LEGITIMACY OF POLITICAL POWER IN PUTIN’S RUSSIA

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ABSTRACT

Scholars working within the democratisation paradigm are unable to satisfactorily explain a double enigma of Russian politics under Vladimir Putin. Firstly, how can an undemocratic president be genuinely popular and approved by the public; and secondly, why has Putin’s personal approval not translated into increased support for state institutions. This paper seeks to explain the puzzle by employing Weber’s sociological theory of political legitimacy. After suitably adapting the theory to modern political conditions, it analyses the legitimacy of power in post-Soviet Russia. A conflictual legitimacy structure is detected, in which a charismatically legitimate president undermines the legal-rational authority of the constitutional state. The dynamics of this conflict explain Putin’s popularity and the discrepancy between the approval of the state institutions and the president. The paper concludes by suggesting possible implications of the current power structure on the future of Russia.
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INTRODUCTION

Most scholars of Russian politics work within the democratisation paradigm. This approach may have been appropriate in the 1990s as Russia’s transition began, but has lost most of its explanatory power since the ascent of Vladimir Putin.¹ Due to its normative and theoretical biases, the transition paradigm now conceals more than it reveals (Carothers 2002). One of the biggest shortcomings of the model is its strong emphasis on formal institutions, according to which all that is needed for a political transformation is an elite agreement on the appropriate institutional design. However plausible, this assumption makes understanding Russia’s political life impossible.

The Russian constitution of 1993 created all the institutions necessary for a liberal democratic state. This constitution has remained virtually unchanged from its coming into force.² We are thus left wondering how Russian politics could transform from broadly democratic to almost authoritarian with little institutional change. Perhaps the answer is that institutions, on their own, are not that important.

“In characterising political systems, it is customary to focus on the institutions. Yet in Russia in the 1990s and 2000s, such an approach can lead one astray. In fact, the system operated very differently at different times, even without any significant change in the rules and structures of government.” (Treisman 2010, 49)

Russia’s problem does not seem to be undemocratic institutions, but rather undemocratic practices. A democratisation theorist would respond, however, that democratic institutions ensure that such practices do not become systematic. In a free society, undemocratic practices are relentlessly punished by the electorate, thus forcing the elites to play the democratic game. This explains why the approval ratings of the ruling elite fell dramatically as politics under Yeltsin became increasingly undemocratic.

Then, however, Vladimir Putin was elected president in March 2000, gathering 53% of the vote in the first round. Since then Russia has gradually become less democratic with a virtual extinction of political opposition, restriction of political freedom, renationalisation of private property and state control of television networks. Surprisingly, and inexplicably for

¹ In this paper, I focus on Russia’s political structure during Putin’s presidency (2000-2008). This time-limit is due to the fact that the inner workings of the present “tandemocracy” with Medvedev are still not transparent enough to allow systematic analysis. My core arguments should still be applicable to the post-2008 Russia.
² The only significant amendment is the December 2008 extension of presidential and State Duma terms to 6 and 5 years respectively.
democratisation theorists, Putin has also been astonishingly popular throughout his reign. Public opinion surveys show that Putin’s personal approval ratings have been constantly above 60% throughout his two terms, with an 8-year average of 75.8% (Appendix, 1).³ Such high approval is puzzling in itself, but even more so if we take into account that the socio-economic changes of the “Putin decade” are regarded by Russian citizens as relatively mediocre. When asked about changes of the past 10 years, 36% of responders say that the economic situation of their family has remained unchanged, while 39% believe it has worsened; 41% think that the level of unemployment “increased considerably” and only 22% believe that the quality of public services has improved (Appendix, 6). Adding to the puzzle is the fact that an extraordinarily high presidential approval has not translated into support for state institutions.

“The institutions that really constitute the political system – the executive at all levels, representative bodies, and the judiciary – enjoy practically no trust. Approval of political parties, the actual bearers of parliamentary democracy, is even lower than that of the notoriously corrupt and despised police. In other words, the new Russian state as represented by its constitutional organs has little support among the population; acceptance is only created through the person of the president.” (Schröder 2009, 77)

The most striking example is the exceptionally poor assessment of the prime minister and the cabinet (before Putin took office). After all, the president appoints and controls the government; it is directly accountable to him; and its policy initiatives are always coordinated with the president. “Strictly speaking, there is no reason why the president should not be held liable for the shortcomings of his government.” (Schröder 2009, 76)

I propose to explain this enigma by employing Max Weber’s sociological theory of legitimacy. I argue that the discrepancy between presidential and institutional support that we witness in Russia today is due to the competition between legal-rational and charismatic types of legitimacy. Whatever his own motives, Putin is not seen as an official within the bureaucracy, but rather as a charismatic leader, who represents the interests of the nation within the state. Russian citizens, I argue, attribute negative developments within the country to the legal-rational state, but not to Putin, who tries to solve people’s problems despite the corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy. As a result, state institutions remain illegitimate, while Putin’s rule is, at present, charismatically legitimate.

³ They have remained high after Putin stepped down in 2008 and became the prime minister. In fact, they have been higher than that of the new president, Dmitry Medvedev, which once again shows that the importance of formal institutions in contemporary Russia should not be overstated.
1. LEGITIMACY OF POLITICAL POWER IN THE MODERN WORLD

In this section, I set the theoretical framework necessary for the empirical analysis in the second part of this paper. I begin by briefly summarising Weber’s well-known typology of legitimacy types. I then critically evaluate it from the perspective of political conditions in modern societies. I argue that to be useful Weber’s theory is in need of substantial modification, especially concerning charismatic legitimacy.

1.1. Weber’s three types of legitimacy

Weber understands political power simply as the ability of A to issue commands that B will obey. He recognises that there is a number of reasons for obedience, including self-interest (fear of punishment or expectation of reward) and simple habit. However, for a stable operation of political power it is necessary that the commands be also seen as valid, i.e. legitimate. As one commentator puts it, legitimacy “maximizes stability of action by making certain patterns of behaviour normatively valid, by attaching to their maintenance a sense of duty and obligation” (Pakulski 1986, 35).

Now, although legitimacy is about “inner justifications” of the ruled (Weber 1994b, 311), Weber is primarily interested in the sociological (and not psychological) implications of legitimacy. Thus, the extent to which a single individual believes in the validity of commands is far less important than what his/her social relations with chief power holders tell us about the actual structure of rule (Breuilly 2010, 3).

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4 To characterise social relationships based on commands, Weber prefers ‘rule’ (Herrschaft) to power (Macht), because the latter is “sociologically amorphous” (ES 53). In this paper, however, I use the terms “political power” and “rule” interchangeably.
The crucial point is that “according to the kind of legitimacy which is claimed, the type of obedience, the kind of administrative staff developed to guarantee it, and the mode of exercising authority, will all differ fundamentally” (ES 213). In other words, different modes of legitimation help us explain different political outcomes, including the structure of rule, degrees of inclusion and stability of the system. A Weberian analysis of a political system can also help us predict future political dynamics.

1.2. Sociological correlates of legitimacy types

One of Weber’s most valuable contributions to the sociology of power is his claim about the correlation between legitimacy types and structures of rule (Rigby 1982, 5). Weber never fully elaborates the reasons for this congruence and his causal mechanism remains unclear. Minimally, the argument seems to be that it is difficult to sustain certain types of rule when the corresponding modes of legitimacy are unavailable. In any case, a strong correlation is empirically observable, most readily in the structure of administrative apparatuses.

In the case of legal-rational legitimation, where obedience is owed to impersonal order, political power is generally exercised through a bureaucratic hierarchical organisation. Officials in the bureaucracy are appointed based on their qualifications and paid a fixed salary. Their task is to apply impersonal legal rules within a clearly defined sphere of competence (jurisdiction). Personal power is derivative, resulting solely from a specific position within the legal order. It is for this reason that Hannah Arendt calls bureaucratic rule a “no-man rule” (Arendt 1998, 40). The paradigmatic example here is the modern state.

The rulers-staff relationships are markedly different in the case of traditional authority. The organisation of power here is much looser. The administrative staff is recruited either from one’s household (relatives, slaves etc.) as in earlier patriarchal systems or from others who are personally dependent upon the ruler (e.g. vassals) as in later patrimonial systems. In short, “personal loyalty, not the official’s impersonal duty, determines the relations of the administrative staff to the master” (ES 227). In such a system, responsibilities of the staff are arbitrary, often shifting and rarely determined by expertise. Once the leader departs, most of the staff loses their position. Traditional rule is not, however, completely arbitrary. The leader is chosen in accordance with the tradition (e.g. primogeniture) and is in turn expected to rule according to customs. Therefore, there are rules, although they are less
rigid and comprehensive than in the case of legal-rational authority. “Traditional authority is bound to the precedents handed down from the past and to this extent is also oriented to rules.” (ES 244)

In contradistinction to both, “charismatic authority is specifically irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules” (ES 244). The administrative staff is essentially a personal following of the extraordinary leader, which Weber terms charismatic community (Gemeinde) or even charismatic aristocracy. There is no clear distribution of competences or hierarchy, instead “the leader intervenes in general or individual cases when he considers the members of his staff lacking in charismatic qualification for a given task” (ES 243). Charismatic authority is a specifically revolutionary force in the sense that it seeks to change the ordinary way of life. Its anti-traditional motto is well summarised by Jesus’ “It is written, but I say unto you!”

Charismatic authority is also inherently unstable. For one, there is no succession mechanism which means that the regime often dies with the leader, or else undergoes routinisation in either legal-rational or traditional directions (ES 246ff.). Yet many charismatic regimes do not even get that far, because the legitimacy of a charismatic leader is strongly dependent upon performance. His charisma needs “proof” in the form of success; “if his leadership fails to benefit his followers, it is likely that his charismatic authority will disappear” (ES 242).

It is possible to present the types of legitimate authority as a matrix of two contrasting pairs that characterise the power structure: 1) personal versus impersonal rule; and 2) routine versus extraordinary operation of power (Breuilly 2010, 20).

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Figure 1. Types of legitimate authority according to the character of power.

We see then that unlike impersonal legal-rational authority, both traditional and charismatic types are based on personal loyalty. At the same time, whereas both legal-rational and

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5 The third reason is that the followers tire of revolutions and degenerate to the level of bourgeois values of good life.

6 As noted above, it is sociologically irrelevant how sincere this loyalty is in individual persons.
traditional forms of rule are routine or everyday (alltäglich), charismatic authority is extraordinary. Weber’s tripartite distinction leaves one of the boxes empty. Is impersonal and extraordinary authority impossible? Or would such authority be necessarily illegitimate? Not quite, as will be demonstrated below.

1.3. Legitimate authority in the modern world

Weber intended the three ideal types of legitimacy as ahistorical, i.e. not linked to particular stages of world history or social development. Yet historical patterns suggest otherwise. Weber himself notes that bureaucracy and its means-ends rationality is the most suitable mode of administration in modern societies. Its development is, in fact, “at the root of the modern Western state” (ES 223). The development of modern technology, complexity of social relations and capitalist economy make bureaucratic administration “completely indispensable”. In the Occident, “the choice is only that between bureaucracy and dilettantism in the field of administration” (ES 223). Although the existence of bureaucracy does not mean that legal-rational legitimacy will necessarily follow, specifically modern power relationships make other types of legitimacy claims less plausible.

At the same time, traditional and charismatic types of rule have become more difficult to legitimate. This is especially true of traditional legitimacy, which has become practically obsolete in modern societies. It is based on the “sanctity of immemorial tradition”, but the rationalisation of modernity and the accompanying “disenchantment of the world” have made public manifestations of the sanctus itself extremely problematic and rare. For example, appeals to the divine right and omniscience of the ruler are difficult to sustain in societies of mass education and widespread literacy, which exposes the lack of competence and misrule to wider population.

It has been argued that the same fate meets charismatic legitimacy, because “the concept carries notions, a vocabulary and metaphors” that are religious/traditional in essence (Dogan 2009, 201). Weber says that “charisma” refers to individuals who are “considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities” (ES 241). Clearly, based on this definition, charismatic authority requires socially shared and embodied beliefs in transcendent powers (Breuilly 2010, 3). These were there in the time of Jeremiah or even Napoleon (whom Hegel
memorably called the “world spirit on horseback”), but are generally unavailable in the 21st century. Thus, although charismatic authority repudiates the tradition, its legitimacy seems to rest on the same grounds that have been undermined in modern societies. However, there is implicitly a second notion of charisma in Weber.

1.4. Modern charismatic rule

Whereas “traditional charisma” appeals to extraordinary powers of the ruler and thus taps into transcendent beliefs, modern charisma operates with a different meaning of ‘extraordinary’.7 Weber’s frequent preoccupation with the charismatic person has overshadowed the aspect that is sociologically more important: extraordinary operation of power. One should not ignore the qualification in Weber’s definition that leaders are “treated as” extraordinary.

If we switch our attention from the agent of power to its operation, we can also address the question concerning the type of legitimacy that is both impersonal and extraordinary. Ken Jowitt (1992, Ch. 1) argues that there can be cases of “charismatic impersonality”. Comparing Nazism with Leninism, Jowitt argues that both are extraordinary, because they are “in crucial respects instances of heroically oriented responses to the class order developments” (Jowitt 1992, 9). At the same time, neither regime cultivated transcendent beliefs, while the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was explicitly opposed to everything supernatural.

Taking Jowitt’s analysis a cue, I find it useful to regard goal-orientation as the defining feature of modern charisma.8 Unlike the case of legal-rational orders that emphasise application of impersonal rules in the procedurally valid manner, charismatic authority (personal or otherwise) is oriented towards achieving specific goals, usually despite procedural norms. Hence, both Nazism and Leninism are instances of charismatic authority, because they subvert rules and strive to change the world. The main difference is that in

7 The distinction between traditional and modern types of charisma was initially inspired by Breuilly 2010.
8 Jowitt’s argument is only used to explicate the core features of modern charisma. While his argument about the existence of impersonal charisma is convincing, most charismatic regimes are nevertheless personal.
Nazism obedience was owed to the Führer (personal charisma), while in the Soviet Union legitimacy was claimed by the Party (impersonal charisma).9

Nazism is, of course, the most pronounced case of modern charisma. Hitler had a mission (i.e. goal-orientation), which he communicated directly to the people, bypassing all formal rules in the process. As Ernst Fraenkel (1941, 46) noted, “National-Socialism makes no attempt to hide its contempt for the legal regulation of the administration” and the Nazi regime constitutes “the negation of formal rationality as such”. Its benchmark was achievement, not procedural correctness; material justice in lieu of formal justice.

What about Hitler’s personal charisma? To be fair, he did manage to attract a hard core of extremely loyal followers, who seem to have genuinely believed in the special mission of the Führer and perhaps in his exceptional powers. But as Roger Eatwell argues, “nothing like Weberian mass contagion charisma characterised interwar fascist [incl. Nazi] support” and “even during regime phases, when there was extensive charismatisation of the leader, the evidence points to a broad variety of motives” (Eatwell 2007, 15).

I am not suggesting that personal qualities are irrelevant for charismatic rule. Actors’ abilities are important, of course, but only when there is an appropriate stage for them to perform on. Less poetically, modern charisma is much more dependent on the structural preconditions that allow extraordinary operation of power to be legitimate. The world does not suffer from a lack of dictators negating formal rationality, yet very few are more than illegitimate thugs. Again, a certain structure of power does not necessarily entail the respective type of legitimacy. Therefore, we should look at the conditions that make charismatic legitimacy claims socially plausible.

Following Lepsius (2007) I conceptualise it as the charismatic situation. What are its main characteristics? Because charismatic leaders seek legitimation based on extraordinary tasks, there has to be a demand for exceptional rule to begin with. We can analytically distinguish between two aspects. Firstly, perception of a crisis is an absolutely crucial precondition of

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9 See Rigby 1982, for a further discussion of legitimacy based on goal-orientation in the Soviet Union. Rigby wishes to place goal-rationality as the forth type of legitimacy outside the bivariate scheme proposed above. I believe that it dissolves in Jowitt’s “charismatic impersonality” once Weber’s ‘extraordinary’ is understood in terms of operation of power rather than personal qualities.
charismatic legitimacy. Secondly, it helps immensely when this is accompanied by the (perceived) inability of current political institutions to overcome the crisis. When these two combine, “hopes grow that a ‘powerful man’ will alter the situation” (Lepsius 2007, 40). Thus, the emotional bond of devotion and exaltation, which according to Weber is constitutive of charismatic relationship, seems to spring from dread and despair.

Nazi Germany is a good example on both counts. The Weimar republic had been plagued by crises since its inception, but the necessary space for Hitler’s rise opened only during the Great Depression. At the same time, political institutions of the parliamentarian system were highly illegitimate due to bitter factional disputes that paralysed and polarised the country. In this situation, a charismatic leader breaks the deadlock by solving the problem of factionalism and restoring the executive capacity of the state. As Eatwell (2007, 12) puts it, “charismatic leaders are most likely to emerge when political parties are weak, or held in contempt”.

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1.5. Weber’s triptych challenged

As I have argued, specific social conditions of modern societies mean that legal-rational legitimacy is the most prevalent, while the traditional type has become practically obsolete. Charismatic legitimacy is still relevant, but only if understood without recourse to supernatural beliefs. It then means extraordinary, i.e. supra-institutional, operation of power. As such, modern charismatic rule depends more on specific socio-political circumstances (“charismatic situation”) than exceptional qualities of the leader. Therefore, only two of Weber’s original legitimacy types remain useful for the analysis of modern societies. Many post-Weberian scholars, however, have proposed additional types to complement Weber’s list. I will now briefly consider two strongest contenders for the pedestal.

It may seem surprising that Weber does not propose democratic legitimacy as a separate type. For example, in a small-scale direct democracy, where all commands are approved by the majority of the population, an individual can think: “Although I voted against this

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10 Again, from a Weberian point of view the objective gravity of the crisis is irrelevant. This opens the door to extensive manipulation by political entrepreneurs.
11 Breuilly (2010, 14) makes the same point regarding factionalism inside the NSDAP: “In a sociological sense charismatic leadership was an answer to the problem of factionalism.”
motion, I will obey its provisions, because most of the citizens voted for it.” In that case, we would certainly have an example of democratically legitimate authority. Yet modern representative democracies function essentially differently. Rule of the people is limited to electing officials, who are then autonomous from immediate social pressures to issue commands. These specific commands are not democratically legitimate, because citizens do not have a direct say in them. They are, nevertheless, generally legitimate because the power holders are legitimate, i.e. appointed or elected according to legal rules. “The most important point to grasp is that parliamentary rule is an example of legal-rational legitimacy.” (Whimster 2006, 239) Therefore, democracy does not qualify as a separate type of legitimacy.

The second possible type I will consider is ideological legitimacy. In his analysis, Weber consistently focuses on the ‘form’ of politics, while leaving the ‘content’ completely empty. As a reaction, ideology has been proposed as a source of legitimacy. It has been argued that people obey not only because they believe in the right of rulers to rule, but also because they agree with the ideological goals of the regime.

“It is the political ideology that gives strength and ‘reason’ to the regime, and which embodies the ideas of identity and equality. Ideology gives its followers the definitive ‘reason’ for their individual support for the leader, as well as for their willingness to sacrifice themselves in order to fight for the ‘cause’.” (Pinto and Larsen 2007, 135)

I do not wish to downplay the role of ideology in politics on the level of personal belief and political outcomes. At the same time, I am unsure about its relation to legitimacy. On the one hand, ideological legitimacy dissipates in rational calculation, if it is linked to the regime’s fulfilment of “inner thoughts of what is right” (Pinto and Larsen 2007, 136). On the other, ideology is (to use Weber’s term) sociologically amorphous and thus should not constitute a separate legitimacy type. For example, nationalism as an ideology can be revolutionary in the case of liberation struggles or routine and banal as in most other cases. In terms of structures of rule, it can be taken up by monarchs, warlords or prime ministers. Therefore, the role of ideology as a political tool is completely dependent on social conditions, including the type of authority (traditional, legal-rational, charismatic).
1.6. Combination of ideal types

Weber never tires of emphasising that his three types of legitimacy are ‘pure types’, i.e. analytical distinctions that seek to explain (and not describe) reality. In reality, there will never be complete congruence between ideal types and empirical cases. “The forms of domination occurring in historical reality constitute combinations, mixtures, adaptations, or modifications of these ‘pure’ types.” (ES 954) In his ‘scientific’ writings, Weber rarely provides detailed analyses of real-world political systems and we are thus not told what political outcomes different combinations of legitimacy types produce. This aspect of Weber’s work has also been subsequently undertheorised and we therefore lack the necessary systematic analysis to fully understand the relationship between legitimacy and political outcomes.

In modern societies, due to obsolescence of traditional legitimacy, the main combination is between legal-rational and (modern) charismatic legitimacy. Thankfully for my purposes, in his political writings Weber does discuss this combination. After WWI and the collapse of the Kaiserreich, he argued for the necessity of mixing charismatic and legal-rational authority in the Weimar republic through a direct election of the president (Weber 1994a).

Weber appears to have believed that a relationship between these types would be symbiotic. The legal-rational parliamentary state would ensure effectiveness of administration, while the charismatic president would support that by overcoming the problem of factionalism as the “bearer of the principle of the unity of the Reich” (Weber 1994, 307).

This is quite perplexing, however, if one remembers Weber’s insistence that “charismatic authority is sharply opposed to rational, and particularly bureaucratic, authority” (ES 244; my emphasis). This opposition follows directly from conflictual grounds of legitimacy: bureaucratic authority appeals to procedural correctness, while a charismatic leader bends or negates rules to achieve specific goals. Therefore, it seems plausible that a charismatically legitimate leader will undermine the (legal-rational) legitimacy of the bureaucratic state. As will be argued in the next section, this is exactly what is happening in Putin’s Russia and goes a long way in explaining the discrepancy between the presidential and state support.
2. DUAL LEGITIMACY STRUCTURE IN PUTIN’S RUSSIA

In this part of the paper, I employ the results of the previous section to explain the enigma presented in the Introduction. I argue that the structure of political power set up by Yeltsin created a competition between legal-rational legitimacy of the state and charismatic legitimacy of the president. Within such a structure, a dialectical relationship exists whereby 1) a charismatically legitimate president undermines legal-rational legitimacy of the state; and 2) illegitimacy of the state, in turn, creates an opening for a charismatic leader.

This structure persists to this day, which explains why Putin enjoys consistently high approval ratings, despite many unsolved problems in the country. Putin successfully manages to claim credit for successes, while attributing failures to the institutions of the state, which are consequently deeply distrusted. Before we proceed to substantiate this argument with empirical data, I would like to address possible objections to my approach.

2.1. Significance of legitimacy

In this section, I justify my focus on legitimacy of power by engaging with some counter-explanations. Surely, legitimacy of Putin’s power is not the only possible explanation of his high support. As noted above, Weber acknowledged that voluntary obedience to authorities may very well be due to simple habit or rational expectation of reward. I will consider both possibilities in turn, beginning with the latter.

One could argue that the expectation of economic gain is the main reason for Putin’s support. Indeed, Daniel Treisman (2010) has established a strong correlation between economic sentiment and presidential approval (Appendix, 2). A similar claim is made by
Wegren and Herspring (2010, 302): “The bulwark of stability and regime legitimacy under Putin was economic growth, and with reduced growth or even contraction in the short-term future, it is unknown how the people will react.” Before 2008, this argument was impossible to refute because Russian economy had been rapidly growing throughout Putin’s two terms. However, in the wake of the recent financial crisis that hit Russia particularly hard, this argument has become substantially weaker. If Putin’s support was based primarily on economic rationality, we would expect a fall in approval ratings similar to the perceived state of the economy.

In 2009, compared to a year earlier: the gross domestic product declined by 9%; industrial production was 11% lower; national average wage dropped from $700 to $600; the number of unemployed increased by around 15%. Together with the objective deterioration of the situation, Russians’ economic sentiment also fell (Treisman 2010). These changes did have a mild impact on Putin’s support. Between June 2008 and April 2009, Putin’s approval ratings fell from 83% to 76%. However, predictions about a drastic collapse of support for the rulers did not materialise. “Whereas macro-economic data imply that public opinion should be turning against the government, public opinion polls show that [the ‘party of power’] United Russia and Putin remain popular.” (Rose and Mishler 2010, 43)

Another line of argument concerns habit and claims that Putin’s support is due to the fact that Russian citizens have simply come to accept the present order. On the face of it, it might not seem a particularly strong argument. It becomes so, however, if we interpret habitual acceptance as resulting from the obvious lack of alternatives in Russian politics (bezal’ternativnost’) and the impact of state controlled media. Indeed, skewed news coverage and non-existence of strong opposition forces (not least due to Putin’s undemocratic practices) forces citizens to adapt to the regime and “encourages resigned acceptance if not enthusiastic support” (Rose 2007, 113). To a significant extent, this argument is confirmed by public opinion surveys. For example, when asked “Why do so many people have confidence in V. Putin?” over 30% reply that there is nobody else to rely on. At the same time, around 60% of the polled constantly say that Putin is trusted because he has dealt, or will deal, with Russia’s problems efficiently (Levada Center 2009, 86).

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Both of these arguments are able to explain some of Putin’s approval ratings – they are useful but insufficient pieces to the puzzle. Moreover, they are not able to explain why presidential popularity has not trickled down to the institutional state. Hence, I believe that a considerable part of Putin’s support is due to the fact that he is popularly legitimate.13

Having justified my approach, I will now explore how and for what reasons Putin’s regime is legitimate. To do this, it is necessary to take a closer look at the political system that emerged under the first president of the Russian Federation.

2.2. Political legitimacy under Yeltsin

Boris Yeltsin is undoubtedly the most important politician in the short history of the Russian Federation. He had a double task of dismantling the crumbling Soviet Union and laying the foundations of the new Russian state. Propelled by public support and enthusiasm, he successfully turned his county away from communism and staved off counter-revolutionary attempts, most spectacularly during the August 1991 coup attempt. It is easier to destroy than create, however, as Yeltsin soon learned. To be fair, the task before him and his team was daunting, because “they were forced to attempt four revolutions at once: create a free market, democratize the state, abolish an empire […] and seek a new geopolitical role for a former nuclear superpower” (Shevtsova 2007a, 892). This was bound to create disagreement and splintering of the “democratic” forces, especially in a situation where the rules of political game were non-existent or contested. Moreover, the economic “shock therapy” that Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar pioneered in 1992 was likely to have adverse effects on the living standards. They were rightly worried that this could “lead to a popular backlash, the effect of which might be not only to unseat them, but also to derail the reforms” (Gill 2002, 173).

In this situation, the only option for Yeltsin to overcome factionalism and maintain executive capacity was to appeal to charismatic legitimacy: “It will be hard, but bear with me and I shall not disappoint you!”

“He rejected joining any party and declared that he would remain above party politics. His calls for the people to trust him and to give him their support because this was the only way that communism could be buried and a new future opened up, was the classic appeal of the

13 For a further elaboration and defence of this claim, see Holmes 2010.
charismatic leader. The implication was that faith could not be put in institutions but should reside purely in the hands of the leader.” (Gill 2002, 175)

People believed or at least could not see a viable alternative. Soon after, as a Weberian analysis would predict, the sociological correlate of charismatic legitimacy began emerging. Following Fraenkel, this process has been conceptualised as the construction of “the dual state in Russia” (Sakwa 2010), where constitutional institutions were either supplemented or displaced by Yeltsin’s “para-constitutional” administrative arrangements. New advisory bodies were established that were staffed by Yeltsin loyalists and were not subject to parliamentary oversight. The Presidential Administration is the prime example, established by Yeltsin’s decree and accountable only to him, while performing many functions of the cabinet. Already in 1992, “there were public concerns that the Presidential Administration may actually become so powerful as to displace the government” (Gill 2002, 175).

Driven by the belief in his exceptional mission, Yeltsin never seriously tried to reach a majority support in the parliament. The latter, as a result, was ridden by factional disputes making legislation difficult to pass. In response, Yeltsin increasingly relied on his powers to rule by decree, undermining the authority and legitimacy of the legislature. This heightened the conflict between the two branches of the state, which Yeltsin tried to evade by, again, appealing to the people and portraying the parliament as pro-communist and anti-reform. In April 1993, the parliament called a referendum, asking people about their attitude towards the president and the legislature: 59% of the voters said that they supported Yeltsin; 67% said they considered early elections of the parliament necessary. Yeltsin acted upon the popular mandate by ordering the parliament to dissolve in September 1993. The move was blatantly unconstitutional under the existing laws and the parliament refused to obey. The ensuing confrontation was resolved only by force, when Yeltsin ordered tanks to fire at the parliament building, arrested several parliamentarians and banned their parties.

After this victory, the new constitution was hastily drafted. It sought to institutionalise the political gains Yeltsin had achieved. As one observer notes, “the new constitutional framework was designed to meet the needs of a specific political personality, Boris Yeltsin” (Shevtsova 1999, 94). It established a plebiscitary super-presidency that had enormous executive and legislative authority, while being virtually unaccountable. The government was a mere extension of presidential power and was not linked to the party composition of
the parliament. The latter, in turn, was made more obedient in the face of many constitutional provisions concerning its dissolution by the president. Constitutional lawyers and parliamentarians objected to the lack of checks and balances in the constitution, but Yeltsin won again. In December 1993, Yeltsin’s charismatic mandate was renewed with 58% of the voters approving the constitution.

The key outcome of the 1993 constitutional crisis was a formal fixation of a power structure that has remained essentially unchanged since then. Its core characteristic is a presidency, the legal limits and obligations of which are fluid and, for the most part, determined by the president himself. For such an authority, legal-rational legitimation is not sufficient and to be effective charismatic legitimation is needed. At the same time, other state institutions (government, parliament, judiciary and, crucially, bureaucracy) can only appeal to legal-rational legitimation. This relationship is unlikely to be symbiotic (contra Weber 1994a), because the charismatic president’s domination over other branches of the state will make the latter seem subordinate and impotent. At the same time, as will be illustrated below, the charismatic leader is likely to employ the traditional monarchical method of ridding himself of responsibility by blaming errors and abuses on his officials. Thus, the stage was set for a conflict between two types of legitimacy – with wide-reaching consequences for Russia’s future.

Having passed a constitution tailor-made for him and with a new parliament that feared open confrontation with the president, Yeltsin had all the possibilities to make good on his charismatic mandate in 1994. Instead, “Yeltsin allow[ed] himself to relax” – virtually disappearing from the public sphere due to poor health or alcoholism (Shevtsova 1999, 103-106). Later in the year, the disastrous war in Chechnya began. At the same time, the economic situation progressively worsened, thus breaking the main promise of the new regime. By 1996, popular approval of the president was so low that Yeltsin barely managed to get re-elected. In fact, he probably did so only because the alternative – head of the Communist party Gennady Zyuganov – was deemed even worse. To regain public’s trust, he often reshuffled cabinets and publicly dressed down public officials, but that had little

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14 Apart from the most basic constitutional restrictions, e.g. term limits and the obligation to rule in accordance with laws.
15 On the ambiguity of Yeltsin’s mandate and the undemocratic nature of the elections, see Mendras 1996.
16 Between 1998 and 1999, for example, Russia had five prime ministers.
effect in the face of his inability to improve the socio-economic situation and his physical incapacity to perform his duties. In 1999, Yeltsin was forced to resign. By then, his charismatic mandate had been revoked: his approval ratings were below 10% and an overwhelming majority evaluated his work with the lowest possible mark (Appendix, 1 and 3).

Significantly for the future of the country, when Yeltsin went down, he brought other institutions of the state with him. The parliament, political parties, courts and the police were all deeply distrusted and illegitimate. Hence, by the end of Yeltsin’s tenure there was no legitimate authority in Russia. That is, if there was any authority at all: “power was being exercised neither through legitimacy nor much coercion; it was dispersed, and central state power was barely being exercised at all” (Holmes 2010, 109).

2.3. Enter Putin

Putin became an acting president in an illegitimate state following a failed charismatic president. At the same time, all “old” opposition politicians, left and right, were distrusted by the electorate. To a significant degree, people voted for Putin out of desperation, driven by a rational hope that perhaps a relatively “new” politician will be able to turn the tables.

The image Putin portrayed of himself was consistent with voters’ expectations. He did not take part in broad ideological debates on liberalism versus communism or market versus the state. In his ‘millennium manifesto’, published one day before Yeltsin resigned, Putin said:

“Russia has exhausted its capacity for political and socio-economic upheavals, cataclysms and radical recreations. Only fanatics or political forces profoundly indifferent to Russia, to the people would be able to call for another revolution.” (Putin 1999)

He was presented as a qualified top manager, who would get the job done with no fanfare or messianic pretentions. As the ‘CEO of Russia’, he did not ask for love or admiration, but rational support for the necessary reforms (Ageev 2001). Apart from his famous promise in September 1999 to “waste the terrorists in the shithouse” following the apartment bombings in three Russian cities, there were no signs of an emerging charismatic leader.17 In fact, the beginning of Putin’s rule was characterised by an attempt to create legal-rational

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17 The promise to “eliminate” terrorists, which violates the principle of fair trial, is one of the most persistent charismatic features of Putin’s rule.
legitimacy for the state by establishing the “dictatorship of Law”.\textsuperscript{18} This is clearly expressed in his first Annual Address to the Federal Assembly: “A period is beginning in Russia when the authorities have the \textit{moral} right to demand that norms established by the state are observed.” (Putin 2000; my emphasis) Strengthening of the institutional state was the key policy direction of Putin’s first term as president, which he conceptualised as the construction of the “vertical of power” (\textit{vertikal' vlasti}).\textsuperscript{19}

One of the most important aspects of it was the federal reform aimed at harmonising country’s legal system and reigning in regional governors. Under Yeltsin, many of them had become virtually independent of central authorities, often violated the constitution and had ties to illegal businesses. This was caused by Yeltsin’s failure to enact an overarching federal law on centre-region relations and his reliance on personal deals with governors.\textsuperscript{20} Another commendable achievement was banishing of the business elite (“oligarchs”) from Kremlin, thus increasing state autonomy. Remaining tasks – raising the effectiveness of bureaucracy, fight against the corruption, establishing judicial independence – mostly remained on the level of rhetoric.

The majority of analysts have rightly pointed to the undemocratic nature of Putin’s centralising reforms. Some, however, have defended his policies. After the failure of “democratization backwards” in the 1990s, they argue, emphasis on the establishment of a \textit{Rechtsstaat} at the expense of democracy is quite understandable.\textsuperscript{21} Ken Jowitt has recently defended Putin, arguing that “a single political entity must prevail for a critical period of institutionally definitional time” (2008, 505). For the purposes of this paper, however, Putin’s democratic credentials are quite irrelevant.

My interest is in the extent to which Putin managed to establish the state that would be able to command legal-rational legitimacy. Unfortunately, he failed. As can be seen from public opinion surveys, trust in the formal institutions of the state has remained almost as [natural_text]
low as it had been during the Yeltsin years (Appendix, 4-5). Part of the reason for failure is objective: bureaucracy remains notoriously corrupt and inefficient. Because legitimacy is about “inner justifications”, however, there is a subjective reason for failure that is no less important. Namely, the way in which Putin exercised authority actually undermined legal-rational legitimacy of the state.

2.4. Putin’s para-constitutional arrangements

Due to the dismal state of Russia’s bureaucracy, Putin (rightly or wrongly) did not believe he could reform the state from “within”, i.e. through constitutional institutions. Instead, he preferred “to work [...] with ad hoc groups that are not defined by institutional boundaries” (Kryshtanovskaya and White 2005, 1066). The chief semi-formal body remained the Presidential Administration, which Putin inherited from Yeltsin. Additionally, four new para-constitutional arrangements are important to note (Sakwa 2010, 194f.).

1. One of the key methods of implementing the federal reform was the creation of seven federal districts.22 These were established by Putin’s decree and are thus extra-constitutional. They are headed by plenipotentiaries accountable only to the president and are responsible for the supervision of regional authorities and implementation of presidential decrees. The insertion of an extra administrative layer was deemed crucial for presidential oversight, but undermined the authority of regional institutions.

2. To further coordinate the centre-region relations, the State Council was created in September 2000. It was a new meeting place of the heads of federal subjects, chaired by the president. This advisory body worked in parallel to, and assumed many functions of, the upper chamber of the parliament – the Federation Council – a constitutionally envisaged forum for regional leaders.

3. In 2005, the “Presidential Council for the Implementation of Priority National Projects” (CIPNP) was established. It was chaired by Putin himself, but de facto headed by the now-president Dmitry Medvedev. CIPNP is responsible for allocating vast sums of money to various “national projects” in education, healthcare, housing and agriculture. It was designed to solve the problem of misappropriation of state resources by the intermediate levels of bureaucracy between the centre and, say, a provincial hospital.

22 In 2010, the number increased to eight when the North Caucasus district was separated from the Southern district to help with the ‘fight against terrorism’.
This is achieved through an administrative mechanism under which CIPNP’s recommendations are mostly enacted through presidential decrees or government decisions (as opposed to federal laws), which are supervised in the regions by the plenipotentiaries rather than governors or mayors. In a situation of rampant corruption, CIPNP is (probably) beneficial for Russia’s development. However, this para-constitutional body “substantially undermine[s] the Prime Minister’s position” and “contribute[s] to a fusion of, among others, the executive and the legislative branches of power; or, rather, to a further subordination of the legislative to the head-executive” (Oversloot 2007, 62).

4. Finally, there was the Public Chamber that was meant to act as a link between the civil society and the state. Although a third of its members are selected by the president, most are representatives of civic organisations. It acts as a sort of “collective ombudsman”, monitoring the work of state authorities, analysing draft legislation and investigating legal violations. On the positive note, the Chamber “introduced a new channel of public accountability against overbearing officialdom”; but in the process it “usurped what should have been one of parliament’s key roles” (Sakwa 2010, 194).

It is not an exaggeration that these four bodies, coordinated by the Presidential Administration, are more influential in terms of policy development than the constitutional institutions of the state. Such a constellation of power cannot claim legal-rational legitimacy, because there are no publically established rules of its operation. Goal-orientation thus takes precedence over procedural correctness, requiring charismatic legitimacy.

2.5. Charismatisation of a bureaucrat

Because the primary link between the para-constitutional apparatus and the people is Putin himself, politics is increasingly removed from the public sphere and communicated to the population through his person. As one highly perceptive commentator noted in 2001, “Putin essentially went one on one with the people, who are more-or-less aware that there is no other policy than that of Putin” (Ageev 2001).23 Hence, the continuation and extension of

23 Significantly, this logic seems to be accepted by the population. Since 2005, there has been an annual live call-in television show in which Putin takes questions from the viewers. When polled, people believe that this
Yeltsin’s para-constitutionalism meant that the bureaucratic top-manager Putin almost had to become a charismatic leader.

If in the beginning of his rule, Putin was rather clumsy in playing this charismatic role, he quickly learned the key lesson: for his rule to be sustainable, “power has to be a person, not a mechanism” (Nezavisimaya Gazeta 2010). More specifically, two interrelated conditions are necessary to maintain the charismatic bond.

Firstly, successes of the country have to be personalised. The abovementioned structure of rule with Putin at its pinnacle makes this task a lot easier. Thus, Russians are made to believe that the economy grew rapidly in 2000s not because of Yeltsin’s 1998 devaluation of the rouble or high oil prices, but due to Putin’s sensible economic policy. To give another example, public opinion polls show that about 50% of responders believe that Putin is responsible for rises in wages and welfare payments (Levada Center 2009, 76). As one commentator elegantly put it, “Putin has in effect come to embody Russia’s recovery” (Laruelle 2009, 7).

At the same time, the charismatic leader needs to distance himself from errors and shortcomings of his rule. Ageev (2001) predicted that because Putin’s system is “entirely devoid of buffers”, it is highly vulnerable to failures. For example, in the case of misadministration by a presidential appointee, Putin cannot defend himself by referring to procedural rules. Yet his high approval ratings after a decade in power attest that he did, in fact, find ways of dealing with this problem.

The obvious one is to make the system less transparent, so that political failures of the leader remain hidden from the society. Here, Putin has taken no chances and essentially nationalised all television networks. This is not enough, however, because people also experience political incompetence and administrative abuses first-hand in their daily lives. The same problem was experienced by the Soviet leaders and was solved by blaming “enemies of the people”, i.e. the “capitalists”. More perniciously, Hitler had blamed “Judeo-

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24 One only needs to recall the public outrage following Putin’s cold and rational handling of the submarine Kursk tragedy in August 2000.

25 Other types of media, including newspapers, are relatively free. The problem is, however, that an overwhelming majority of the population relies on television for their daily news (fully 94% of the responders in Levada Center 2009, 122).
Bolsheviks”. For explicitly anti-ideological Putin in “post-ideological” Russia this method is unavailable (Hanson 2011).

Nevertheless, Putin proved Ageev wrong by managing to find a suitable buffer: representatives of the legal-rational state. Helped by obedient journalists, he has been able to create an image of a ‘father of the nation’, who fights against corrupt and inefficient bureaucrats for the interests of the people. One of the most common manifestations of this comes during Putin’s many well-publicised visits to the regions. There, he typically opens a factory or a hospital and then dresses down local officials for failing to improve the living conditions of the population. As one commentator puts it:

“His manner of winning the public's support tends to follow an easy formula. Find an issue that annoys a lot of people, find somebody to blame for it, and lace into him, publicly and with some classic village wit. Show on state television how the problem gets fixed.” (Shuster 2010)

Employing these mechanisms, Putin is able to embody Russia’s successes, while remaining politically isolated from its failures. For example, if the improvement of living standards is attributed to Putin, then it is the government that takes the blame for rising prices (Levada Center 2009, 76). In view of this, the discrepancy between the approval of Putin and the government becomes quite understandable.

A good indication of Putin’s image as a tireless leader is his remark during an annual press-conference in the Kremlin in February 2008: “I have worked like a galley slave throughout these eight years, morning till night, and I have given all I could to this work.” (Putin 2008)

Sadly, for the time being this theatrical populism seems to be effective: around 60% of responders say that Putin’s monopolisation of power is good for Russia (Levada Center 2009, 87).

My final example of Putin’s charismatic legitimacy comes from the very end of his presidency. As his last year in office progressed, many speculated that Putin would have the constitution changed and remain in office for another term. Appealing to legal norms, Putin decided to step down. Yet the way in which Dmitry Medvedev was anointed as the chosen heir to the throne barely increased legal-rational legitimacy of power in Russia (Hanson 2011). Most significantly, however, about 60% of the people actually supported the
For many in Russia, therefore, Putin’s popular charismatic mandate was stronger than the spirit of the constitution.

2.6. Dual legitimacy and its implications

We can now summarise the results of the empirical investigation. I have argued that Yeltsin set up a dual legitimacy structure in Russia, in which there is a dialectical relationship between the president and the bureaucratic state (Figure 2 above). The charismatically legitimate Yeltsin undermined the legal-rational legitimacy of the state, which in turn reinforced the need for an extra-institutional operation of power by the president. Sociologically, this conflict is visible in a dual structure of the administrative apparatus, where Yeltsin’s para-constitutional arrangements (chiefly, the Presidential Administration) duplicated and undermined the work of constitutionally envisaged institutions. For personal and economic reasons, Yeltsin’s charismatic mandate was eventually revoked, leaving Russia with hardly any legitimate authority. These dynamics of legitimacy can be visualised with the help of a matrix (Figure 3).

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Figure 3. A matrix of legitimacy in Russia. The horizontal axis represents the level of legal-rational legitimacy of the state. The vertical axis the charismatic legitimacy of the president.

Putin came to power after Yeltsin had fallen all the way along vector A. Putin’s initial steps as the president suggested a determination to restore state legitimacy through comprehensive reforms (vector B). However, because the reforms were carried out through

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a greatly extended para-constitutional apparatus, he gradually drifted back into Yeltsin’s structure of legitimacy. To legitimise his rule, he then had to reinvent himself as a charismatic leader (vector C). Shevtsova makes a very apposite remark that Putin tried “to embody the Pope and Martin Luther simultaneously” (2007b, 66). Unfortunately, an uncertain and difficult task of Luther was less appealing to Putin than glory of the Pope. Therefore, the structure of rule in Russia remains essentially unchanged, although Putin has thus far been more successful than Yeltsin at sustaining his charismatic mandate.

What are the implications of this dual legitimacy structure? It could be argued that there is no problem, because people genuinely support Putin’s rule. However, as Weber has argued, charismatic legitimacy is by nature unstable. Firstly, because it relies heavily on achievement, a prolonged crisis is likely to undermine it; secondly, because it is typically personal, it ends with the departure of the leader. In the case of Putin’s Russia, inability of the regime to deliver on its promises is likely to delegitimise it. As a response, the ruling group may become more coercive, “turn[ing] an “electoral authoritarian” regime into an unqualifiedly authoritarian system” (Rose and Mishler 2009, 132). However, even if Putin departs as peacefully as Yeltsin, the continuing and systematic illegitimacy of the state means that the political regime needs to be reconstructed anew each time there is a change of leadership. The instability of power relations in Russia significantly contributes to the situation in which both the elites and people more generally choose short-term gains over long-term commitments. This is obviously detrimental to the long-term development of the society by trapping Russia in a vicious circle of corruption and mismanagement.
CONCLUSION

Scholars working within the democratisation paradigm have found it increasingly difficult to analyse Russian post-Soviet regime. Specifically, they have been unable to satisfactorily explain a doubly puzzling aspect of Russian politics under Vladimir Putin. Firstly, how can a clearly undemocratic president enjoy exceptionally high popular approval ratings? Secondly, why does presidential approval not translate into support for public institutions? To explain the discrepancy, a shift in focus is necessary.

I have argued that an engagement with Weber’s classic theory of legitimacy of power is a fruitful way to approach the issue. If suitably adapted to specifically modern conditions, Weber’s ideal types of legitimacy (primarily, legal-rational and charismatic) and their sociological correlates help us disaggregate various facets of a political system, thus making it easier to understand. In real-world cases, legitimacy types occur in combinations, the dynamics of which are not sufficiently analysed by Weber. In section 1.6, I pointed out that he seems to have believed that a mixture of charismatic and legal-rational legitimacy is a symbiotic one. In my application of Weber’s theory to Putin’s Russia, I show that he was quite mistaken.

In terms of legitimacy, post-Soviet Russia has been characterised by a dual legitimacy structure established by Yeltsin with a charismatically legitimated president and a legal-rationally legitimated bureaucratic state. This combination is reflected in the nature of administrative arrangements. A sort of “dual state” exists, where extra-constitutional bodies work in parallel to formal institutions. This combination is far from symbiotic, because the president’s charismatic legitimacy and exercise of power undermines the legitimacy of the bureaucratic state. Unable or unwilling to transform Yeltsin’s dual structure, Putin has been able to enhance his support by delegitimising the constitutional institutions of the state. This is done through a double mechanism of personalising and embodying successes of the country while blaming the errors of rule on the representatives of the legal-rational state. Thus far, Russian citizens appear to approve of Putin’s populism and he has been able to portray himself as the representative of the people fighting against inefficient and corrupt officials of the state. Within such a structure of legitimacy, the discrepancy between Putin’s personal approval ratings and those of state institutions becomes understandable.
The current arrangement of power has significant implications for Russia’s future. Because the stability of the regime is dependent on Putin’s charismatic authority, his departure or delegitimation is likely to lead to substantial instability in the country. Thus, almost two decades later, Russia’s future remains as uncertain as ever.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Note: ES = Weber 1968


APPENDIX: PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY DATA

1) Approval ratings of Russian leaders, 1989-2009

Source: Treisman 2010, 43 (with omissions). Based on VCIOM and Levada Center polls (data available at www.russiavotes.org). Putin’s approval includes his period as prime minister.

2) Economic sentiment and presidential approval in Russia, 1993-2008

Source: Treisman 2010, 45. Author’s remark (ibid.): “Economic sentiment is percent saying “very good”, “good” or “average”, when asked “How would you evaluate Russia’s economic situation?” plus percent saying “a significant improvement”, or “some improvement”, when asked “What awaits Russia in coming months in the economy?” Missing values interpolated.”
3) Distribution of evaluations of Yeltsin on 10-point scale

![Graph showing distribution of evaluations of Yeltsin on a 10-point scale for October 1991 and September 1999.]

Source: Treisman 2009, 42.

4) Indices of trust in public institutions

![Graph showing indices of trust in public institutions from 1994 to 2007. The graph compares the President, Government, Regional officials, and State Duma. Index values below 100 signify a predominance of negative evaluations.]

Source: Levada Center 2009, 74. Index values below 100 signify a predominance of negative evaluations.
5) Indices of trust in security and law enforcement agencies

Source: Levada Center 2009, 74. Index values below 100 signify a predominance of negative evaluations.
6) Evaluations of the “Putin decade”, 1999-2009

**In your opinion, what has changed in Russia over the past 10 years?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Considerably increased</th>
<th>Slightly increased</th>
<th>Remained at the same level</th>
<th>Slightly decreased</th>
<th>Considerably decreased</th>
<th>Difficult to answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of unemployment</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prosperity of the majority of Russian citizens</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>The gap between the richest and poorest people</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial production</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The circumstances of pensioners</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The economic circumstances of your family</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

**How has... changed in the past 10 years?**

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<th></th>
<th>Improved</th>
<th>Worsened</th>
<th>Has continued without change</th>
<th>Difficult to answer</th>
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<td>19</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>Education, health and transport systems and the housing and public utilities sector</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>47</td>
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<td>Protection of people’s social welfare</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>Security of life and legal protection</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>Control system and obedience of laws</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>The state of freedom of speech and observance of human rights in Russia</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
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<td>Situation in North Caucasus</td>
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<td>Position of Russia in the world arena</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>Relations between Russia and neighboring states</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Levada Center 2009, 24 (my emphases).*