Introduction: The need for popular support

The history of government is first of all a story of the state's capacity to mobilize support. Notwithstanding big differences between democratic and undemocratic political systems, they have one thing in common: All forms of government require political support to maintain their authority (Finer, 1997; Vu, 2010). Max Weber characterized authority as *Herrschaft*, a term connoting domination not democratization (1947: 152n). The pyramids of Egypt are a monument to the power of pharaohs to mobilize enough support to build a political system that lasted many centuries. North Korea is a striking contemporary example of a regime that has lasted more than half a century by using totalitarian methods to coerce citizens to be resigned to give it a show of support. However, the evolution of Anglo-American democracies shows that popular support can be achieved without coercion.

In the short term a regime may survive by coercion, for example, a puppet regime established by an occupation army; however, the long-term survival of a regime requires voluntary support or at least the resigned acceptance of the mass of its population. The history of the past century shows that many regimes have been assigned to the ash can of history because of a lack of support. For decades the Soviet Union appeared to be secure with the support of its citizens, and elsewhere in the Communist bloc regimes appeared to demonstrate that governments could rest on bayonets. The abrupt collapse of these regimes demonstrates the contingency of coercion as a source of support.

The eruption of competitive elections on many continents raised hopes of arriving at "the end of history" through the spread of democratic ideas and institutions (Fukuyama, 1992). National governments, with the United States in the lead, have funded many democracy assistance projects (see e.g. Carothers, 2004). Aspirations to democratize the world reached a climax with the introduction of competitive elections in Iraq and Afghanistan. The consequence has

been a rediscovery of the need to have a state as a pre-condition of democratization (e.g. Weber, 1947; Almond and Coleman, 1960; Rose, 2009a).

Failed hopes for democratization have now raised concerns about a "democratic roll back" (Diamond, 2008) and even "the erosion of political support in advanced industrial democracies" (Dalton, 2004: 1) because of a decline in political trust and satisfaction with the way that democracy is working (see e.g. Pharr and Putnam, 2000; Listhaug *et al.*, 2009). Some scholars of undemocratic regimes write about "authoritarian resilience" and the "durability" of authoritarian regimes (Brownlee, 2007), while others find evidence of "competitive authoritarianism" creating openings for democratization (Levitsky and Way, 2010a). Many studies have ambiguous implications (Gilley, 2010: 163). For example, Robert Putnam's (1993) theory of how social capital contributed to *Making Democracy Work* in northern Italy also shows that in southern Italy, where trust is harder to find, the consequence is *Making Democracy Fail*.

The regimes that rulers supply

What people are asked to support is determined by the character of the regime that political elites supply. A government that does not rely on elections to secure support is not failing to democratize; it is seeking support for an undemocratic regime. There is a vast literature differentiating democratic regimes from each other and also differentiating undemocratic regimes (see e.g. Linz, 2000; Haerpfer *et al.*, 2009). This has led to a proliferation of adjectives qualifying the two terms. David Collier and Steven Levitsky (1997) have identified more than 500 ways of describing "democracy with adjectives." Juan Linz has likewise been prolific in creating a typology of "authoritarian regimes with adjectives." In particular, Linz emphasizes the difference between undemocratic regimes that make totalitarian claims on their subjects and those that limit their demands. Barbara Geddes (1999) and Axel Hadenius and Jan Teorell (2007) emphasize subcategories of undemocratic rule in the form of military regimes, personal dictatorships, party states, monarchies and theocracies.

Support reflects the interaction of political elites and the mass of their citizens. Democratic governments are meant to do what the people want. Governors claim the support of the governed because they hold

office by winning elections. The need to seek re-election makes elective officeholders willing to supply what voters want (Schumpeter, 1952). The ability to give direction to government at the ballot box makes those who vote for losing parties as well as those endorsing the winners prepared to support a regime that allows for a change in the government of the day. An election that changes those in charge of government does not signify the withdrawal of support from the regime. It shows that the system works by giving voters a chance to turn out of office governors who fail to do what they want.

To treat an undemocratic regime as the possession of a political elite is to see only half of what makes it effective, because it ignores how citizens respond to the demands of their leaders. Just as a democratic regime can mobilize support by its political and economic performance, so can an undemocratic regime. The first modern states, such as Prussia and the absolute monarchy of France, were "police states," because they created institutions effective in maintaining order and the rule of law (North *et al.*, 2009). This encouraged the development of voluntary support on the grounds that order was preferable to disorder. Today, Singapore is an example of an undemocratic regime that claims support by maintaining order through the rule of law. A nationalist or populist regime may rely on the "soft power" of ideological persuasion to rally support. However, this leaves open to question whether subjects believe what the regime promotes. Many undemocratic regimes employ arbitrary or repressive methods to mobilize a show of support. Coerced subjects may respond by using "weapons of the weak" in efforts to get around some of its demands (Scott, 1985; Havel *et al.*, 1985; Wedel, 1986), and harsh repression may lead subjects to combine their resources in a rebellion (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006).

A regime that has indefinitely maintained support without challenge is often described as stable or consolidated. However, these terms imply an absence of change. It is more appropriate to describe such a regime as showing durability. A durable regime maintains support by adapting to changes that occur in its domestic and international environment. The United States Constitution, for example, has survived since 1787 because it has adapted to major changes in the scale, composition and demands of its citizens. Durability is not synonymous with democracy (cf. Chapter 9 and Przeworski *et al.*, 1996). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an absolute Islamic monarchy that

has maintained itself since 1932. This makes it much older than most regimes of the member states of the United Nations and of the European Union.

An undemocratic regime is most vulnerable to support being challenged by a split in its political elite (Bueno de Mesquita *et al.*, 2003). The importance of elite unity is illustrated by contrasting developments in the world's two largest and longest-lasting Communist regimes, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. The Soviet regime fell not because of the withdrawal of support by the mass of its citizens. It fell because Mikhail Gorbachev's reform initiatives provoked a self-destructive split within the Central Committee of the Communist Party that led to the break-up of the party-state. In China, by contrast, after winning a civil war the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party have maintained both their unity and a show of popular support (Shi, 2008) notwithstanding substantial reversals of policy as well as changes in leadership. Since the break between Moscow and Beijing, China has carefully followed developments in Russia in order to learn lessons about how to avoid an elite split that would threaten the collective privileges of the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (Marsh, 2005: 5ff.; Shambaugh, 2008).

When a regime does collapse, political elites must supply a new set of institutions with untested prospects for survival. The failure of the new regime's predecessor is a stark reminder that success cannot be taken for granted. However, there is no guarantee that the new regime will be democratic. A recurring feature of Middle Eastern politics is the replacement of one undemocratic regime by another (Posusney, 2004). Holding elections is no guarantee of support being forthcoming. Today, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan each have an elected government, a major change from rule by a despotic Saddam Hussein, the Taliban or an army general. However, from Islamabad to Baghdad there is palpable evidence that elected governments are administering "failed states," because they lack the support needed to maintain order.

The Berlin Wall illustrates the capacity of an undemocratic regime to coerce a show of support indefinitely – but also its vulnerability. Before the Wall was built in 1961 Germans could voluntarily move between East and West Germany. Millions of subjects of the East German Communist regime "voted with their feet" and walked to West Berlin in order to become citizens of the democratic Federal

Republic of Germany. The Wall was put up by the East German regime to prevent its subjects escaping from its demands. The regime's security service, the Stasi, used hundreds of thousands of informers to intimidate subjects to give at least a passive show of support, and border guards were ready to shoot to kill the few who sought to escape its coercive system (Koehler, 1999). However, when Gorbachev announced as part of his reform program that the Soviet Union would no longer support the East German regime in coercing its subjects, massive street demonstrations showed its lack of support. Within a year the East German regime had disappeared.

Plan of the book

In order to address an issue of broad relevance to comparative politics, the persistence of undemocratic regimes, we first show the importance of popular support in maintaining undemocratic as well as democratic regimes. This is a counsel of realism rather than despair, for the majority of states in the United Nations today are not durable democracies. Secondly, the book explains why, with the passage of time, support for the Russian regime has grown, notwithstanding the fact that it has concurrently become more undemocratic. Since support is open to challenge at critical junctures (Capoccia and Keleman, 2007), the third object is to test the robustness of popular support in response to challenges. We examine the predictable challenge of dealing with succession to the presidency when Vladimir Putin stepped down as president after reaching the constitutional limit of two terms of office and the unexpected challenge of the 2008 economic crisis, which threatened the prosperity that has contributed substantially to developing support. The political inertia of the passage of time has consolidated a mixture of active and passive support for a regime that Russians now see, to use Juan Linz's (1990b) phrase, as "the only game in town."

This book takes a bottom-up approach to governance. It relates the regime supplied by the political elite to the support that is given or withheld by ordinary Russians through the analysis of a unique series of surveys, the New Russia Barometer (NRB). The critical time for tracking the development of or the failure to develop popular support is in its early years. It is not possible to do so in regimes established long before the development of public opinion surveys (for exceptions,

see Weil, 1989; Noelle-Neumann, 1995). In recently established regimes, most surveys of public opinion have been undertaken soon after their launch, when citizens have not had enough time to judge them on the basis of their experience. This book is different, because the New Russia Barometer began interviewing Russians in the first month of the Russian Federation in January 1992. In all, eighteen nationwide NRB surveys have been conducted, in quiet times as well as when elections stirred up political interest. The latest survey included here was conducted a year after Dmitry Medvedev became president and the economic crisis hit the country (see www.abdn.ac.uk/cspp). The result is a data base beginning when Russians were hesitant or negative about the new regime and spanning the new consensus of support that has emerged. This dynamic is captured in the book's subtitle – *The* Changing *Views of Russians*.[1]

Because our study sets out to explain why some Russians support the regime and others do not, we avoid the mistake of assuming that the unitary nature of the state leads to a unity of public opinion (Katzenstein, 2009). Unlike the approach of area studies specialists, it avoids what Amartya Sen (2006: 45) calls the "illusion of singularity" by applying generic concepts to the experience of Russia. Since most regimes in the world are undemocratic or only partially democratic, the Russian system may today be more typical of how the world's peoples are governed than are Anglo-American democracies.

Chapter 1 sets out two contrasting stylized models of the generation of popular support: a democratic model in which support is a consequence of government doing what its citizens demand and an undemocratic model in which subjects indicate their support by responding to demands from government. A wide variety of theories offer reasons why individuals give support to or withhold support from their regime. These range from a belief that it is legitimate to the resigned acceptance of it as a lesser evil. In practice, every regime relies on a mixture of motivations. A review of World Values Survey data about endorsement of democracy as an ideal and of support for a regime finds that support, on average, is just as high in countries that are undemocratic as in countries with democratic regimes.

[1] Unless otherwise noted we use the word "Russians" to refer to all citizens of the Russian Federation, regardless of their ethnicity. The preamble of the country's 1993 constitution declares it is a compact of "We the multinational people of the Russian Federation."

During the political life of the median Russian adult, the country's leaders have brought about abrupt changes in the regime that they supplied. The earliest memories of such a person are of socialization into a totalitarian or post-totalitarian regime that had no hesitancy about coercing subjects. This regime was disrupted when Gorbachev's efforts to strengthen the Soviet regime through reform opened up a struggle between himself, hardline Communists opposed to change, and a renegade Communist, Boris Yeltsin. This led to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the creation of a Russian Federation confronted with the challenges of a transformed polity, economy and state. Initially, competitive elections offered Russians a choice between those more sympathetic to the old regime and supporters of the new regime under President Yeltsin. Chapter 2 charts the uneven and unexpected course of events that showed Yeltsin was better at disrupting Soviet institutions than at institutionalizing a new regime.

After becoming Russia's second president, Vladimir Putin made order his first priority, starting with enhancing the power of the Kremlin. Chapter 3 shows how the mass of the population was asked to show their support at elections in which competition had been closed down by alterations in election laws, intimidation of the media, and establishing United Russia as the "party of power." This has created what Putin's advocates describe as a "sovereign democracy," in which the sovereignty of the state takes precedence.

Chapter 4 draws on NRB surveys to track changes in the way in which Russians have evaluated what the leaders of the Russian Federation have supplied since the wreckage of the Soviet Union. It finds that a big majority of Russians regard democracy as ideal and that they think the new regime falls short of their ideal. Nonetheless, while the regime has been becoming less democratic, support for it has been growing and is now at the same or a higher level than support for Central and East European democracies that were once part of the Communist bloc. Since every NRB survey finds differences of opinion about the regime, four hypotheses are offered to explain variations: Political support varies with socialization, with political performance, with economic performance, and with the passage of time.

The breadth of topics covered in NRB surveys provides many indicators for testing hypotheses about the causes of support, such as social changes due to the turnover of generations, political performance in fighting corruption, fluctuations in the economy, the

ineluctable passage of time, or a combination of multiple influences. Chapter 5 details the results of analyses that emphasize the importance of political performance for support, such as priceless political gains in freedom. It also shows that the economic influences that matter most are how people evaluate the national economy rather than their own household's circumstances.

Because political support for a new regime cannot be achieved overnight, it is an excellent example of Weber's dictum that politics is about the slow drilling of hard boards. With the passage of time performance makes evident how a new regime differs from its predecessor. The longer it remains in place the greater the likelihood that its subjects will abandon any expectation that it could be replaced. Chapter 6 sets out the results of an innovative statistical analysis showing that the passage of time has been of greatest importance in causing the great majority of Russians to support their regime.

Political shorthand often confuses political regimes with political personalities, for example, speaking of Putin's Russia, Bush's America or Blair's Britain. However, a regime is meant to be durable rather than expire with the passing of a leader. The 1993 Russian constitution imposed a two-term limit on the office of president. In a stable regime, such a limit presents no threat, since it is the office rather than the individual that is the object of support. In regimes in which support is problematic, leadership succession can threaten a struggle within the political elite that is resolved by a change in regime. If Putin had held on to the presidency by bending or breaking the constitution, this would have confirmed fears of the regime becoming a system of personal rule as in post-Soviet Central Asia. Chapter 7 shows how at this critical juncture Putin finessed the challenge by making himself prime minister and nominating his protege, Medvedev, as president. Although Western observers described the subsequent presidential election as unfair, Russians did not – and support for the regime remained high.

Since the national economy is one of the most important influences on political support, the 2008 global economic crisis was also a challenge to support. It abruptly produced a big fall in Russia's gross domestic product (GDP) and a rise in the number who were not paid regularly even though in work. Chapter 8 uses evidence from the NRB survey a year after the crisis began to determine to what extent support has been depressed by the reversal of the national economy.

While this lowered support, the effect was largely offset by the passage of time having created so big a cushion of support that a big majority of Russians continue to be positive about the regime.

The capacity of the Russian regime to maintain support when confronted with challenges confirms the potential for an undemocratic regime to become a durable regime. However, the transformation of Russia two decades ago is a reminder that undemocratic regimes are not proof against failure. The final chapter asks: What could disrupt the political equilibrium that has emerged in the Russian Federation? It compares the durability of Russia's regime with that of other post-Soviet regimes and marshals a global array of surveys to test the importance of political support for undemocratic as well as democratic regimes.

Because historical events and institutions provide "hard" data about the political context in which surveys ask people their opinions, this book offers a crosslevel account of the interaction between the performance of the regime that elites supply and the response of its subjects. It draws upon the work of institutionalists such as Archie Brown (2009), Richard Sakwa (e.g. 2008a) and Stephen White (2011) and of political sociologists such as Vladimir Shlapentokh (1989, 2001), and on Russian government sources too. Unlike studies of elections, this book is not concerned with why people support a particular party (see e.g. Colton and Hale, 2009) but with why people support a regime that international observers characterize as undemocratic in its conduct of elections and much else. Unlike James Gibson *et al.* (1992), we are less concerned with the cultural preferences of Russians than with how Russians slowly develop support for a regime that they see as incongruent with their preference for a complete democracy (Whitefield, 2009).

In the two decades since the New Russia Barometer was launched, the authors have accumulated many debts. Tens of thousands of Russians have given us their views about how their country is governed in interviews conducted by the Levada Center. Its staff has behaved with great professionalism and integrity, notwithstanding political and economic difficulties of maintaining a not-for-profit research institute originally founded in the final years of the Soviet Union as VCIOM, the All-Russian Center for Public Opinion. The complete set of surveys is now available from the United Kingdom Data Archive. Stephen White and Neil Robinson made helpful

comments on a draft of this manuscript. The preparation of this book has been supported by a grant from the British Economic and Social Research Council (RES-062-23-0341) for Testing the Durability of Regime Support in Russia: The Challenge of Putin's Term Limits. Earlier New Russia Barometer surveys have been supported by grants from scientific, governmental and private foundations in Austria, Germany, Hungary, Sweden and the United States as well as the ESRC; from the program on the effects of relative deprivation on health led by Sir Michael Marmot at the University College London Medical School; and from the World Bank and UN agencies. At no point has any of these organizations sought to exert influence on the design or content of questionnaires or on the interpretation of survey results. This has always been the responsibility of social science authors.

Ideas in this book have been presented in academic seminars, conferences and public policy meetings in places ranging from Washington and Berkeley to Berlin, Vienna, Moscow and Tokyo. Articles from work in progress have been published in peer-reviewed academic journals devoted to political science; journals concerned with Russia and post-Communist countries; in social medicine journals; in the Studies in Public Policy series of the Centre for the Study of Public Policy (CSPP); and in shorter commentaries on public policy (for a list, see www.abdn.ac.uk/cspp). A number have been published in the Russian-language *Bulletin* of the Levada Center. A complementary book by the senior author, *Understanding Post-Communist Transformation: A Bottom Up Approach* (2009c), compares the experience of Russians with Central and East Europeans who are now citizens of democratic states of the European Union.

While this book builds on previous work, it is not nor could it be a repeat of what has previously been published. In the five years since our previous book (Rose, Mishler and Munro 2006), Russians have experienced a change of presidents and a reversal in economic fortunes, and their responses to these developments have been tracked in four nationwide New Russia Barometer surveys. Equally important, in keeping with the priorities of the Russian regime today, the emphasis of this book is not on democratic institutions such as elections, but on why a regime that is not beholden to the Western idea of electoral democracy has gained and maintained the political support of Russians.