, at least half of each single-chamber regional legislature must be elected by party-list elections, not single-member-district contests.<sup>26</sup>

(2) *Centralization.* The Kremlin<sup>27</sup> has dramatically increased the control of central state structures over the election process. It has strongly subordinated Russia's previously (largely) autonomous election commissions of all levels to the Central Election Commission, which since 2007 has been headed by long-time Putin associate Vladimir Churov, a physicist with relatively little election commission experience. Regional parties have long been barred from national elections; additionally, in 2001, they were denied recognition as parties, costing them the right to compete in the party-list segment of regional elections, which are reserved for recognized parties. With authorities openly attempting to engineer a reduction in the number of parties, fewer than ten were officially recognized in 2009, a drop from 44 such entities in 2003.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the powers of the surviving parties' central leaderships have risen. Not only did Putin personally assume direct formal management of the United Russia party organization in spring 2008, but starting in 2006 only officially recognized members of a party or independents (that is, not members of other parties) have had the right to run for office on that party's candidate list. While early in his term Putin signed into law a system of state financing for parties, more dramatically important was the Kremlin assertion of informal central control over party and election financing that occurred during his second term. The state-owned Vneshekonombank, directly under the president's supervision, reportedly exercised strict control over all party campaign-related expenditures (both on and off the books) in the 2007 Duma election. Given the extent of Kremlin monitoring, it was widely believed that no businessperson in his or her right mind would finance any project smacking of opposition politics without the Kremlin's blessing and that the Kremlin itself actually directed individual corporate sponsors to particular opposition parties by giving them what might be called "suggestions they couldn't refuse."<sup>29</sup> Sources in the Yabloko leadership, for example, assert it was the Kremlin that requested that Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky become its primary sponsor for the 2003 Duma election.<sup>30</sup>

(3) *The "dictatorship of law."* Law in the Putin era has increasingly become an instrument by which rulers controlled society (rule by law) instead of a mechanism by which society and state mutually set limits on each other's behavior (rule of law).<sup>31</sup> At the base of this process is a sophisticated body of law regulating the political process. This law typically requires severe punishments (such as the disqualification of candidates or the shutting down of media outlets) for violations that are so imprecisely defined, so technical, or so hard to avoid that almost anyone can be found in violation. This gives considerable latitude to state officials in deciding what constitutes grounds for invoking the

severe punishment, and the officials who have been tasked with this responsibility (including court and law enforcement officials) have been progressively subordinated to the Kremlin administrative hierarchy and politicized. Election law, for example, requires that would-be presidential candidates without party representation in the Duma follow an elaborate process for collecting and registering signatures to get on the ballot, and then puts these signatures through verification by state-hired handwriting experts to determine their validity. Thus Mikhail Kasyanov, the former prime minister turned opposition candidate, somehow wound up with too many (over 5 percent) “invalid signatures” among the 2 million he collected to get on the 2008 presidential ballot, leading to his disqualification and, for good measure, fraud convictions of some of his signature collectors.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, the largely unknown Andrei Bogdanov (a Kremlin-friendly candidate offering the appearance of a “liberal option” on the ballot) breezed through the verification of his 2 million signatures, a quantity over twenty times the 89,780 votes his party got in the 2007 Duma election.<sup>33</sup> Even more recently, during the regional and local elections held on October 11, 2009, the invalidation of signatures kept many figures disliked by the authorities, including opposition Solidarity candidates in Moscow, off the ballot.<sup>34</sup>

(4) *Rising thresholds.* The legal hurdles to occupying elected office have steadily risen since Putin came into office. Most obviously, the threshold for a party to win a delegation in the Duma in proportional representation voting rose from 5 percent of the vote to 7 percent as of 2007, and at the same time parties were forbidden to join forces by running as a single bloc in these contests. Many regional parliaments (51 as of the March 2008 elections) established 7 percent thresholds for their own party-list elections. Also during the 2000s, the authorities have greatly increased the minimum number of members that an officially registered party needed to maintain (from 10,000 to 50,000 in 2004) and the number of signatures necessary to get on the ballot for different contests if they did not already have parliamentary representation. Moreover, the alternative to signature collection—putting up a monetary deposit—was axed in early 2009.<sup>35</sup> The “exception that proves the rule” is the removal of the minimum voter turnout level for an election to be valid. That move minimizes the chances that voter apathy or disgust over uninteresting elections with preordained results (not to mention an organized election boycott) could undermine a given election.

(5) *Negative selection.* The primary principle of state intervention in electoral contests has increasingly become less the Kremlin’s positive selection of a single candidate to actively push to victory against all comers and more the negative selection of unwelcome candidates to be disqualified. Certain names, prominent among which have been Vladimir Ryzhkov and Garry Kasparov, have reportedly appeared on Kremlin blacklists, not to be allowed onto ballots for any office. The remaining candidates, however, are generally allowed to

compete and occasionally to win at least minor offices, as with the Communist Party victory in the Tver City Duma election of March 2009. In the past, voters whose favorite candidate was disqualified could vote “against all,” which could force repeat elections if the number of people doing this exceeded the number of votes for the leading candidate on the ballot. In 2006, this option was eliminated for all Russian elections.

(6) *Nonstandard voting procedures.* Election authorities have increasingly made use of voting practices that diverge from the common procedure whereby voters show up at a precinct to cast ballots on election day. These nonstandard practices include allowing people to vote early and employing mobile ballot boxes that are brought to people’s homes. The share of votes cast by such procedures in the 2009 Sochi mayoral elections, for example, was some 37 percent.<sup>36</sup> While justified in terms of maximizing voters’ ability to participate, they complicate or altogether circumvent non-state monitoring and are widely believed to facilitate not only ballot stuffing but also other means of administrative control over voting. Managers of organizations that depend on state funding can demand that their staff vote early at certain designated polling places instead of their home precinct and show them their “correctly filled-in” ballot prior to dropping it in the urn. Of course, voters can be pressured, albeit less efficiently, by bosses or state officials even with standard voting procedures in place, too.<sup>37</sup>

How far from point B can the rulers push the public? In an autocratic regime that relies primarily on brutal repression, the rulers give society only what they want to give it and not a kopeck more (that is, they give the public, and themselves, their favored point Z). Overmanaged democracy leaders, however, face a significant limitation brought about by their own reluctance to eliminate (or eviscerate) democratic processes entirely, especially elections that include at least some genuine opposition.

## The Limits of Management

Why might state rulers be reluctant to eliminate democratic institutions, even when they have the power to do so? One reason is that they simply might not want (or might be afraid) to resort to the rawest forms of coercion, although Putin and Boris Yeltsin both demonstrated in Chechnya that they were neither pacifists nor shrinking violets. Another reason is that free and fair elections can serve many functions that can benefit state leaders’ own ability to get things done. They legitimize state authority; provide feedback between society and the state; identify problems that are looming or already exist; allow society to “diagnose” (pass judgment on) the effectiveness and direction of state policy; supply a competitive mechanism for selecting candidates for public office and programs for implementation; channel social tensions and opposition sentiment in constructive rather than destructive directions; create a peaceful mechanism for resolving differences of opinion and interest in public policy; generate public interest and hence engagement in the policy process;

and incentivize innovation in policy making. In all but the tiniest or newest of true democracies, free and fair elections are contested at least partly by political parties, which are also widely regarded as serving important functions for the state. These functions include the organization of specific societal interests for the purpose of reaching agreement with them in state policy-making institutions; the creation of support and enhancing the legitimacy of state decisions in which they have a part; the simplification of political choices that the citizenry faces; the winnowing of the field of potential candidates for office and possible platforms on which candidates may run; and the absorption of opposition sentiment (directing it away from challenges to the underlying political order).

Accordingly, contrary to some more simplistic accounts, Russia's leaders have decidedly not eliminated electoral competition entirely, even though they have almost certainly had the power to do so since the start of Putin's second term as president. At least some real opposition force has been allowed onto the ballot in every national election since the USSR broke apart, most prominently the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF).<sup>38</sup> The KPRF has now been complemented by a variety of "loyal opposition" (often called "virtual") parties that claim to advocate policies that diverge from those of Putin's United Russia party but that in fact are closely linked to Kremlin structures. These include the supposedly socialist *Spravedlivaia Rossiia* (A Just Russia) party, led by longtime Putin associate Sergei Mironov;<sup>39</sup> Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's avowedly nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia; the purportedly "pro-European" Democratic Party led by Andrei Bogdanov; and the liberal *Pravoe Delo* (Right Cause) party that was born in late 2008 of a surprisingly open agreement not to oppose the Kremlin very strongly in return for being allowed to compete for significant elective offices.<sup>40</sup> Each of these parties is tasked in part with trying to engage particular sets of voters—including members of nationalist organizations, anomic protest electorates, the business community, and local interests whose rivals have wound up controlling regional United Russia branches—who might otherwise become alienated or even wind up with the opposition. Such virtual parties can be easily scrapped when they are no longer needed, as happened with the Democratic Party upon the formation of *Pravoe Delo* in 2008, or when they show signs of taking on a life of their own, as happened with the Motherland Party and the Pensioners' Party in 2006–2007.<sup>41</sup>

Yet as Joshua Tucker has argued, contested elections themselves—even when regimes attempt to control them tightly—can serve to facilitate a social uprising or even a revolutionary overthrow of a regime when the public is broadly dissatisfied with the policy outputs (such as high corruption).<sup>42</sup> When an election is obviously stolen and is widely believed to ride roughshod over public preferences, it can instantly crystallize opposition by supplying a single moment of

outrage and a particular organized leadership (the opposition believed to have actually won) around which people can rally, knowing that there will likely be some safety and power in numbers at that particular moment.<sup>43</sup> This is one way in which even unfree and unfair elections—so long as at least some real competition to represent real group interests is allowed—can force hybrid regime rulers to pay some heed to public preferences. Massive protests after elections in Iran in 2009 are evidence that even elections whose contestants are carefully filtered by the regime can have such an effect. These pressures can be particularly powerful when they combine with a succession crisis, as they did during the so-called color revolutions that toppled incumbents in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan in 2003 to 2005.<sup>44</sup> Awareness of those outcomes has helped discourage the Russian leadership—so far, at least—from resorting to large-scale vote-count fraud to stay in power.<sup>45</sup>

Of course, elections provide only one particularly stark potential focal point for crystallizing mass protest in an overmanaged democracy. After the Russian government announced a decision in 2005 to replace a wide range of in-kind benefits (such as free utilities and transportation for pensioners) with monetary payments that people feared would not be sufficient, retirees and others poured into the streets. These protests, involving thousands of people, were reported in at least 80 of Russia's 89 regions and even blocked the central highway in Moscow along which top Russian officials were returning from their New Year's vacations.<sup>46</sup> The policy announcement itself, combined with the concrete nature of the feared loss and the general "obvious" agreement on who was to blame (the central authorities), prompted Russians to overcome their typically high threshold for collective protest action.<sup>47</sup> In fact, 26 percent of the Russian public expressed the intent to join the protests during January 2005.<sup>48</sup> This ultimately forced the government to compromise, pulling back on some of its strongest measures. Accountability was exercised, but in a highly inefficient way that imposed significant costs on society (as with the road blockages) and caused state authorities to perceive a significant risk of things spiraling out of control.

One might think of overmanaged democracy leaders, then, as being limited not by what would produce a free and fair majority vote, but by what would spark an unacceptable level of public protest, not to mention revolution. In terms of Figure 1, the threshold at which such an uprising occurs might be represented by the outer ring around society's ideal point A.<sup>49</sup> That is, how far away from its ideal point society can be "stretched" before it snaps, recoiling against state leaders. Overmanaged democracy authorities can be expected to consistently try to offer society policy X, which is as close to the leaders' own ideal policy as they can hope for without triggering an uprising (or at least without having to use raw violence to suppress such an uprising).

### **Expanding Public Toleration of Policy Outputs Desired by the Regime**

The rulers can be expected to employ a range of means to bring point X as close as possible to their own ideal point, Z. One tactic is to manipulate public opinion through mass media they control, moving point A to the left. Another is to reduce the propensity of civil society to organize autonomously against the regime—in other words, increasing the distance between X and A—by using a large toolbox of sophisticated methods that are designed to preempt or prevent rather than to suppress by brute force. Chief among these are efforts to disrupt the ability of dissenters to coordinate, including denying them access to obvious locations for spontaneous rallies and channeling demonstrations to places where they are unlikely to attract passersby or the halfhearted, such as an out-of-the-way stadium or a central square surrounded by a ring of armed troops that allows people to enter only by passing through a metal detector (these are among the favorite Russian state tactics). Other tools include the systematic discrediting and marginalizing of undesired protest organizers and civil society activists as well as the intimidation of potential participants. For example, Graeme Robertson describes how Russian law enforcement organs have systematically tracked people inclined to social activism and have frequently intercepted them one way or the other (by accusing them of traffic violations, for instance) en route to a protest so that they never actually arrive at planned rallies.<sup>50</sup> Naturally, authorities also do their best to divert primary blame for problems from themselves. Thus Putin was very quick after the world financial crisis hit Russia in 2008 to stress that it originated in the United States, meaning that he and his government should not be held accountable for economic problems incurred by Russia.

Russia's authorities under Putin have also cultivated a sense that social organization independent of the state is useless, communicating to the public that so long as the state is providing something beneficial, protest is unproductive and indeed impermissible. The rulers argue that their role in this non-participation pact, as it might be called, has been to supply: the steady economic growth that took place under Putin after a decade of collapse; Russia's return to global leadership; a perception of stability; and a sense that the country is being guided by a strong and capable leader.<sup>51</sup> Survey evidence in 2008 shows that the Russian public overwhelmingly agrees that each of these things did, in fact, occur during the Putin presidency.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, public opinion research also shows that Russian citizens do not see their government as an expression of their own will or that of the public. A 2006 Levada Center survey, for example, found that nearly three-fifths of adult Russian citizens felt “absolutely no” responsibility for what happens in their country, with an additional quarter feeling only a tiny amount of responsibility. Similarly, a November 2007 survey by the same organization found that just 28 percent of the adult population tended to think that the interests of the authorities and



society corresponded.<sup>53</sup> The essence of the non-participation pact, then, is that so long as Russians believe that the state is at least minimally holding up its end of the pact, when it comes to actual governance, they are willing to put up with dysfunction and even decline, such as the corruption that most Russians agree remained constant or even increased under the Putin administration.<sup>54</sup> The promotion of this pact by the state, then, also serves to increase the distance between X and A in Figure 1. Surely this is a key reason for the Kremlin's seeming obsession with Putin's (and now Medvedev's) ratings among the public.

### **Overmanaged Democracy and Accountability**

The implications of overmanaged democracy for accountability in governance are thus several. The system does involve a significant accountability mechanism, one much stronger than in an authoritarian system that allows no public opposition to exist, but the mechanism works inefficiently. Moreover, as this inefficiency rises because of state efforts to centralize and emasculate the election process, the system tends to generate policies that are further away from the social ideal—policies of type X instead of policies of type B. Moreover, when the accountability mechanism is exercised, it works outside of any institutional framework and risks getting out of control, potentially inflicting serious collateral damage on society. These consequences of overmanaged democracy could ultimately cost the former rulers more than they would have had to give up personally had they been able to peaceably retire to the life of a democratic opposition force and hope to return to power in the future.

### **Information**

Another key to good governance is information, especially information that helps the state choose which policies to offer society. Some of the best generators of such information, however, are also generators of something else that rulers in any system tend not to like: political unpredictability and challenges to their authority. Some of the most powerful engines of politically useful information include robust mass media and electoral competition. Competition in these realms provides political and media entrepreneurs with strong incentives to invest great resources in discerning societal needs and interests and in finding effective ways to communicate and address them. But because these very information-producing engines are also sources of political unpredictability and the risk of defeat, overmanaged democracy rulers have strong incentives to try to weaken them.

### **Information, Electoral, and Media Management**

Contested elections and mass media competition can be important sources of information that authorities can find useful for supplying good governance.

Electoral competition generates strong incentives for political entrepreneurs to seek out and publicize information on policy needs and on how well authorities are performing in terms of policy development and implementation. Mass media outlets face similar incentives under free competition as they are most likely to beat out their competition when they best identify (potential) problems facing society. The combination of competitive elections and free media is particularly powerful in generating information, as candidates work through media at the same time that the media have an interest in reporting information relevant to political competition. Free electoral and media competition can also provide an “early warning” system for state authorities by quickly generating and publicizing information on major problems (including those resulting from state policies) that are on the horizon.<sup>55</sup> Even if the authorities are not particularly concerned about governing well and want nothing more than to retain power, electoral and media competition provides crucial information on what society is likely to accept or reject and on what problems may be approaching that authorities will need to deal with to stay in power.

Much attention has been given to Russia’s attempts to manage or eliminate these forms of competition. The previous section outlined various ways in which the Kremlin has effectively emasculated electoral competition without entirely eliminating opposition. The state has also made a concerted effort to manage mass media competition, though its strategy here is tailored specifically to the peculiarities of the media market. The paragraphs below will focus on this media management strategy.

Kremlin efforts to manage mass media have been concentrated on the most influential outlets, which primarily means the three main national television channels. These three channels have been found to be the primary source of information on politics for about nine-tenths of the population during the Putin era.<sup>56</sup> Importantly, these efforts have not usually involved actual nationalization of previously private media outlets. In the cases of the two main state channels, First Channel and Rossiia, the state simply asserted control over what it partly or entirely already owned. In the case of NTV, the state-controlled firm Gazprom called in an overdue debt that NTV owed and thereby gained managerial control over the network.

This assertion of state control has virtually eliminated news competition among the most important media outlets. Nothing that is unexpected or unwanted by the Kremlin can appear in a news broadcast on the three major television networks. Analytical programs and talk shows are almost always pre-recorded and edited rather than broadcast live. Sharp political satire, a brilliant and enjoyable staple of Russian popular culture in the 1990s, is now almost entirely a thing of the past. As a general rule, in keeping with the desire to promote a sense that there are no alternatives to the top leadership, primary coverage on all three main channels was consistently given to Putin’s activities

as president during his two terms, though since that time Medvedev has become the primary star of these broadcasts with a large degree of secondary coverage devoted to Putin. In fact, the managers of the three major networks actually personally coordinate their content in weekly Friday meetings with the head of the Kremlin press service and in follow-up meetings during the week.<sup>57</sup> News broadcasts on the three channels are virtually the same. Regional authorities have increasingly copied these developments among central media. Local stations in the state-owned federal Rossiia channel's VGTRK network (which previously exercised a good deal of autonomy from their parent station) have now been strictly subordinated to a nationwide network led by the state company's central headquarters in Moscow. Starting in 2004, the VGTRK introduced a standardization of news content, supplying centrally produced material for the regional outlets to broadcast.

All this can redound to the detriment not only of society, but also of rulers and the states they run. In the most abstract terms, without roiling springs of information on what society really will or will not accept or on what really will or will not work, authorities risk thinking they are adopting policy X when they are actually adopting policy Y. This mistake, seemingly small in Figure 1, can be disastrous because policy Y lies outside the realm of what society will tolerate and ultimately triggers an uprising, perhaps one catalyzed by an election the authorities mistakenly think they are in a position to win.<sup>58</sup> So long as societal needs change little or in a predictable way, this danger may not be great. But it can accumulate over time or, in the worst-case scenario, suddenly become acute when economic or other shocks produce a shift in public opinion along unforeseen dimensions.

### **Substitutions and Their Governance Effects**

Authorities in an overmanaged democracy seek to redress these problems in at least two ways. One is the proliferation of substitutions designed to compensate for the information loss characteristic of subverted electoral and media institutions. Russian authorities have thus created, for example, huge networks of "public reception offices" across the country, with different networks under the supervision of almost every major state or semi-state organization, including the presidential administration, the federal inspectorate, the United Russia party, the Accounts Chamber (Russia's equivalent of the American GAO), governors, and mayors. More than ever since the USSR's communist regime fell, the Kremlin also undertakes elaborate analyses of appeals that citizens make in letters or visits to these reception offices. In addition, it relies heavily on opinion polls and data collection by state security services such as the FSB as well as contracting organizations, including large-scale secret surveys conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation that were publicized for the first time in May 2009 in part to call attention to the poor performance of regional authorities.

There are several problems with these measures, however. For one thing, because the substitutions are dependent on central authorities' favor for their continued operation and personnel decisions, they have more incentive to reproduce the views of the authorities than to challenge them. Additionally, they do not include the kind of competition that (especially when combined with transparency) has proven to be such a powerful information-generating engine for the state.

Recognizing the informational value of political competition, Russia's leadership has sought to find creative ways to foster "constructive" competition that has beneficial effects but that does not actually threaten to let an opposing side win. This is one purpose of the "loyal opposition parties" described above. United Russia's leadership has also been experimenting with ways to permit competition within its own ranks. While it has publicly disapproved of having multiple United Russia candidates contest a single race, as when four party members challenged the official party nominee in the Nizhny Tagil mayoral race in October 2008, it has not acted strongly to prevent this. Moreover, if the party's own challenger defeats its nominee, it has not been averse to taking the victor back into the fold, as it did when one of the four party "mavericks" (Valentina Isaeva) defeated the party nominee to become Nizhny Tagil mayor.<sup>59</sup> In the summer before the 2007 Duma campaign officially began, the party also for the first time held a series of intraparty preelection contests (dubbed primaries, *praimeriz*) in which a long list of possible United Russia candidates were pitted against each other for party members' votes in each region. And in 2009, the party mandated that similar primaries be held for elections at all levels. Another form of political competition encouraged within United Russia involves three internal party "debating clubs" that represent distinct "patriotic," "social-conservative," and "liberal-conservative" ideas.

The Kremlin effort to allow for manageable competition has not proven workable in practice, however, and so does not appear to be having the desired informational effect. Competition among different United Russia candidates has been the exception rather than the rule, and the Kremlin has let one of its loyal opposition parties defeat United Russia at the regional level or higher only once since 2007, when Spravedlivaia Rossiia beat United Russia in a no-holds-barred battle of political machines for the Stavropol regional legislature. And even in this instance, recoiling at the criticism United Russia had to endure during the campaign and having second thoughts about the wisdom of letting even the most loyal of loyal oppositions control a region, the Kremlin quickly orchestrated the replacement of the parliamentary chairman, the Stavropol mayor, and the governor himself (all members of Spravedlivaia Rossiia) with United Russia representatives through prosecution and other manipulations of the law.<sup>60</sup> The outcomes of United Russia's primaries also appear to have been largely ignored, with candidates who performed well often not making it into

lead slots on the party list and with many getting high places on the party list despite poor performances in the primaries. The regional elections of October 11, 2009, especially the Moscow city council race, provided further indication that the Kremlin is moving away from many of these attempts to allow managed competition.

### **Manipulating Media Markets**

A second way in which overmanaged democracy authorities in Russia have sought to redress the information problem has been in not entirely snuffing out truly independent media, but marginalizing them in a creative way that manipulates media market forces and takes advantage of inertia in media consumers' habits. Thus, aside from the three main television networks, there is in fact wide-ranging autonomy of political expression and even some serious investigative journalism that works against state officials in Russia. These can be found on the Internet (to which more than a quarter of the population reported access as of 2008),<sup>61</sup> print publications (including but by no means limited to *Novaia Gazeta*, the *New Times*, *Kommersant*, and *Vedomosti*), and radio outlets (especially *Ekho Moskvy*) that broadcast to the whole population of Moscow and St. Petersburg as well as to about four dozen other cities throughout Russia. REN-TV, a channel accessible to most urban Russians, has even featured reasonably objective TV news coverage right up to the time of this writing, especially on its Saturday wrap-up program, and St. Petersburg–Channel 5 also broadcasts news that differs somewhat from that of the three main channels. Moreover, it should be stressed that the people with the greatest access to these outlets, especially urban and educated people, are the very populations that have filled the streets in anti-incumbent postelection uprisings elsewhere, as in Ukraine in 2004 and Iran in 2009.

The state has permitted this in part because these media serve at least four purposes. First, they are sources of independent information for the state about developments in the country and emerging problems. Second, they serve as “bulletin boards” on which players in politics or business can make public some piece of information or argument aimed primarily at Russia's most important reader: Putin. Third, they function as a kind of safety valve for disgruntled elites, a channel through which their discontent can be vented and diverted from action more threatening to the state. Finally, the fact that such media operate relatively independently lessens the feeling in society that freedom of expression is actually being squelched, thereby reducing incentives to rebel among those who value such freedom.

But if sources of free information exist and if they are generally available to many or even most Russians, one might ask, how do the authorities ensure that these media do not then come to undermine the rulers' use of media as an instrument of control? The answer lies partly in clever state manipulation

of media markets. While the three main national channels do not compete in news coverage, they are fierce rivals for audience share and advertising income. They therefore attract viewers primarily to their highly professional and appealing entertainment programming. Advertisers in turn freely invest most of their money in these particular channels, which gives them even bigger budgets to produce high-quality entertainment programming and limits the ability of other outlets to do so. Viewers, initially attracted primarily to the three major television channels' entertainment programming, then tend not to turn the dial when the news comes on.<sup>62</sup> This helps explain why REN-TV's relatively objective news coverage was watched in a given week by only 22 percent of Russia's population during spring 2008, while 88 percent reported watching the news on the First Channel, 83 percent on Rossiia, and 60 percent on NTV, despite the fact that only 12 percent reported not being able to access REN-TV where they live.<sup>63</sup> The mass audience of the three major national networks is, in an important sense, the electoral base of the regime.

Similarly, relatively few people are willing to spend the extra time, effort, or money necessary to access news in other ways, including through newspapers or the Internet, and even here (as well as in radio) people often choose their outlets based on their entertainment component, with news content coming as a secondary consideration. And just in case the Kremlin deems it necessary to squelch a particular voice, it has an abundance of instruments for doing so, including orchestrating a change in ownership or finding a legal pretext to halt publication or broadcast. Either of these steps is easy due to vague and/or overly specific requirements in the governing legal acts. In fact, Yury Kovalchuk, widely reported to be a Putin friend, acquired a controlling share in both REN-TV and St. Petersburg–Channel 5 in recent years, bringing them and other assets together in a new National Media Group in early 2008. While these channels have maintained some independence in news up to the time of this writing, reports emerged in October 2009 that both channels will cease producing their own news programming and instead rely on material produced by the state-owned company Russia Today.<sup>64</sup>

As a result, and despite the availability of independent sources of news that do in fact provide a very different picture of Russian life, the media that most Russians have actually watched, read, or heard during the Putin era have conveyed the Kremlin line. This line includes the implicit message that active engagement is futile except through state-sponsored substitutions and that, in any case, engagement is not necessary because the state working to provide growth, international prestige, stability, and strong leadership.<sup>65</sup>

While granting a limited preserve for the functioning of independent media is surely better for the state's information needs than the absence of such, the methods by which this preserve is maintained negate many of the intended gains. The relative poverty that keeps independent outlets from competing strongly in the entertainment realm (and hence the news realm) impedes their

capacity to serve as truly robust information generators, leaving them unable to finance major investigations and large networks of journalists. Without the cover of impartial law enforcement, they become vulnerable not only to vindictive state authorities (especially at the local level), but also to organized crime or other violent groups that might not like the direction particular stories take. Marginalized by the regime, they frequently find it hard to develop sources or even to gain simple access to public officials, who often will not grant interviews and rarely allow independent media to pose tough questions at public events. And even the most independent of media face pressures to self-censor lest they jeopardize their entire operation.

### **Overmanaged Democracy, Information, and Governance**

Overmanaged democracy's impact on the generation of information necessary for good governance is in general negative, perhaps even relative to more repressive autocratic countries. For one thing, the same substitutions meant to provide a diversity of opinion can instead generate a kind of echo chamber effect, as the same view appears to be reproduced from multiple authoritative sources (and challenged only by marginal ones) and is thereby reinforced in rulers' minds when in fact it is generated by actors trying to anticipate what authorities want to hear. Because authorities may in fact think that these views are more independent than those coming from their own direct subordinates, the risks of policy missteps are greater. Additionally, overmanaged democracy severely damages the competitive engine of information production, with substitutions remaining inadequate and free media that remain functioning unable to do their job fully effectively. Returning to Figure 1, all this means that any given government initiative is more likely to look to the authorities like the optimal X than the dangerous Y regardless of whether it is true. This makes policy Y more likely to be chosen, which makes society worse off and also makes the state more vulnerable to social instability, especially when society is undergoing rapid change or experiences a major shock.

### **State Capacity**

State strength, among other things, requires the capacity to adapt to the diverse and shifting interests that characterize any developing society.<sup>66</sup> This capacity, however, tends to go hand in hand with institutions that create uncertainty for ruling authorities in politics. Institutions such as parliaments that genuinely represent diverse social interests that may be changing by their very nature are not predictable. Such institutions devise creative ways to peacefully resolve conflicts of interest, guarantee the protection of key interests, and guard against an executive's ability to make foolish decisions that run counter to the most important social interests and thus destabilize the state. Overmanaged

democracy, in part, represents an effort by state authorities to eliminate these sources of political risk for themselves while minimizing the consequences in terms of state capacity.

### **Pervasive Substitutions**

The limitations on the election system and media markets described above have increasingly resulted in a parliament (State Duma and Federation Council) dominated by Kremlin loyalists who depend more on the presidential administration than on their own nominal constituents, the marginalization of genuine opposition parties reflecting diverse social interests, mass media that have little incentive to give voice to diverse interests except at the behest of the Kremlin, and a government consisting of Kremlin appointees rather than a coalition of different social interests. Recognizing that this gutting of democratic institutions has compromised the state's ability to accommodate the country's diverse and changing social interests, Russian authorities have compensated by devising an elaborate system of substitutions. Table 1 illustrates how for seemingly every major institution of democracy that Russian authorities have weakened in recent years, they have maintained multiple substitutions intended to serve at least some of that institution's state-capacity-augmenting functions or to regulate or provide some kind of check on the other substitutions or any remaining democratic institutions. In principle, these substitutions do in fact provide the authorities with ways to engage different societal interests, encourage innovation, gather information for improving policy quality, and verify policies that are to be adopted. But in each case, the more "management" the state inserts into the equation, the more serious the drawbacks, which often mean that more harm than good is being done to state capacity.

Let us turn to rulers' need for a mechanism to hash out conflicts of interest. In democracies, this function typically is accomplished through genuine party competition in elections and a system of lobbying. Russian authorities have come to rely heavily on lobbying as a mechanism for interest accommodation. But this is one of the most problematic elements even in democratic systems, and the Russian version is much less transparent.<sup>67</sup> Without strong independent parties, the Kremlin has supplemented its virtual parties with huge newly created state corporations.<sup>68</sup> These "national champions" are justified primarily as a way to modernize and restructure certain industries and to enhance international competitiveness, but they are used partly as representatives of these industries in back room deals.<sup>69</sup> Conflicting regional interests are handled in a similar behind-the-scenes way, through the State Council (Gossoviet) and its Presidium, institutions we describe below. Without public competition and open media, there is little to keep corruption out of all these consultations, and there remains significant incentive for the substitutions to present the Kremlin with information that it wants to hear.



**Table 1. Five Weakened Democratic Institutions and their Substitutions in Russia\***

Institution	Substitutions
State Duma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Chamber</li> <li>• Consultative councils, commissions attached to president</li> </ul>
Federation Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Council and its Presidium</li> <li>• Council of Legislators</li> </ul>
Political parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Loyal opposition” parties and movements</li> <li>• State corporations</li> <li>• Regional political machines</li> </ul>
Independent media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public reception offices</li> <li>• Regional networks for collecting letters from citizens</li> <li>• FSB, other secret services</li> <li>• Pollsters</li> </ul>
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presidential administration</li> <li>• State corporations</li> <li>• Security Council</li> <li>• Center for Strategic Research (early Putin brain trust)</li> </ul>

\* Not a complete list.

The State Council is an instructive example. This is an entity that represents all of Russia’s governors, and the president appoints some of these governors to the State Council’s Presidium on a rotational basis. While not grounded in the Constitution, this system gives governors on the Presidium direct access to the president and special authorization for policy initiative during their terms, affording them the opportunity to voice regional concerns about existing policy or problems of implementation, to inform the Kremlin about the state of affairs in their regions, and to suggest new ideas for new policy originating outside of Moscow. Substitutions such as the State Council, then, do in fact have the potential to improve the Kremlin’s ability to design and carry out policies of type X (desired by state authorities) instead of type Y (disastrous to incumbents).

But here, too, the state encounters a series of problems. One is analogous to the informational “echo chamber” problem described above: The substitutions generate incentives for kowtowing to central authorities that are at least as strong as their incentives to represent real divergent interests in society, thereby reinforcing prior Kremlin inclinations regardless of whether the actual needs of different parts of society are being served. This, in turn, creates problems of policy design and implementation, increases the system’s dependence on the performance of just a handful of Kremlin officials, and renders the system vulnerable to both socioeconomic change and succession crises. Indeed, the

governors who sit on the State Council, it turns out, are no longer directly elected; instead, they were first dependent on presidential nomination for reappointment and then made subject to nomination by the party that won the most recent regional legislative election—in all cases since that time, United Russia. These governors must also regularly coordinate with one of the seven presidential envoys (*polpredy*) appointed to monitor and control developments with the regions in their purview (that is, in their *federalnyi okrug*). Newly installed governors often have not even lived in their regions prior to their nomination by the president. This, plus the fact that the federal government exercises a high degree of control over regional financial flows, makes governors more directly beholden to the Kremlin for their future career prospects than to their own constituents or the regional interests they are expected to represent. Such governors are also likely to be less authoritative in implementing and advocating for federal policies in their home regions, less able to accurately assess local problems of policy implementation, and less capable of generating fresh ideas for realizing federal goals locally than are governors who have had to stand the test of local electoral politics.<sup>70</sup> The rule whereby only some governors are given membership in the privileged Presidium, and then in a combination determined by the Kremlin, succeeds in providing yet another obstacle to any anti-Kremlin coordination on the part of governors and in the same way complicates genuine interest representation.<sup>71</sup>

In place of subjecting their policies to the civic verdict that elections typically render, the Russian state has also experimented with ways to avoid the echo chamber effect in determining whether genuine interest representation has been achieved. The aforementioned networks of public reception offices attached to various institutions and not-for-public-eyes opinion surveys are two such methods. The presidential administration has also developed a system of monitoring regional developments that is based on a large number of quantitative indicators, and it engages in a wide range of consultations with interest groups (which are only too eager to share their views with the administration). But the proliferation of state organs designed to monitor and control other state organs, all without solid foundation in a constitutional division of powers, has the potential to generate both sclerosis (an inability to change policy in response to rapid change) and counterproductive intra-agency battles within the regime. Indeed, as Putin was preparing to hand off the presidency to Medvedev in 2007–2008, a rather wild “war” broke out among competing law enforcement agencies and between rival Putinite “clans” vying for influence over the succession. The battle was fought through interviews given to major newspapers and the arrests of each other’s political allies.

### **Interest Representation to the Streets**

Similarly, overmanaged democracy has a tendency to force the most serious conflicts of social interest outside the framework of orderly politics, something

both society and the state generally prefer to avoid. Social interests that find themselves excluded from state policy making are faced with a dilemma under overmanaged democracy: Either keep competing in the state's elections on the state's terms and lose your standing as a truly independent representational force (as many members of the business-oriented Union of Right Forces [SPS] such as Leonid Gozman opted to do by dissolving their party to join *Pravoe Delo* in late 2008), or take your battle to the streets and oppose the system with all of its repressive might, only to be branded an extremist and marginalized (as did former SPS leader Boris Nemtsov in opposing Gozman's move). The result has been an increasing divide between incumbents (as personified by United Russia) and the opposition, with the public increasingly losing faith in the parties that are trying to comprise an opposition that still accepts the existing system. The popularity ratings of Yabloko, as an example of the latter kind of party, plummeted during the Putin era. In fact, public attachment to parties other than the ruling party has also dropped dramatically. In 1999 a third of Russia's population professed some form of loyalty to one of Russia's major political parties other than Unity or United Russia; by 2008 this figure had dropped by more than half.<sup>72</sup> The Kremlin actively promoted this process by systematically liquidating parties whose fortunes dipped below official membership requirements, providing state financing to those able to "win" Duma delegations, and setting forbiddingly high hurdles for the formation of new independent parties. At the time of this writing, only seven parties remain registered, just two of which can be considered to have genuinely oppositional inclinations (Yabloko and the KPRF). And only four (United Russia, SR, the LDPR, and the KPRF) have been able to consistently win seats in national or regional legislative elections since the mid-2000s, with the lion's share always going to United Russia. Russia's October 2009 regional elections confirmed this trend.

The system has also ceased to provide much of a constructive channel for the public to let off steam, as the main legitimate avenue for alternative interest expression now is on the streets. Thus when a genuine conflict of social interests arose after the government sought to replace longstanding social benefits with cash payments in early 2005, parties and electoral institutions were for the most part bypassed, with discontent boiling over in the form of largely spontaneous, locally organized street protests. While parties soon got involved, it was mainly to try to ride or further inflate the protest wave—following events rather than driving them.

### **Overmanaged Democracy's Dependence on Manual Control**

The cash-for-benefits example highlights another important finding: Overmanaged democracy can work well on its own when the country does not experience any shocks and social changes do not necessitate serious reforms, but when such shocks or changes arise, the system requires direct and personal intervention from the highest levels in order to respond effectively. Thus,

miscalibrating the cash-for-benefits reforms in early 2005, Putin had to force a partial reversal of course to bring the public back under control. Because society itself is always changing and countries like Russia are still in need of ongoing reforms, the overmanaged democracy system, to be functional, requires constant manual control by top leaders. This is because the increasingly centralized system gives very little incentive for lower levels of government to try something new and, more importantly, gives them little real authority to do so—even when it comes to resolving local problems.

Thus during spring 2009, observers watched on television a spectacle in which Putin personally had to travel to Pikalevo, a town with a population of just 20,000, to quell a local protest that was cutting off federal roads. Seeking to save his reputation as a decisive leader who protects citizens and is tough on greedy big businessmen, Putin publicly scolded the “oligarch” Oleg Deripaska, the owner of one of the town’s four main companies, for allowing wages to go unpaid and local production to be shut down. The prime minister ordered the businessman to change his firm’s practices, and Deripaska obediently agreed to do so. Attempting to counteract this tendency for Putin to become personally drawn into such conflicts of social interest, the Kremlin (this time in Medvedev’s voice) then called on governors to be more proactive and not to hide under their desks.

### **Overmanaged Democracy, State Capacity, and Governance**

So long as the president and prime minister (and their closest aides) have sufficient skill, instincts, and energy to sustain this manual control, and so long as the aforementioned non-participation pact holds, overmanaged democracy’s problems of state capacity may appear to be only minimal. This was arguably the case for most of the Putin presidential years, when many policies found broad support and the economy grew steadily without causing major social dislocations or excessive expectations. But while the system can perform adequately in times of relative stasis and moderate growth, overmanaged democracy renders the whole system vulnerable to economic or other crises that require a carefully considered, major, and/or rapid change of course, and individual leaders may not always be up to the challenge. And the proliferation of substitutions may give policy makers the sense that they are representing real social interests far better than they actually are. In terms of Figure 1, therefore, overmanaged democracy tends to shrink the range of policies that the state can offer society within a reasonable period of time. This, in turn, produces a relatively high risk that, during a time of socioeconomic change, what is actually implemented will wind up being a dangerous policy of type Y instead of type X, and this can happen even when regime authorities know that X is what they want to implement. As argued above, overmanaged democracy may also complicate the state leadership’s ability to tell the difference between a

policy of type Y and one of type X. Overmanaged democracy thus brings risks for both society and state rulers, shrinking state capacity to produce desirable policy and over the long run making social upheaval more likely.

## Conclusion

What can we say, then, about the overall implications of overmanaged democracy for governance? Certainly, we should be careful not to overlook its real achievements, and these lie primarily in the provision of short- to medium-term political order and stability relative to the 1990s. By one estimate, Putin in 2000 inherited a situation in which as much as 30 percent of all regional laws ran counter to federal law.<sup>73</sup> Acts of terrorism, notably the apartment bombings of 1999, were occurring in Moscow and other Russian cities, while lawlessness and civil war reigned in Chechnya. State employers were frequently unable to pay wages on time. Taxes were regularly dodged by leading corporations, to say nothing of individual citizens.

These features of the Yeltsin era represent failures by the state to provide good governance, and it is in this realm of restoring basic, short- and medium-term order and stability through overmanaged democracy that Putin's team can most credibly claim that its governing policies have had a positive impact. Wage arrears were largely eliminated early on in Putin's presidency. Federal and regional legislation has been effectively harmonized. Major terrorist acts continued for the first five years of Putin's presidency, culminating in the horrific Beslan school hostage tragedy, but have since tailed off. While instability has risen recently in Ingushetia and Dagestan, relative stability has returned to Chechnya for the first time in more than a decade.<sup>74</sup> A representative survey conducted just after the 2007–2008 election cycle shows that the Russian population has generally recognized these achievements: At least three-fifths believed that under Putin's watch political stability had increased in Russia as a whole (60 percent) as well as in Chechnya (62 percent).<sup>75</sup> Moreover, the Levada Center has found that people's own sense of personal freedom has increased substantially under Putin and Medvedev, particularly after Putin's first term: The share of the population saying they feel like a "free person" increased from less than 40 percent in November 1990 to just over 50 percent between 2000 and 2006, with a rise to close to 70 percent by mid-2008.<sup>76</sup> Evidence from the same agency indicates that people have increasingly come to accept or even support Putin's system of rule relative to various alternatives: In 2008, the percentage of people supporting the "current system" for the first time constituted a plurality compared with those who backed "democracy as in Western countries" or "the Soviet system that we had up until the 1990s."<sup>77</sup>

These very important successes for Putin's system of governance, however, have also come at considerable cost, a cost that is likely to become much more

pronounced in the years ahead if the system remains largely unchanged. That is, success in resolving Russia's immediate problems of state-building was achieved by constructing a new system (overmanaged democracy) that has weakened government accountability before the public, dampened sources of information and innovation, and reduced state capacity to accommodate diverse and changing social interests flexibly and effectively. And this, in turn, may sow the seeds for instability as the public, with heightened expectations but little sense of engagement with its own government, finds that extra-system mobilization has become the primary mechanism by which it can effect a major change in course. In addition, because the system has become increasingly dependent on manual control by an extremely narrow set of individuals in and around the central executive branch, it raises the danger that the system will not function well should a leader less competent and popular than Putin come to control it.

These dangers are reflected in a variety of systematically collected statistics, including some from organizations closely associated with Putin's own team. A number of studies, for example, highlight how the circle of people able to influence national outcomes has shrunk under Putin to now include primarily top central state officials. One set of figures comes from the journal *Ekspert* and the Institute for Public Projects (*InOP*), linked to first deputy presidential administration chief Vladislav Surkov and the self-described "liberal wing" of Putin supporters. They undertook a study to identify politicians in Russia who held real influence over national political outcomes in 2002 and 2007, and found that the number of such individuals had shrunk from about 200 to about 50 during the intervening period. Moreover, while the 2002 list included people from a wide variety of institutions (state organs, business, parties, and even organized crime), the 2007 list was "almost equivalent to a telephone book of the administration."<sup>78</sup> Similarly, a November 2007 Levada Center survey found that four times as many Russian citizens believed that the gap between the authorities and the people had widened under Putin than believed it had narrowed (45 percent versus 11 percent), while 36 percent thought the gap remained unchanged. This same poll also revealed that only 7 percent of the population believed citizens' ability to regulate the actions of state authorities had improved during Putin's watch, while 24 percent said it went unchanged, 21 percent said it had gotten worse, and 37 percent averred that the population does not have and never has had the ability to restrain state authorities.<sup>79</sup>

At the same time that power is becoming increasingly concentrated in the hands of state administrators, public faith in such figures has declined if one looks beyond Putin and Medvedev. The state-managed VTsIOM polling agency found that by 2008, only four of Russia's 83 governors had anything close to a national reputation for being able to effectively solve social problems, deal with the economy, and battle crime—a marked contrast to the large number of such figures before the elimination of direct gubernatorial elections.<sup>80</sup>

Other surveys show that even before the 2008 financial crisis, the faith citizens put in their own governors to solve regional problems had declined in recent years.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, more people than not (38 percent versus 15 percent) believe that corruption among state officials has increased during the Putin era and that income inequality also has risen (64 percent).<sup>82</sup> Year-by-year tracking conducted by Transparency International confirms this popular Russian view of trends in corruption: While perceived corruption levels dropped during Putin's first term, they rose steadily during his second term (when overmanaged democracy came into full flower). In 2008, Russia was found to be a more corrupt country than it had been in 1998, the last year before Putin arrived on the political scene.<sup>83</sup>

When do the governance problems inherent to overmanaged democracy become so acute as to destabilize the system? Our answer leads us to speculate about both the medium and long term. In the medium term, the experience of the 2000s allows us to say that the problems we identify may not come to a head quickly so long as the system is supported by steady economic improvement, broad personal support for the president, energetic and highly skilled manual control of the system by the leader and his inner circle, and the absence of major shocks to society or the need for major changes of policy course. The experience of the global financial crisis that occurred in 2008 further indicates that what is most important for the system's survival and functioning is the leader's popularity and personal skill: So long as these are not damaged significantly by the disappearance of economic improvement or by an external shock—and so far both Putin and Medvedev have sustained high approval ratings despite the economic crisis—the system can continue to function reasonably well. But in the longer run, when people start to take Putin's initial state-building achievements for granted, the governance problems that overmanaged democracy generates are likely to become more pronounced and to erode popular support for the system's leadership. This would amount to the removal of the system's linchpin, making it highly vulnerable to succession struggles and struggles for power within the elite—struggles that could well give new life to electoral processes that currently seem tightly controlled.

Putin's shift from the presidency to the premiership, with Medvedev playing the role of president, increases the system's vulnerability to such an intra-elite struggle. While most Russian elites (and the larger part of the population) generally perceive Putin to be the paramount leader, the appearance of this "tandemocracy" has given rise to speculation among various elites as to just how much power Medvedev actually has and whether it might one day increase. And this speculation creates incentive for elites dissatisfied with Putin to try to encourage the possibility of more power for Medvedev. Thus while there is little sign of any real divergence in goals between Putin and Medvedev, the fact that there are now two prominent leaders rather than one makes management of the system more difficult and places a premium on continued agreement

between both parts of the tandem. If these tensions are to come to a head soon, they are most likely to do so as the next round of federal elections approaches. The elections—now less than two years away—will ratify a political arrangement that, with longer presidential and parliamentary terms now in place, is likely to last at least five to six years. These are very high stakes. But even if this next election cycle passes smoothly, the logic of overmanaged democracy suggests that the system is not viable for the long haul. Further down the road, the current Russian system is likely to unravel in an uncontrolled way if the leadership itself fails to transform it.



## Notes

- 1 Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 1 (January 2002); Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 2 (April 2002); Marina Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003); Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 76, no. 6 (November/December 1997).
- 2 For example, works documenting Russia's democratic deficiencies are legion, e.g., M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). One study that explicitly treats governance in Russia but is not focused on the impact of regime hybridity politics is Timothy J. Colton and Stephen Holmes, eds., *The State after Communism: Governance in the New Russia* (Armonk: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).
- 3 Jack A. Goldstone, Ted Robert Gurr, Barbara Harff, Marc A. Levy, Monty G. Marshall, Robert H. Bates, David L. Epstein, Colin H. Kahl, Pamela T. Surko, John C. Ulfelder Jr., and Alan N. Unger, *State Failure Task Force Report: Phase III Findings* (McLean, VA: Science Applications International Corporation, September 30, 2000), <http://globalpolicy.gmu.edu/pitf/SFTF%20Phase%20III%20Report%20Final.pdf>, last accessed January 12, 2007; Thomas Kenyon and Megumi Naoi, "Policy Uncertainty in Hybrid Regimes: Evidence From Firm-Level Surveys," *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 43, no. 6, June 2010, forthcoming, available at [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1005420](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1005420), access date November 21, 2009.
- 4 An influential and more specific definition of governance comes from the World Bank and is summarized by Kaufmann: "The set traditions and formal and informal institutions that determine how authority is exercised in a particular country for the common good, thus encompassing: (1) the process of selecting, monitoring, and replacing governments; (2) the capacity to formulate and implement sound policies and deliver public services; and (3) the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them." See Daniel Kaufmann, "Governance Redux: The Empirical Challenge," World Bank Institute Working Papers, 2004, available at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWBIGOVANTCOR/Resources/govredux.pdf>, accessed May 30, 2009, p.8.
- 5 Thomas Carothers, "The Backlash Against Democracy Promotion," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 85, no. 2 (March/April 2006); Christopher Walker, ed., *Undermining Democracy: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Authoritarians* (New York: Freedom House, June 2009), available at [http://www.underminingdemocracy.org/files/UnderminingDemocracy\\_Full.pdf](http://www.underminingdemocracy.org/files/UnderminingDemocracy_Full.pdf).

- 6 In fact, there has been a great deal of cross-fertilization in the development of overmanaged democracy in these countries.
- 7 As Graeme Robertson has observed, one reason regimes remain hybrid as opposed to fully authoritarian is that the democratic elements in a hybrid regime benefit not only society, but also the rulers themselves. See Graeme B. Robertson, *The Politics of Protest in Hybrid Regimes: Managing Dissent in Post-Communist Russia*, 2008 manuscript of forthcoming book (New York: Cambridge University Press).
- 8 Since January 2009, the Public Chamber is formally consulted on bills prior to their final drafting and passage.
- 9 It is primarily point (3) that distinguishes overmanaged democracy from “delegative democracy” (see Hale, McFaul, and Colton 2004; Guillermo O’Donnell, “Delegative Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 5, no. 1 (January 1994). On managed democracy and the variety of other labels used to describe the same basic idea—including “competitive authoritarianism,” “electoral authoritarianism,” “semi-authoritarianism,” and “illiberal democracy”—see Timothy J. Colton and Michael McFaul, *Popular Choice and Managed Democracy: The Russian Elections of 1999 and 2000* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003); Michael McFaul, Nikolay Petrov, and Andrei Ryabov, *Between Dictatorship and Democracy: Russian Post-Communist Political Reform* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004); Levitsky and Way 2002; Ottaway 2003; Andreas Schedler, ed., *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2006); Zakaria 1997. Kremlin ideologist Vladislav Surkov has branded Russia’s current system “sovereign democracy.” See Vladislav Surkov, *Teksty 97-07* (Moscow: Evropa, 2008).
- 10 Indeed, more generally, there is a strong argument to be made that Russia features one of the most refined hybrid regimes on the planet, designed and managed by highly sophisticated strategists, media gurus, message spinmeisters, and political machine technicians.
- 11 This does not mean that Russia was the first to develop something resembling overmanaged democracy, even in Eurasia. Belarus and Kazakhstan, for example, preceded Russia in tight media controls, and they also began systematically removing unwanted candidates from elections before Russia’s leadership started the practice in earnest.
- 12 E.g., Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).
- 13 Sakwa refers to many such institutions as “para-constitutional” institutions that practice “para-politics,” intended by the Kremlin to “enhance efficacy” but that have in fact diminished it. See Richard Sakwa, “Putin’s Leadership: Character and Consequences,” *Europe–Asia Studies*, vol. 60, no. 6 (2008), pp. 879–97.
- 14 Levitsky and Way (2002) have usefully warned analysts that hybrid regimes might be thought of not just as insufficiently democratic democracies but as insufficiently authoritarian autocracies.
- 15 One of the most famous treatments of democracy actually defines it as “institutionalized uncertainty.” See Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- 16 International considerations, however, also give regimes like Russia’s incentive not to reject the formal claim to democracy. For example, democracy is held up as a goal by some of the globe’s wealthiest and most prestigious clubs, including the G8 and the European Union.

- 17 This sort of wishful thinking on the part of the regime helps explain why this system's chief hired architect, Vladislav Surkov, first deputy head of the Russian presidential administration, would think it fruitful to compare Russia's leadership with the American President Franklin D. Roosevelt: Here was an important figure presiding over his country in a time of crisis who could in fact count on winning reelection repeatedly in a system generally recognized to be a democracy (Surkov 2008, pp. 37–42). In fact, Surkov and many other establishment Russian politicians rarely deny that democracy is desirable and frequently even recognize democratic shortcomings in Russia, as in his June 2009 speech in Bashkortostan (*Novyi region* 2, June 19, 2009, 15: 49, <http://www.nr2.ru/policy/237236.html>, accessed October 30, 2009). But they typically also place a priority on what they say are the benefits to society (such as political stability) that come from a single leader or party just happening to win every time during crucial stages in a country's development. A collection of Surkov's writings on this theme, frequently under his preferred label "sovereign democracy," can be found in Surkov 2008. United Russia campaign rhetoric touting Putin as a "national leader" in the vein of Roosevelt and de Gaulle and United Russia as akin to the postwar Christian Democrats in West Germany also seem to capture this contradiction between the desire to actually be democratic and the desire to know one will always win the "democratic" competition. For example, see the interview by Andrei Vorobiev, a leading United Russia official, in *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, November 2, 2007, p. 8, or the lead editorial by a leading pro-Putin publicist, Mikhail Leontiev, in *Profil*, October 8, 2007, p. 2. Russian leaders also frequently note that Western democracy is imperfectly competitive, arguing that Russia's democratic deficit relative to Western countries is therefore only one of degree.
- 18 Huntington, for example, defines democracy as a political system in which a country's most powerful leaders are elected in regular, free, and fair elections in which all adult citizens are eligible to compete. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1991).
- 19 It is rare that a regime can completely ignore public opinion and survive for long, of course, so this is primarily a matter of degree.
- 20 Shmelev quote, *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, 2007.
- 21 References made below to "RES survey 2008" refer to the 2008 wave of the Russian Election Studies series of surveys of the Russian population designed by Timothy J. Colton, Henry E. Hale, and Michael McFaul and conducted by the Demoscope group of Mikhail Kosolapov and Polina Kozyreva at the Institute of Sociology at the Russian Academy of Sciences. In the 2008 RES survey, 1,130 adult Russian citizens were interviewed from March 18 to May 8. For more on the findings of this survey, see Henry E. Hale and Timothy J. Colton, "The Putin Vote: Presidential Electorates in a Hybrid Regime," *Slavic Review*, vol. 68, no. 3 (Fall 2009), pp. 473–503. The survey was funded by the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research under authority of a Title VIII grant from the U.S. Department of State. The views expressed here, however, are those solely of the authors of this paper and are not the responsibility of the U.S. government, the NCEEER, or any other organization.
- 22 In theory, these two points might be identical, but in practice this is rarely the case. For one thing, money that the authorities might want to spend on themselves or their cronies will be desired by other members of society for their own purposes. Additionally, the authorities are likely to have an interest in personally holding on to power that the public may not always share, or for which the public may not be willing to pay the price involved.

- 23 For example, the authorities used a variety of such methods to ensure that its candidate won the high-profile 2009 mayoral race in Sochi, but still allowed the fierce liberal opposition candidate Boris Nemtsov onto the ballot.
- 24 Among the numerous detailed accounts of such processes, see A. V. Ivanchenko and A. E. Liubarev, *Rossiiskie vybory: Ot perestroiki do suverennoi demokratii* (Moscow: Nezavisimyi Institut Vyborov, 2006), as well as Fish 2005 and McFaul, Petrov, and Ryabov 2004.
- 25 President Medvedev has recently proposed that the governor be nominated by the party winning the most votes in regional legislative elections, rather than the president.
- 26 For regions that have two legislative chambers, the requirement is that at least half of one chamber be elected according to a proportional representation system. Only a few such regions are left now, though, as the trend has become the adoption of single-chamber legislatures.
- 27 We use this as shorthand to refer to central state authorities and their networks of collaborators.
- 28 See, in part, Aleksandr Kynev, "Izbitatel'naia reforma Vladimira Putina I regional'nye vybory," *Neprikosnovennyi Zapas*, vol. 50, no. 6 (2006), as reprinted in *Polit.Ru*, March 12, 2007, <http://www.polit.ru/research/2007/03/12/kynev.html>.
- 29 Natalia Morar', "Chernaia kassa Kremliia," *Novoe Vremia (The New Times)*, December 10, 2007, pp. 18–22.
- 30 One author's interviews with Yabloko officials. Thus, contrary to one widely accepted interpretation, Khodorkovsky's support for opposition parties such as Yabloko was not the cause of his arrest.
- 31 For a good explication of the difference, see Thomas F. Remington, *Politics in Russia*, sixth edition (New York: Longman, 2010).
- 32 *RFE/RL Newslines*, January 28, 2008; *Polit.Ru*, December 24, 2008, 08:59.
- 33 *Novoe Vremia (The New Times)*, February 4, 2008, p. 11.
- 34 Kevin O'Flynn, "Moscow City Elections a Lesson in Controlled Democracy," RFE/RL Features, October 9, 2009, [http://www.rferl.org/content/Moscow\\_City\\_Elections\\_A\\_Lesson\\_In\\_Controlled\\_Democracy\\_/1847940.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Moscow_City_Elections_A_Lesson_In_Controlled_Democracy_/1847940.html), accessed October 25, 2009; Nikolay Petrov, "Digging Their Own Graves at the Polls," *Moscow Times*, October 14, 2009.
- 35 *Polit.Ru*, January 23, 2009, 15:14. The slight reduction in these thresholds that Medvedev introduced during 2008–2009 does not reverse the overall trend.
- 36 Robert Coalson, "Victory in Sochi," April 28, 2009, RFE/RL blog "The Power Vertical," <http://www.rferl.org/content/blog/1617655.html>, accessed October 30, 2009.
- 37 On such methods of administrative pressure, see M. N. Afanasiev, *Klientelizm i Rossiiskaia Gosudarstvennost'* (Moscow: Moscow Public Science Foundation, 1997).
- 38 Thus a full quarter of people who voted for the KPRF in the 2007 election said that they did so primarily to protest the situation in which Russia found itself, instead of backing the party for its ideology, performance, leading personalities, or other attributes (RES survey 2008). There are nevertheless widespread reports that the KPRF has been willing to "deal" with the Kremlin, not trying too hard to oppose the authorities in return for retaining this status. E.g., *Polit.Ru*, March 19, 2009,

- 10:00, <http://www.polit.ru/news/2009/03/19/commy.popup.html>. On Russia's party system, see Henry E. Hale, *Why Not Parties in Russia? Democracy, Federalism, and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); G. M. Mikhaleva, *Rossiiskie partii v kontekste transformatsii* (Moscow: URSS, 2009), and, on the 1990s, Yuri Korguniuk, *Sovremennaia rossiiskaia mnogopartiinost'* (Moscow: INDEM, 1999).
- 39 Mironov described his decision to appear on the 2004 presidential ballot when Putin was seeking reelection in the following way: "When a leader who is trusted goes into battle, he must not be left alone. One must stand beside him" (*Moscow Times*, January 9, 2004).
- 40 On *Pravoe Delo*, see, for example *Kommersant*, November 17, 2008. On *Spravedlivaia Rossiia*, see Luke March, "Managing Opposition in a Hybrid Regime: Just Russia and Parastatal Opposition," *Slavic Review*, vol. 68, no. 3 (Fall 2009), pp. 504–27.
- 41 The latter two parties were liquidated and merged into A Just Russia.
- 42 Joshua A. Tucker, "Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions," *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 5, no. 3 (September 2007), pp. 537–53.
- 43 One paper substantiating this empirically in a cross-national study is Grigore Pop-Eleches and Graeme B. Robertson, "Elections, Revolution, and Democracy in the Post-Cold War Era," paper presented at the 2008 annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association.
- 44 See Henry E. Hale, "Regime Cycles: Democracy, Autocracy, and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia," *World Politics*, vol. 58, no. 1 (October 2005), pp.133–65.
- 45 There is strong evidence of fraud, but Putin's and Medvedev's ballot-box victories have not depended mainly on this particular factor, as polling evidence testifies (e.g., Hale and Colton 2009). Most of the heavy-handed falsification exercises have occurred in provinces, and most prominently where machine politics preceded Putin, as with the Mordovian precincts reporting that more than 100 percent of the vote went to United Russia in the 2007 Duma election. Precise estimates of Russian fraud levels can be found in Mikhail Myagkov, Peter C. Ordeshook, and Dmitri Shakin, *The Forensics of Election Fraud: Russia and Ukraine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). See also A. E. Liubarev, A. I. Buzin, and A. V. Kynev, *Mertvye dushi: Metody falsifikatsii itogov golosovaniia i bor'ba s nimi* (Moscow: Nikkolo M, 2007).
- 46 *RFE/RL Newsline*, January 20, 2005; *RFE/RL Newsline*, February 14, 2005.
- 47 On the importance of blame attribution, see Debra Javeline, *Protest and the Politics of Blame: The Russian Response to Unpaid Wages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).
- 48 A Levada Center poll (*RFE/RL Newsline*, January 27, 2005) found that 41 percent blamed the federal government, 31 percent singled out Putin, and 22 percent named the Duma. Twenty-six percent said they planned to join protests. On the protests, see Robertson 2008.
- 49 These points are an outer ring, farther away from A than the points that would generate an election loss, because undertaking a revolution is more costly for society than voting.

- 50 Robertson 2008.
- 51 Striking evidence of the link between economic growth and presidential popularity appears in Daniel S. Treisman, “The Popularity of Russian Presidents,” draft paper presented at the international conference “Frontiers of Political Economics,” Higher School of Economics/New Economic School, Moscow, May 30–31, 2008, <http://www.hse.ru/data/396/226/1237/paper%20-%20Treisman.pdf>, last accessed December 8, 2008.
- 52 Colton and Hale 2009.
- 53 Levada Center, “Predstavleniia rossiian o demokratii,” October 15, 2009, <http://www.levada.ru/press/2009101501.html>, access date October 27, 2009.
- 54 As of 2008, only 15 percent thought that corruption had decreased during Putin’s two terms in office, with 40 percent reporting no change and 38 percent saying it had increased (RES survey 2008).
- 55 One classic example comes from economist Amartya Sen, who argues that no famine has ever occurred in a democracy even though many democracies have been extremely poor. Democracy’s early warning systems, including media and political competition, kick in far enough in advance to thwart the kind of state policies that tend to generate famine. See Amartya Sen, “Democracy as a Universal Value,” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 10, no. 3 (July 1999), pp. 3–17.
- 56 RES survey 2008.
- 57 Maria Lipman, “Media Manipulation and Political Control in Russia,” Chatham House, January 2009, [http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/13290\\_300109lipman.pdf](http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/13290_300109lipman.pdf), accessed July 6, 2009, p. 11; Mikhail Fishman and Konstantin Gaaze, *Russian Newsweek*, August 4, 2008.
- 58 Indeed, Huntington (1991) has documented the frequency of “stunning elections,” in which confident authoritarian incumbents, expecting to be rewarded for democratizing, are roundly defeated because on other policies they have low ratings of which they are unaware because everybody tells them what they want to hear.
- 59 *Polit.Ru*, October 15, 2008, 15:17.
- 60 *Polit.Ru*, December 6, 2007, 18:57; *Polit.Ru*, April 22, 2008, 16:33; *Kommersant*, April 14, 2008.
- 61 RES survey 2008.
- 62 Adjacent programming is considered a strong influence on the choice of news programming to watch in the United States as well, so Russian authorities are playing on a more general media market phenomenon.
- 63 RES survey 2008. The percentages do not total to 100 because people can watch more than one news program, especially because the channels typically broadcast their main news programs at different times.
- 64 *Kommersant*, October 16, 2009.
- 65 Lipman 2009.
- 66 Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).
- 67 For example, Russia lacks a law on lobbying.

- 68 Of course, this is not the only intended purpose of the state corporations.
- 69 Vadim Volkov, “Russia’s New State Corporations: Locomotives of Modernization or Covert Privatization Schemes?” Ponars Eurasia Policy Memo no. 25, August 2008, <http://ceres.georgetown.edu/esp/ponarsmemos/page/55920.html>, accessed July 6, 2009; Volkov, “Goskorporatsii: ocherednoi institutsial’nyi eksperiment,” *Pro et Contra*, vol. 11, nos. 5–6, September–December 2008, pp. 75–88.
- 70 Empirical documentation is provided by Andrew Konitzer, who among other things shows that even the highly corrupt gubernatorial elections of the 1990s and early 2000s produced a significant modicum of accountability for governors before their constituents. Andrew Konitzer, *Voting for Russia’s Governors: Regional Elections and Accountability Under Yeltsin and Putin* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2005).
- 71 Issues of fairness also arise because appointments to the Presidium are made semiannually with two coming from every federal okrug, but there are different numbers of regions in different federal okrugs. This means that Urals Federal Okrug governors (of which there are six) will serve far more often (once every three years) than will governors from, say, the Central Federal Okrug, which contains eighteen governors.
- 72 Compare Hale 2006 with results from RES 2008 survey.
- 73 Reuters (Moscow), May 14, 2000, as circulated by David Johnson’s Russia List.
- 74 Very recent events, including the slaying of the famous human rights activist Natalia Estemirova, and a number of subversive attacks in the summer of 2009 suggest that even this relative stability may be fleeting and achieved at the very high price of giving free rein to local strongman Ramzan Kadyrov.
- 75 RES survey 2008.
- 76 Levada Center, “Predstavleniia rossiian o demokratii,” October 15, 2009, <http://www.levada.ru/press/2009101501.html>, accessed October 27, 2009.
- 77 Levada Center, “Predstavleniia rossiian...,” 2009. Richard Rose and his colleagues reach similar findings, arguing that alternatives seem more and more distant and unrealistic. See Richard Rose, William Mishler, and Neil Munro, *Russia Transformed: Developing Popular Support for a New Regime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- 78 *Ekspert*, no. 6 (February 12–18, 2007), p. 19.
- 79 Levada Center, “Predstavleniia rossiian...,” 2009.
- 80 *Kommersant*, July 24, 2008.
- 81 Nikolay Petrov, “Reputatsionnye poteri,” *Grani.Ru*, May 26, 2009, 13:16. <http://www.grani.ru/opinion/petrov/m.151569.html>, access date October 30, 2009.
- 82 RES survey 2008. A plurality saw no change in levels of corruption (40 percent), and 7 percent found it hard to say.
- 83 See data posted on the Transparency International website, [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi), accessed July 7, 2009. Russia’s annual scores on the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), in which higher scores indicate less corruption, are as follows: 2.4 in 1998 and 1999, 2.1 in 2000, 2.3 in 2001, 2.7 in 2002 and 2003, 2.8 in 2004, 2.4 in 2005, 2.5 in 2006, 2.3 in 2007, and 2.1 in 2008.









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