

Understanding Russian Politics

A fresh and compelling interpretation of Russian politics by a leading authority, this textbook focuses on political developments in the world's largest country under Putin and Medvedev. Using a wealth of primary sources, it covers economic, social and foreign policy, and the 'system' of politics that has developed in recent years. Opposing arguments are presented and students are encouraged to reach their own judgements on key events and issues such as privatisation and corruption. This textbook tackles timely topics such as gender and inequality issues; organised religion; the economic *krizis*; and Russia's place in the international community. It uses numerous examples to place this powerful and richly endowed country in context, with a focus on the place of ordinary people which shows how policy is translated to Russians' everyday lives.

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Contents

List of figures	<i>page</i> vii
List of tables	ix
Preface	xi
Map: administrative units under the 1993 Constitution	xiv
1 From communist to postcommunist rule	1
2 Voters, parties and parliament	27
3 Presidential government	71
4 From plan to market	115
5 A divided society	163
6 Changing times, changing values	219
7 Russia and the wider world	263
8 What kind of system?	321
Notes	371
Note on surveys	457
Index	459

Figures

2.1	The legislative process (simplified)	<i>page 67</i>
3.1	Presidential popularity, 1990–2010	92
4.1	Economic performance, 1989–2010	138
4.2	Comparative economic performance, 2000–2010	151
5.1	Russia’s population projections, 1950–2050	212
6.1	Political system preferences, 1996–2008	226
6.2	Economic system preferences, 1997–2008	228
8.1	Freedom House ratings, selected countries (1980–2010)	354

Tables

2.1	Russian Duma elections, 1993–2007	<i>page</i> 31
2.2	Elections to the Russian State Duma, 1993–2003	32
2.3	The Russian Duma election, 2 December 2007	40
2.4	Russia’s political parties, 2007–2010	44
2.5	Trust in civic institutions, 1998–2010	53
2.6	Voting support by ‘party family’, 1993–2007	55
2.7	Patterns of voting support, 2007 Duma election	57
2.8	The composition of the Duma, 2000–2011	65
3.1	The Russian government, 2010 (simplified)	80
3.2	Russian presidents and prime ministers since 1991	84
3.3	The Russian presidential election, 1996	93
3.4	The Russian presidential election, 26 March 2000	96
3.5	The Russian presidential election, 14 March 2004	97
3.6	The Russian presidential election, 2 March 2008	100
4.1	Soviet economic performance, 1951–1991: various estimates	119
4.2	The progress of privatisation, 1993–2000	132
4.3	Natural resource endowments, selected countries (per head of population)	152
4.4	Corruption: Russia in comparative perspective, 1996–2010	154
4.5	The big two: Gazprom and Rosneft’	157
5.1	Living standards in the 1990s (percentage changes, year on year)	166
5.2	The richest Russians, 2008–2010	176
5.3	Living standards in the 2000s	186
5.4	Comparing societies, c.2010	191
5.5	Recorded crime, 1990–2000 (thousands)	193
5.6	Recorded crime, 2001–2008 (thousands)	202
5.7	Comparative crime rates, c.2010	202
5.8	Women in the Soviet/Russian legislature, 1974–2007	208
5.9	Female political representation: Russia in comparative perspective	209
6.1	The main concerns of ordinary Russians in the 2000s	225
6.2	Russians and their economy, 1994–2010	227

6.3	Which way forward (2008)?	229
6.4	The ‘best’ and ‘worst’ features of the Soviet system, 1993–2010	231
6.5	Evaluating the October revolution, 1990–2010	232
6.6	The characteristics of Soviet and postcommunist rule, 1998–2005	233
6.7	Changes since communist rule, 2001–2010	234
6.8	Comparing the Soviet system and the West in retrospect	235
6.9	Putin’s ‘direct lines’, 2001–2010	244
6.10	The main religious denominations, 1996–2010	256
6.11	Russians and their religions, 1991–2010	256
6.12	Russians and their religion in comparative perspective	257
7.1	The major East–West arms treaties	273
7.2	Defence forces, selected countries, c.2010	287
7.3	Patterns of international membership, 2010	297
7.4	Russia’s friends and foes, 2009	302
7.5	Russian foreign policy orientations: a schematic representation	307
7.6	The key Russian foreign policy documents (since 2000)	317
8.1	Patterns of media consumption, 2010	340
8.2	Indices of press freedom, selected countries, 2010 (rankings)	343
8.3	The Russian judicial system: an outline	344
8.4	Russians and ‘democracy’, 2005–2010	363
8.5	What, in your view, is ‘democracy’ (1996–2010)?	364
8.6	What are the positive and negative features of ‘democracy’ (2006)?	364
8.7	What kind of democracy does Russia need (2005–2010)?	365
8.8	What would be the most suitable political system for Russia (2010)?	365
8.9	Comparing political influence in Russia and the West, 2010	367

Preface

Russia is no longer the Soviet Union. But it still accounts for a seventh of the world's land surface, stretching across two continents and eleven different time zones. It was a founding member of the United Nations and holds one of the permanent seats on its Security Council. It has one of the world's largest and most technically advanced concentrations of military might. It is also one of the world's biggest economies, with accumulations of natural resources that are among the largest in the world and a vital component of the energy balance of many European and more distant countries. How Russia is governed is accordingly a matter of direct concern to the whole world, and not just to Russians themselves.

An earlier version of this study focused on 'Russia's new politics' at a time when it was still conventional to speak of a more general 'transition to democracy'. The focus of this new and very different book is the Putinist system that came into existence in the early years of the new century, amid a widespread acceptance that early and more optimistic forecasts of Russia's political direction had been mistaken or at least premature. But it is, I hope, much more than a study of the institutions of government that became established during these years: because the process of government can scarcely be understood without an examination of the changes that have been taking place in a much more divided society, in an economy that has been moving from state ownership to a more complex hybrid, and in Russia's relations with the rest of the world community.

This is a book that draws on many years' experience of teaching graduates and undergraduates at my own institution in Scotland, in Italy (at the Orientale in Naples and more recently the Johns Hopkins Bologna Center) and in the United States. It draws very heavily on the printed press, much of it read in the periodicals room of the Historical Library in Moscow. It draws only when I am unable to avoid it on electronic sources: not, I hope, because of any obscurantism, but because sources of this kind do not contain page references or (usually) graphics, may disappear or otherwise become unavailable, and in a small but disturbing number of cases may differ from the printed original. I have also made extensive use of a series of national representative surveys, conducted not just in Russia but in some other post-Soviet republics as well, between 1993 and 2010 (details are provided in a separate appendix), and of archives, interviews and (obviously) printed books of all kinds, many of them collected on frequent visits to the larger Russian cities.

It is a book that draws at least as much on a close working relationship over many years with other scholars in several countries. My collaboration with Ol’ga Kryshatanovskaya of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences goes back to the late Soviet years, with a particular focus on the political elite. I have worked closely for many years with Ian McAllister of the Australian National University, and before that with Richard Rose of Strathclyde and Aberdeen, on the analysis of survey data. At Glasgow I owe a particular debt to Bill Miller, who helped to introduce me to the quantitative analysis of post-Soviet politics, and to Sarah Oates, with whom I have shared much more than a scholarly interest in political communications. My work would have been inconceivable without the expert assistance of Tania Konn-Roberts and her colleagues, and the world-class resources of Glasgow University Library. I am indebted to the Leverhulme Trust for a Major Research Fellowship that provided me with the time I have needed to bring this study to a conclusion, and to the Economic and Social Research Council for their continuing support under grants RES 000-22-2532 (a joint award with the Australian Research Council), RES 062-23-1378 (Crafting Electoral Authoritarianism) and RES 062-23-1542 (The Putin Succession). It was two of these ESRC awards that allowed me to appoint Tania Biletskaya and Valentina Feklyunina as research assistants, and this is my opportunity to thank them for their wisdom and good humour as well as practical assistance.

Several of those I have already mentioned are part of a larger ‘family’ that has built up over the past ten years or so, many of them organised in a ‘transformation group’ that operates under the joint leadership of myself and another Glasgow colleague, Jane Duckett. It includes Sarah, Tania and Valentina as well as Derek Hutcheson, Elena Korosteleva, Yulia Korosteleva, Sam Robertshaw, Anke Schmidt-Felzmann and Vikki Turbine. Derek and Valentina are part of a still larger extended family of former research students, many of whom are making their own contribution to academic or public life around the world. It is a pleasure to list them here: Aadne Aasland, Ayse Artun, Mervyn Bain, Youcef Bouandel, Janet Campbell, James Cant, Laura Cleary, Peter Duncan, Katsuto Furusawa, Åse Grødeland, Mohammed Ishaq, Peter Lentini, Eero Mikenberg, Atsushi Ogushi, Clelia Rontoyanni, Alison Swain, Reza Taghizade and John Watts, and a separate Korean ‘family’, including Taikang Choi, Younhee Kang, Seongjin Kim, Ik Joong Yun and Yeongmi Yun.

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towards completion. I am equally grateful to the Political Science Program at the Australian National University for appointing me a Visitor in early 2010, which allowed me to complete the manuscript in the idyllic environment of their Canberra campus, and to Grinnell College in Iowa, where I was able to make the final corrections.

I have sometimes been asked if this is a study that offers a particular interpretation. I hope all its readers will feel the evidence has been presented fairly, and that they have been left free to draw their own conclusions. But it will not escape many of them, particularly those who consult the final chapter, that I believe Russia has been poorly served by the concentration of power in its central institutions that developed over the years of the Putin presidency, a concentration that appears to have prejudiced many of the leadership’s own objectives (in terms of social and economic development) quite apart from its baneful effects on the quality of its public life. In this respect, the Russian system offers us a fully developed example of the typical strengths and weaknesses of authoritarian government: above all its lack of an effective rule of law, which leaves individual liberties vulnerable to abuse by the authorities and discourages foreign and domestic investment. It is perhaps some consolation that, unlike in the Soviet years, Russian scholars can now debate these issues for themselves, and in dialogue with scholars in other countries, even if it may often be easier for them to do so in academic journals and conferences than in the mainstream media.

Finally, a note on conventions. For the transliteration of Russian I have relied on the scheme favoured by the journal *Europe-Asia Studies*, departing from it where other forms have become widely accepted in English (accordingly Yeltsin rather than Yel’tsin, Igor rather than Igor’, Archangel rather than Arkhangel’sk, and place names more generally without hard or soft signs, although I have transliterated strictly in the footnotes). References are given in full on their first occurrence in each chapter, and thereafter in shortened form. The notes are not limited to source references, but include some additional and (I think) important detail; each chapter ends with suggestions for further reading, limited to a small number of works in English. Place names are generally rendered in their contemporary form, rather than ones adopted at a later period (accordingly it is Leningrad up to 1990, and St Petersburg thereafter, although there is still a Leningrad region).

All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.



Russia: administrative units under the 1993 Constitution

