

New Trends in Russian Political Mentality: Putin 3.0. Ed. Elena Shestopal. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016. xviii, 396 pp. Notes. Index. Illustrations. Figures. Tables. \$110.00, hard bound.
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The arrival of Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin in May 2000 ushered in an era of perceived political stability in Russia. It has become a common perception that Putin ended the tumultuous period of the 1990s and laid the foundation for stable development in both political and economic spheres. While this may be true to an extent, stability under Putin transpired to be rather cursory, at least in the ideological sense. If anything, one might conclude that the El'tsin years have been clearer for western observers in terms of the direction that Russia's political future might take. The El'tsin era developed against the backdrop of the collapse of the Soviet Union, when most people, both in Russia and abroad, hailed the victory of the western liberal path. Russia's "natural" mission was seen in embracing liberal democratic values and joining the "normal" (western) league of states with its institutions serving as a benchmark of progressive development.

The arrival of Putin has subverted this paradigm. More importantly, this seemingly sudden change of course has found a surprisingly enthusiastic response within Russian society. The ubiquitous victory of the western liberal path disappeared with the turn of the century and the more usual Russian hovering on history's crossroads resurfaced. Statist traditionalists have reemerged as historic opponents to western liberals, as had been the case for most of Russia's turbulent past. The nature of "Russian" ideology, the specific character of Russian society, the attitude of Russians to their authorities, their perceptions of the country's past and present, their lenience to particular and often distinct forms of government, and their quest for justice and desire for security, became the most commonplace points of public and academic scrutiny.

In this light, the arrival of the book *New Trends in Russian Political Mentality* edited by Elena Shestopal is an important event for the study of contemporary Russian politics and society. This essential volume authored by Russia's leading sociologists focuses on the particularities of public opinion, political thought, and ideology in Russia during the Putin era. The book is composed of four thematic sections devoted respectively to core cultural historical trends of Russia's political mentality, Russia's popular attitudes to political power, images of political institutions, and perceptions of Russia's political leaders. The discussion provides important foundations for interpreting the political situation in contemporary Russia for political scientists and public opinion makers in the west.

It could be posited that one of the main challenges faced by scholars of Russia is accounting for the particularities of Russia's history and political culture. The latter, though slowly changing, continues to exert a significant influence on perceptions and attitudes of ordinary people to the nature of the country's political system and leadership. Arguably, Russia's historic conundrum lies in her almost inescapable lenience towards offering a metaphysical and ontological "alternative" to Europe: to western Christianity as seen by the adoption of Eastern Orthodoxy, to capitalist modernity by the pursuit of the Soviet socialist path, and to globalism by the drive towards the multipolar world order. Undeniably, this "alternativism" has historical and cultural roots. The book takes a broad range of historical factors into account and renders them serious explanatory power for the study of contemporary Russian politics. Attitudes to political power, political institutions, and political opposition are exhibited as derivative from a set of rudimentary historical cultural positions, which include religious, geographical, geopolitical, and security-related factors.

Scarcely less important remains the attitude of Russians to the Soviet era. Coming to terms with this historical period represents the touchstone for forging civic peace, bridging the existing metaphysical divisions within Russian society, and developing some new dimensions of Russia's potential future. The task of national reconciliation pursued by the Putin government includes forging a reconciliation between the conditional "reds" and conditional "whites"—a topic of heated public debates, publications, and private societal discussions. Finding a common touchstone without the ideological destruction of either side is the task targeted by Russian government and society. The authors shed light on the public attitude to this theme with a particularly unbiased approach that highlights the extant points of division and potential fields for reconciliation. Attitudes and perceptions of the authorities and institutions during the El'tsin and Putin eras, though perhaps less consequential, are also examined with equal insight and skill.

Political leadership has always puzzled historians, political scientists, and philosophers alike. The most ambitious question has been what drives human history. Is it political personalities and their "will to power"? A struggle between economic classes? Hegelian Spirit? Or something else? This puzzle is even more enigmatic in the Russian case. The volume highlights historical aspects of the Russian leadership and concludes that post-Soviet developments created qualitatively new conditions that require leaders to adapt their identities to current popular demands. The authors provide a unique insight into personalities of Russia's political leaders within the opposition and those in power. Various phases of public attitudes to Vladimir Putin's activity are discussed in detail. The authors conclude that Putin's leadership has always been marked by contradictory trends of approval and skepticism. At the same time, following the events in Crimea, the authors claim that Putin has an indispensable role as a political figure for public consolidation and is of primary importance to the perception of Russia's role in the world arena following the Crimean events.

The nature of Russia's political opposition is another area of interest. Many contemporary studies of Russia, in particular those within the media, place mistakenly high hopes on the potential growth of discontent amongst ordinary Russians and on the ability of the non-systemic liberal opposition to effect fundamental change within Russia's political system. This study demonstrates that the popular attitude to Russia's opposition is generally skeptical. Moreover, in contrast to established opinion, Russians do not divide opposition on "systemic" and "non-systemic" grounds. They do not think that the non-systemic branch has higher truth or value. Moreover, they consider representatives of "systemic" opposition as mere opposition. Deeply held skepticism about the opposition's real intentions, as well as the general weakness of Russia's parliament, prevents the latter from securing greater political success. It is also significant that discontent with the authorities does not always translate to immediate support for the opposition even if the latter criticizes the most immediate shortcomings of the government.

To conclude, the unfolding story of post-Soviet Russia shows that a broad range of factors are beginning to play out. Metaphysical issues of a non-economic, non-material, and ideational nature are gaining greater prominence. Those issues pertain to social justice, responsibility, social, legal and political equality, foreign policy and security, interpretation of crucial junctions of the country's history, and the nature of contemporary politics and institutions. As these factors begin to play a larger role in the evolution of Russian politics and society, the unbiased study of people's political and cultural mentality becomes indispensable for a deeper understanding of Russia. Hence, this book is essential reading for all interested audiences, including advanced students of Russia, policy makers, and public opinion shapers. It is a contribution

that provides a refined and politically-nuanced picture of Russian society based on sophisticated theoretical analysis and elaborate sociological research.

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Russian Studies and Comparative Politics: Views from Metatheory and Middle-Range Theory. By Frederic J. Fleron, Jr. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017. xi, 345 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Figures. Tables. \$110.00, hard bound.
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In political science, scholars who specialize on a particular country can find themselves pulled in opposite directions. On one side are disciplinary pressures, which include grounding one's work in the general literature and providing readers with lessons that may prove applicable in other settings. On the other side are demands from country experts—both from the country in question and from other disciplines—who may question the utility of comparison, which is the nominal objective of comparative politics. In *Russian Studies and Comparative Politics*, Frederic Fleron pursues the admirable goal of outlining how scholars of Russian politics may satisfy these rival demands. Fleron presents the work as a culmination of previous calls to integrate Sovietology—and, more recently, Russian politics—into contemporary social science theory building, as well as a compilation of his own efforts to do so over the course of his academic career. His proposed solution is a greater reliance on middle range theory.

The book begins with a discussion of middle-range theory, its promise for understanding Russian politics, and its ability to use idiographic knowledge for disciplinary goals. Like others, Fleron presents middle range theory as the point where theorizing and empirics meet. Middle range theory avoids excessive generalities and abstraction while still providing a coherent conceptual framework that can guide the collection and analysis of data. In Chapter 2, Fleron reviews the main tenets of area studies and social scientific approaches while emphasizing that “the goal of any area of systematic knowledge [should be] to construct empirically verified theories” (39). Like most of the chapters in the volume, Chapter 2 is a reprint of a previous publication. In this case, the chapter comes from a 1968 Soviet Studies article. Nevertheless, the chapter's discussion of different research strategies, concept formation, and theory construction are foundational topics that fruitfully lay the groundwork for the chapters to come.

Chapters 3 and 4 round out the section of the book dedicated to metatheory. Both of these chapters were written in the mid-1990s and consider the degree to which the division between area studies and social scientific approaches that characterized Sovietology might continue. Fleron rejects the suggestion that “fact gathering” during this period of transition should take precedence over theorizing and warns against scholarship that is satisfied with producing “believable” and “recognizable” narratives. Instead, Fleron urges scholars to apply existing middle-range theories to political developments in Russia and to use the particularities of the Russian case to refine those theories. Fleron's call for systematic comparison as a way to acquire general knowledge is constant and unapologetic.

Chapters 5 through 10 present studies by Fleron that are intended to serve as models of how to apply and test middle-range theories. The subjects under investigation range from the use of cooptation theory to understand how Soviet leaders adapted to their changing environments to an application of congruence theory to assess the