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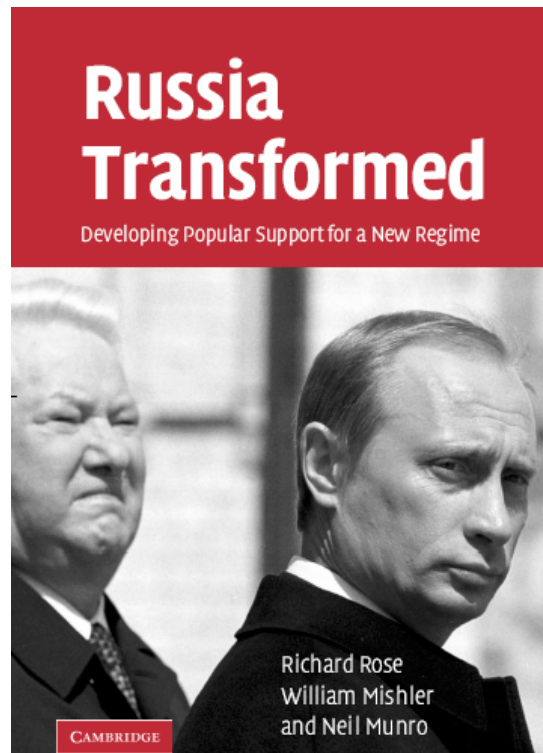
**RUSSIA TRANSFORMED**  
**Developing Popular Support for a New Regime**

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*Since the fall of communism Russia has undergone a treble transformation of its political, social and economic system. The government is an autocracy in which the Kremlin manages elections and administers the law to suit its own ends. It does not provide the democracy that most citizens desire. Given a contradiction between what Russians want and what they get, do they support their government and, if so, why? Using the New Russia Barometer - a unique set of public opinion surveys from 1992 to 2005 - this book shows that it is the passage of time that has been most important in developing support for the new regime. Although there remains great dissatisfaction with the regimes corruption, it has become accepted as a lesser evil to alternatives. The government appears stable today, but will be challenged by constitutional term limits forcing President Putin to leave office in 2008.*



**Advance praise from James L. Gibson**

Sidney W. Souers Professor of Government, Washington University in St. Louis

"Every serious scholar of comparative politics knows the value of paying attention to new research reports by Rose and Mishler, since these political scientists have contributed mightily to our theoretical and empirical understanding of the processes of transformation in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union - indeed, none has contributed more. With this landmark work on the Soviet transition, Rose, Mishler, and Munro provide the definitive analysis of how Soviet society changed, at the grassroots level, in the hearts and minds of the citizenry. Perhaps never in political science has such an impressive collection of original data been assembled and only rarely in political science have we learned as much from survey data, not just about the changes that have engulfed the former Soviet Union, but more generally about democratization, and most generally about fundamental processes of political change. Outstanding scholarship, from outstanding scholars!"



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## Advance Praise

"Few, if any, students of post-Soviet Russia have a greater experience and skill in telling with numbers the story of the continuing giant transformation than Richard Rose, William Mishler, and Neil Munro. Their research is both scrupulous and insightful."

Leon Aron

Director of Russian Studies at the American Enterprise Institute, Washington, DC and author of *Yeltsin: A Revolutionary Life* (2000)

"This is a landmark study on two counts. First, it gives a detailed empirical account of the development of popular regime support in post-Communist Russia. The evidence displayed comes from a unique database which combines fourteen representative sample surveys covering the period from January 1992 to January 2005. Second, and even more important, the study's theoretical approach and the models proposed are of general relevance for the dynamic analysis of mass response to regime transformation. A 'must read' for those interested in Russian studies and comparative research on political behavior and change."

Hans-Dieter Klingemann

Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB)

"Another treat from Richard Rose and colleagues - a study full of ideas as well as numbers, which will be required reading for all specialists on Russian politics, and which has a lot for comparativists as well. I particularly like the discussion of the supply and demand of regimes, and this is certainly the best place to start for an understanding of the choices that Russians will face in 2008 when Putin comes to the end of his second presidential term and stands down. Or doesn't."

Stephen White

Professor of International Politics, University of Glasgow

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## Introduction

### Transformation and its aftermath

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We are making such a large turn that it is beyond anyone's dreams. No other people has experienced what has happened to us.

Mikhail Gorbachev, April 15, 1991

I want to ask you for forgiveness because many of the hopes have not come true, because what we thought would be easy turned out to be painfully difficult. I ask you to forgive me for not fulfilling some hopes of those people who believed that we would be able to jump from the grey, stagnating totalitarian past into a bright, rich, and civilized future in one go. I myself believed in this. But it could not be done all at once.

Boris Yeltsin on retiring as president, December 31, 1999

Political transformation has long been a fact of life – and sometimes death. The First World War led to the collapse of the tsarist empire and of its neighbors, the Prussian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires. This was followed by the creation of the Soviet Union as a Communist party-state and of fascist and Nazi regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. After the Second World War, democratic regimes were established in Western Europe, while Moscow installed Communist regimes behind an Iron Curtain that divided the continent.

In the past century, Russia has twice gone through a treble transformation of the state, the polity, and the economy. The first upheaval followed the 1917 Revolution that ended the tsarist empire. Lenin and his dedicated followers created a new state with new boundaries, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and a Communist regime with the totalitarian goal of transforming the minds as well as the behavior of its subjects. Josef Stalin transformed a backward economy into an industrialized non-market economy, in which the commands of the Communist Party and the plans of bureaucrats decided what should be produced.

The second transformation began when Mikhail Gorbachev tried to reform the Soviet regime in the late 1980s. However, the unintended consequence of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) was another treble transformation that Gorbachev aptly characterized as beyond any Russian's dreams or nightmares. At the end of 1991, the

2 Russia transformed

Soviet Union dissolved into fifteen independent states. In place of a one-party regime with a totalitarian vocation, there is now a regime in which elections offer a variety of choices and people have freedoms previously denied them. A command economy in which people used connections to obtain goods that money couldn't buy in shops has been replaced by a market economy in which shops offer lots of goods for sale to those who have the money to buy them.

Transformation has challenged Russia's political elite to adapt to new political institutions or be consigned to the dust bin of history. There were neither precedents nor blueprints for what would happen. Boris Yeltsin became president with the optimistic belief that the country could "jump from the grey, stagnating totalitarian past into a bright, rich, and civilized future in one go." In reality, the Yeltsin administration proceeded by a painful trial-and-error process of responding to the great challenges facing the new regime. His successor, Vladimir Putin, reacted against the "upheavals and cataclysms" of the Yeltsin years and declared in a millennium address launching his period in office that the time had come to govern through what he called "the dictatorship of law."

Ordinary Russians too have been challenged by the intense and pervasive effects of transformation. Since everyone was initially socialized to come to terms with the Soviet regime, the launch of the Russian Federation was the start of a process of political re-learning on a scale that had not been seen in Europe since the fall of Nazi Germany in 1945 and the Soviet imposition of Communist regimes across half the continent. Economic transformation has altered the way in which you get food, whether you have a job, and how much or whether you are paid. Political transformation has made it possible *not* to take an interest in politics, since the Communist Party no longer has the power to compel youths and adults to pay lip service to the party line. Russians who do become involved in politics have had to work with the new regime by learning new skills, adapting skills learned in the Soviet era, or by combining the two.

In the aftermath of transformation, political elites and ordinary Russians have had to come to terms with each other. All leaders, whether democratic or authoritarian, require a combination of compliance and support from those they govern. Demands for compliance have been far fewer than in the previous regime. Instead of actively mobilizing the population to advance Communist Party goals, up to a point the leaders of the new regime have accepted a degree of dissociation between governors and governed. This strategy confers new freedoms on ordinary people while leaving governors free to act as they wish. Demands for support have been limited too. Competitive elections have been "managed" in ways acceptable to the Kremlin (cf. McFaul, 2005). Instead of



invoking democratic, socialist, or nationalist values as grounds for normative support, governors have regarded it as sufficient for Russians to show resigned acceptance to the regime as a fact of life. In the words of a onetime Communist leader in Hungary, Janos Kadar, "He who is not against us is with us."

The first object of this book is to determine the extent to which Russians have developed support for the regime that has filled the void created by transformation. This is done by drawing on a unique source of evidence: fourteen New Russia Barometer nationwide surveys of public opinion from 1992 to 2005. It shows that Russians not only differ in their evaluation of the current regime; they also disagree about what should or could replace it. Given these differences, the book's second object is to explain why some Russians support the new regime while others do not. Is it because they differ in age and education? In their political values or their assessment of the performance of government? Or is it because some people are winners while others are losers from the economic effects of transformation? Since opinions have fluctuated both up and down since 1992, the third object is to understand how the passage of time has altered attitudes. The dreams that people had at the start of transformation have been replaced by experience of its consequences. While many Russians find the new regime falls far short of their hopes and ideals, most who are not prepared to give it positive support are nonetheless resigned to accepting it as a lesser evil.

### **Transforming institutions and popular support**

Transformation creates a fundamental discontinuity in the institutions of a society. Whereas an election can change the people and party in control of government while leaving its institutions intact, transformation changes the very structure of government. Transformation differs from political reform: it is not an alteration of institutions to make the political system work better; it is a disruption of institutions that replaces one political system with another.

#### *Destruction and creation of regimes*

In a sense all societies are in transition, for change is an inevitable part of political life. However, transformation is an abnormal condition of society, because it involves fundamental changes in its central institutions. Like war, it is an interruption in the everyday activities of a political society. Defeat in war does not necessarily transform a political regime. In the Second World War, the Netherlands and Norway were occupied

4 Russia transformed

by Nazi Germany for almost five years, but at the end of the war they restored their regime as it was before the war. However, the end of the war meant the fall of the Nazi regime and the creation of two German states, the democratic West German Federal Republic and the misnamed East German Democratic Republic.

Political transformation is most evident in the dissolution and creation of states. While at any given point in time the boundaries of states are fixed in international law, with the passage of time the boundaries of states expand or contract, new states emerge and some disappear from the map altogether. Ironically, Mikhail Gorbachev's attempt to restructure the Soviet Union led to the creation of more new states than at any time since the achievement of independence by African colonies. The collapse of the Soviet Union has resulted in the creation of new "unhistoric" independent states in Central Asia; historic nations such as Armenia became states; and nations such as Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, which had been independent states before 1939, regained independence.

Even if the boundaries of a state remain intact, the political regime – that is, the state's central institutions linking governors to governed – can be transformed. Whereas the boundaries of Latin American states, for example, have tended to be fixed for a century or longer, these states have experienced frequent changes of regime between civilian dictators, military rulers, and popularly elected governments. Among the member-states of the European Union, a big majority have had at least one change in political regime within the lifetime of some of their national leaders. Greece, Spain, and Portugal changed from undemocratic to democratic regimes in the 1970s; a bloodless 1958 military coup in France replaced the Fourth with the Fifth Republic; and Germany, Austria, Italy, and Finland changed regimes following defeat in the Second World War. By definition, all post-Communist states have had a regime change within the lifetime of a majority of their citizens, and a big majority have had changes in their territorial boundaries too.

An economic transformation can occur even without a fundamental change in the state or the regime. The transformation of Scandinavian countries from agrarian to industrial economies is an older illustration of this point, and Japan becoming a world economic power a more recent one. However, the Soviet Union was industrialized long before it collapsed. The Soviet legacy to the new regime was the need to transform a non-market economy into a market economy. Thus, when the Yeltsin administration sought to privatize state-owned industrial assets in the 1990s, it did so in the absence of a private sector.

The experience of Russians is extraordinary because transformation has occurred simultaneously and abruptly in three different dimensions of society – the state, the political regime, and the economy. It thus differs

from a society in which transformation has been a process of evolution and each step has occurred at a different period in its history. For example, in England the supremacy of the rule of law and Parliament was established in the seventeenth century; the Industrial Revolution did not begin until the late eighteenth century; the development of a democratic regime based on universal suffrage was not completed until early in the twentieth century; and the dissolution of the British Empire came half a century after that.

*Destruction and creation of popular support*

If a new regime is to survive, it requires some form of support from its people. David Easton (1965: 159ff.), who initially developed the concept of political support, defined it in very general terms as, “*A* (the citizen) orienting himself favorably toward *B* (the regime).” This definition emphasizes that support is a state of mind. However, if it is to sustain the institutions of a regime, it must also lead to compliant behavior (see Rose, 1969).

The history of government demonstrates that the support of subjects can be maintained for a very long time by very different kinds of regimes. The pharaohs of ancient Egypt maintained a centralized system of autocratic rule for millennia, and the Roman empire lasted for centuries without modern means of telecommunication or coercion. The tsarist, Habsburg, and Prussian empires not only maintained their institutions but also expanded their territorial grasp for centuries before being disrupted by defeat in the First World War.

The less support a new regime has, the less effective it will be. Subjects who do not support the new regime are less likely to follow its laws and exhortations. They are also less likely to pay taxes, thus increasing the need for unpopular tax collectors or economically distorting taxes that cannot be evaded. Insofar as refusal to support the new regime reflects preference for an alternative regime, the new regime must invest substantial resources in political surveillance and intimidation of potential opponents and in propaganda designed to create support, or at least to produce passive acceptance.

Easton’s definition of support is clinical rather than normative; there is no assumption that support can be given only to democratic regimes. The very detailed index of his 507-page study of political support lists only five references to democracy. This gives the term broad contemporary relevance, for many member-states of the United Nations today have regimes that are not democratic. Not only does history offer many examples of undemocratic regimes achieving substantial support, but also contemporary surveys show a substantial measure of support for regimes

in countries that, at most, are only partly democratic (cf. Rose and Mishler, 2002).

Theories offer a variety of reasons why people might support their regime. Citizens can support a regime because it represents their political values, whether of democracy, ethnic communities, or Communism. Citizens may also support a regime because it “pays,” that is, delivers economic benefits. In semi-democratic regimes, individuals may support the current regime as a lesser evil compared to other alternatives, for example, a foreign invader. In an authoritarian regime, subjects may be resigned to accepting that the regime will remain in place, whether they like it or not. Coercion is the ultimate inducement that the regime can offer, and fear of arrest or worse can lead individuals to show support publicly even if their private opinions are different.

In a regime that is older than its oldest citizens, political support is usually not in dispute, because everyone learns to support it through a continuous process of socialization that begins in childhood, as parents, school, and the media communicate the dominant political values and beliefs of a society. It extends into adulthood without interruption, reinforcing what was learned earlier. By the time a youth becomes an adult, he or she will regard the regime as the only form of government conceivable for their country.

Russia’s transformation was a crash course in political re-learning; it changed people’s lives as well as changing their system of government. Some changes were for the better and some for the worse, for example, the new regime immediately delivered freedom from a repressive party-state, but it also created treble-digit inflation and job insecurity. When transformation occurred, the median Russian was middle-aged and settled in his or her way of life. The Soviet regime was the only regime they had ever known. Transformation disrupted the collective norms and institutions by which individuals had learned to order their lives. Durkheim (1952) predicted that the consequence of such shocks would be anomie, that is, a loss of meaning in life leading, at the extreme, to suicide.

In the time that has passed since the Soviet Union disappeared at the end of 1991, Russians have had to alter their behavior or risk becoming marginalized in a post-transformation society. The disappearance of old institutions and the introduction of new ones has meant that concepts such as “freedom” and “market” are no longer abstractions, but realities that Russians experience in their everyday lives. Once it is realized that old institutions have disappeared and that new institutions show signs of persistence, people can adapt to what confronts them. Since the Russian Federation was launched, Russians have had time and opportunities to learn what their new system of governance is like. Instead of making

judgments on the basis of hopes and fears, Russians can now draw on this experience to evaluate the aftermath of transformation.

### **Top-down and bottom-up approaches to transformation**

Understanding transformation is both an intellectual and a practical task. Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations* in an intellectual attempt to make sense of the market economy; Smith generalized his theories of economic behavior from the bottom-up perspective of eighteenth-century merchants in the High Street around the corner from his lecture hall at the University of Glasgow. Karl Marx wrote a top-down account of the causes and consequences of the Industrial Revolution from a desk in the British Museum in London. The founders of the Soviet Union developed Marxism-Leninism as a doctrine to guide, or at least justify, their plans and actions to transform Russian society.

By the time the Soviet Union collapsed, social scientists had developed concepts and theories about every aspect of social life. The great majority of these theories were derived from Western, and above all Anglo-American, societies and had been tested in societies with established democracies and market systems. The emphasis was on explaining the stability of political and economic institutions. In the narrowly defined universe within which these theories were developed, the qualifying phrase – “all other conditions remaining equal” – was usually met. However, all other conditions were not equal in Communist regimes. The fall of the Berlin Wall has challenged Western social science theories to explain fundamental change as well as stability in regimes (cf. McFaul and Stoner-Weiss, 2004, 5ff.; Brady and Collier, 2004).

Transformation is a dynamic process, starting with the disappearance of the old order. There is then a period of turbulent change, followed by the institutionalization of a new regime. Thus, any theory purporting to account for what has happened in Russia cannot be based on a static analysis, such as a crossnational comparison of economic conditions and more or less democratic regimes. In order to account for the conditions leading up to transformation, the turbulence of the process, and its aftermath, theories must have regard to developments in historical time (Pierson, 2004). Moreover, attempts to predict Russia’s future that ignore its present and recent past are utopian.

#### *Top-down approaches to transformation*

Because transforming changes have occurred in societies on multiple continents in the past two decades, this has encouraged some social scientists

to view Russia's transformation in terms of general theories that are global in scope. Economic theories generalized from market economies, known colloquially as "the Washington consensus," were used by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to dispense advice and money to the Russian government. In the blunt words of Lawrence Summers (1991: 2), then chief economist at the World Bank, "Spread the truth – the laws of economics are like the laws of engineering. One set of laws works everywhere." When Summers became a senior Treasury official in the Clinton administration, he gained substantial influence in promoting this doctrine as United States government policy too. The billions of foreign aid that subsequently flowed into Russia from the West were a costly tuition fee to learn that the transformation of a non-market into a market economy is not the same as the transformation of an agricultural market economy into industrial economy (Lopez-Claros and Zadornov, 2002; Wedel, 1998).

Insofar as Russia required fundamental economic change, this encouraged comparison with conventional developing countries. Shleifer and Treisman (2004) have used Latin American and Asian data about social and economic development to support their claim that Russia is a third-world country undergoing modernization. However, such a comparison ignores the historical fact that, when most third-world countries were primarily agricultural, the Soviet regime had transformed Russia into a society with large industries, cities, and high levels of education. While economically superior to other developing countries, Russia is inferior in political openness (Fish, 2005: 98ff.). The distinctiveness of Russia's economy before and after transformation has encouraged the self-mocking Russian boast, "We are not a third-world country but a fourth-world country."

Because Russia's political transformation has been contemporaneous with a global spread of democracy, this encouraged political scientists to analyze Russia as part of a global "third wave" of democratization (see Huntington, 1991) and even to see the Hegelian antithesis between democracy and Communism as resulting in the "end of history," that is, the triumph of democracy as the only ideology for governing a modern society (Fukuyama, 1992). This approach was particularly congenial to Western policymakers trying to understand a non-Communist Russia. It encouraged Western governments to provide funds for "democracy promotion" in Russia and other post-Soviet states. However, the assumptions of such efforts were not matched by realities on the ground (Carothers, 1999). A consequence of initially viewing Russia as a democracy is that it can now be examined as a "failed" democracy rather than as an example of Presidents Yeltsin and Putin having succeeded in

maintaining a new regime by whatever means they thought effective (Fish, 2005).

Prior to the political collapse of the Soviet Union, scholars of Latin America and Southern Europe had developed a framework for analyzing regime changes as transitions from authoritarian rule (see, e.g., O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986). This led some "transitologists" to recommend the application of Latin American models of regime change to post-Communist countries (see Schmitter and Karl, 1994; Bunce, 1995, 2003; Gans-Morse, 2004). In the abstract, such an approach could be justified. However, it ignored the concrete differences between "pre-modern" developing countries and a Soviet system that had been "anti-modern" (Rose, 1999). Unlike the Soviet Union, Latin American societies had not had totalitarian regimes that destroyed the institutions of civil society and markets. Confirming Russia's difference from Latin countries, a multicontinental comparative study of governance placed the Russian Federation in the bottom group, below countries such as India, Mongolia, and China (Hyden, Court, and Mease, 2004: chapter 2).

Because the Soviet Union created a Communist bloc of countries, its breakup has encouraged the comparative analysis of post-Communist regimes, in which Russia is simply one among more than two dozen cases. However, the paths of post-Communist countries have diverged. Eight are now democratic regimes and market economies belonging to the European Union, and two more are hoping to join shortly, while most of the Soviet republics that became independent with the breakup of the USSR have become undemocratic regimes. A comparison of post-Communist regimes from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan to Hungary and the Czech Republic demonstrates differences rather than similarities in their trajectories. On most political criteria, the Russian Federation usually falls somewhere between the new EU member-states and Central Asian regimes (see chapter 2).

Scholars who specialize in Russian history are inclined to emphasize distinctive and even unique features of Russia's past and to argue that these tend to determine the path that the new regime will follow. Continuities between past and present are readily cited from tsarist and Soviet practice. However, the proposition – Russian history matters – raises the question: which history? Is it the history of the despotic reforms of Ivan the Terrible or of the successes and failures of nineteenth-century tsars? How relevant is the Soviet experience under Stalin as compared to that of Brezhnev or Gorbachev? Theories of persisting Russian values and norms imply that it will take generations for transformation to be rid of the legacy of the past and make the new regime effective.

Whatever the influence of the past, transformation also emphasizes the necessity to understand what is new. Kremlinology, that is, the intensive analysis of the actions and entourage of the head of government, emphasizes what is currently topical. It is equally applicable to a regime headed by an elected president, a Communist Party general secretary, or a tsar. Such accounts illuminate the intentions of leaders and the enormity of the challenges confronting them during and after transformation (see, e.g., Brown, 1996; Breslauer, 2002; Aron, 2000). However, a book entitled *Yeltsin's Russia* (Shevtsova, 1999) tells us more about Boris Yeltsin than it does about the 140 million Russians whose opinions the president was meant to represent. Books that bill themselves as about "Putin's Russia" imply that Vladimir Putin's departure from the Kremlin will produce a different Russian regime.

Policymakers from abroad favor Kremlinology because it implies that who you know is what matters. The temptation facing foreigners is to take from encounters with Russia's leaders what they would like to believe, because it is consistent with their own domestic political goals. For example, during the height of the Stalinist purges, the leading British Fabians, Beatrice and Sidney Webb (1937) returned from a trip to Russia with a glowing impression of what they lauded as a new and attractive civilization. In President Yeltsin's tumultuous time in office in the 1990s, President Clinton's policy toward Russia was more about backing Boris than about backing democracy (Marsden, 2005). Intergovernmental bankers can be impressed by personalities too. After a trip to Russia in the early period of transformation, the managing director of the International Monetary Fund, Michel Camdessus (IMF, 1994), told a press conference that he had faith that Russia's economic transformation was succeeding, citing "very strong personal assurances" given by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and "especially impressive" religious leaders who assured him that "Russia's traditional spiritual values would enable the Russian people not only to cope with the difficulties of the transition process but also to make it more human."

This book is distinctive in focusing on the development of popular support during the decade and a half since the launch of the Russian Federation in 1992. It thus rejects the emphasis on "instant" history that characterizes journalistic Kremlinology. It also rejects the historicist view that knowledge of Russia in the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, or twentieth century, before transformation, is sufficient to understand popular support for the Russian regime today. Nor does it assume that the circumstances of transformation in 1991 are sufficient to understand its aftermath. Drawing on the New Russia Barometer survey, which started in January 1992, the first month of the Russian Federation,



this book tracks the dynamics of popular attitudes over a decade and a half. It can thus test empirically the extent to which popular attitudes developed in the Soviet era have persisted or have been eroded by the passage of time. Moreover, the effects of political inertia, that is, the slow but steady pressure that the passage of time can exert on attitudes toward a new regime, can also be tested.

*No government without subjects*

A regime cannot persist without the willing or unwilling support and compliance of those subject to its authority. Without this, laws and *diktats* are empty pronouncements. In the eighteenth century, Grigory Potemkin, an agent of Tsarina Catherine the Great, was said to have constructed artificial villages showing her subjects enjoying a happy rustic life, so that when the empress toured newly conquered territories in the south she would believe that the land was wealthy and her subjects content. In Soviet times the Ministry of Economic Planning created statistical Potemkinvilles, figures that gave the appearance of a dynamic and successful economy.

Up to a point, the totalitarian aspiration of Communist rulers for a public show of total support was successful: public opinion was kept private. A character in a novel by Vladimir Dudintsev described people as having two persons in one body, the “visible” person doing and saying what the state commanded while the “hidden” person did and thought as he or she liked within a close circle of trusted family and friends. At the top of an hour-glass society, the Soviet elite managed the direction of the regime, while at the bottom their subjects sought to minimize contact with rulers (Shlapentokh, 1989; Rose, 1995c).

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been an explosion of research applying different methods to understanding how Russians have responded to transformation and its aftermath. Anthropological observation of a small group of people details the particularities of personal networks. However, it is misleading to generalize to a whole society from the study of a single village or a single block of flats. Rational choice theories offer an abstract theory of individuals maximizing welfare, but because they are general they fail to indicate what happens when individuals are challenged to maximize their welfare amidst the uncertainties of transformation and its aftermath. Official statistics offer data about the income of the average Russian, but say nothing about differences between Russians who are well above and well below average.

To understand what ordinary Russians think about transformation, we need unofficial as well as official data. This book applies normal social science methods to create a unique resource for studying the attitudes

of ordinary Russians, the New Russia Barometer (NRB). Richard Rose created the NRB in order to collect empirical information about how ordinary Russians were responding to the unprecedented treble transformation of their society. Each Barometer survey interviews a representative nationwide sample of approximately 2,000 persons in cities from Murmansk to Vladivostok and in rural areas with a total population four times that of Moscow (see Appendix A; [www.abdn.ac.uk/cspp](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/cspp)).

Interviewing a representative sample of Russians shows how misleading it is to assume that what the Kremlin says determines what ordinary people think (see Mickiewicz, 2006) or to make blanket statements about what “all” Russians think. Politics is about the expression of conflicting opinions about government, and every survey shows that Russians are *not* of one mind politically. Instead of reporting holistic descriptions of a Russian “mentality” or “soul,” NRB surveys have introduced a sense of proportion: surveys show that some Russians are of one opinion about the regime, while others hold the opposite view; they thus identify both majority and minority attitudes in the population.

Although concerned with public opinion, this book is not about what Russians want: it is about what Russians make of what they get. Many surveys have projected Anglo-American assumptions onto the population of Russia: for example, asking questions about satisfaction with the way democracy is working in Russia assumes that the regime is a democracy. The NRB avoids this mistake. It asks whether people support the current regime as it actually is. Since it also asks whether people think the current regime tends to be democratic or a dictatorship, it can show whether support is more likely to come from those who see the regime as a dictatorship or as a democracy.

### **Analyzing regime support**

Because transformation is the start of a process of fundamental change, evidence from a decade ago is insufficient for understanding what is happening today. Equally, it is misleading to assume that what Russians think today is unaffected by what they have learned since the start of transformation. Because there have been fourteen NRB surveys since the start of the new regime, this book can analyze the dynamics of regime support.

Chapter 1 sets out the central thesis of this book: an understanding of development of regime support can be achieved only by taking the importance of time into account. In a regime in a steady-state equilibrium, the political commitments that people learn early in life can persist indefinitely, because the behavior of political elites and institutions follows a predictable path. However, sooner or later, elites will be challenged

to introduce changes. The response can restore the status quo ante or introduce reforms that leave the regime intact but its institutions altered. By contrast, when a dynamic challenge leads to disruption and political transformation, both subjects and the political elite are forced to adapt. Initially, people do so on the basis of experience of the past or hopes and fears about the future. With the passage of time, individuals can evaluate the regime on the basis of its actual political and economic performance. The experience of Russians since 1992 has been a crash course in political re-learning.

To understand the dynamics of regime change requires a typology of regimes that elites can supply. In place of the teleological determinism of the consolidation-of-democracy literature, chapter 2 classifies regimes according to two criteria: whether the rule of law is respected and whether elites are accountable to the populace through free elections. This typology not only distinguishes between democratic and autocratic regimes but also between three types of autocratic regimes – constitutional, plebiscitarian, and despotic. Democratic regimes have developed differently: some have evolved slowly while others have had false starts. Post-Communist regimes have differed in their dynamics too. The Russian Federation has become a plebiscitarian autocracy holding elections without the rule of law. By contrast, new regimes in Central and Eastern Europe have become democratic members of the European Union, while in Central Asia post-Soviet regimes have become lawless, unaccountable despotisms.

Centuries of autocratic rule in Russia have involved a changing supply of regimes. Chapter 3 charts the process of change from tsarist despotism to the totalitarian despotism of Stalin's Soviet Union and the subsequent relaxation but not abandonment of a Communist Party dictatorship unconstrained by the rule of law. This history gave Russians lots of experience of coexisting with despotism. Mikhail Gorbachev's attempt to reform that regime ended in its disruption and the creation of the Russian Federation. The early years were necessarily turbulent as political elites tried to create new political and economic institutions and a new state. Since Vladimir Putin became president in 2000, the direction of government has been much more orderly and controlled, a process that has emphasized the autocratic rather than the plebiscitarian character of the regime.

Even though Soviet restrictions on freedom of speech kept public opinion private, Russians have always held political values. Chapter 4 draws on New Russia Barometer surveys from the early 1990s to provide a bottom-up view of Russian society at the start of transformation. Notwithstanding (or perhaps because of) lifelong indoctrination, most Russians were

indifferent to or negative about Marxism-Leninism and about socialism. The values endorsed by a majority were freedom, *glasnost* (that is, openness), the unity of Russia, and Christianity. But amidst the turbulence of transformation, Russians also had immediate mundane concerns, such as queuing for hours to get bread and waiting weeks or months to get paid at work. Skills learned in Soviet times helped Russians to cope with the turmoil of transformation. It also taught Russians to be patient. Even if President Yeltsin believed it was possible to jump all at once from a grey totalitarian past into a bright and civilized future, most Russians did not.

Traditional theories of Russian political culture assumed that there was a consensus of opinion about basic political values, and the Soviet regime insisted that its subjects demonstrate total support for the regime. There were no public opinion surveys to challenge this assertion. Chapter 5 presents evidence from fourteen years of NRB surveys showing that Russians consistently *disagree* when asked whether they approve of the current regime – and the percentage giving support goes up and down. There is a similar pattern of disagreement about the endorsement of alternative regimes such as dictatorship by a strong man or the return of the Communist system. The chapter sets out a series of hypotheses about why Russians differ: the influence of social structure, politics, the economy, and the passage of time. It also explains the innovative statistical measures that will be used to take into account how the passage of time can alter the extent of regime support.

Whether Marxist or not, sociologists explain political attitudes as a reflection of differences in social structure. There are disagreements about whether class, education, gender, religion, or other differences have the biggest impact on political outlooks. However, sociological theories agree in stressing that political support is less a result of characteristics of a regime than of characteristics of its subjects. Chapter 6 tests the extent to which social differences actually do account for how Russians evaluate the new regime and its alternatives. It finds that social structure has little influence.

In an established democracy, political performance and values can influence whether citizens vote for or against the government of the day while leaving support for the regime unaltered. By contrast, in a new regime, the evaluation of political performance can determine which regime an individual supports. Having lived under two different regimes enables Russians to evaluate the new regime as better than its predecessor or as a lesser or greater evil. Regime support can also reflect both whether institutions are seen as trusted or corrupt, and approval or disapproval of the president. Chapter 7 finds that the influence of political values and

performance is substantial, and sometimes changes with the experience gained through the passage of time.

The impact of the new regime on the economy has been great; it has also been erratic. Governors cannot deny responsibility for the costs of transformation, nor can they be stopped from claiming credit when the economy starts to boom. Generalizations about the influence of economic conditions need to take the ups and downs of the economy into account. It is also important to ascertain whether movements in the national economy count most, or whether individuals place more weight on the economic conditions of their own household. The New Russia Barometer's carefully designed set of economic indicators analyzed in chapter 8 show not only how much the economy matters for regime support but also which economic conditions, national or household, are most important.

One asset that any regime has is the fact that it is there: the longer a new regime manages to survive, the more pressure this exerts on subjects to accept it and to expect it to survive well into the future. The passage of time can also lead people to abandon support for alternative regimes if they think there is no hope of regime change coming about. The results produced by innovative statistical analysis show that the passage of time has created a political equilibrium in which many who disapprove of the economic and political performance of the regime are nonetheless resigned to accepting it.

The transformation of Russia is a reminder that popular support for a regime is inherently open to shocks. The final chapter asks: what *could* disrupt the political equilibrium that has emerged in the Russian Federation? Generational and social changes can have little impact on the equilibrium of support in the foreseeable future. Russians see their society as facing risks, such as an HIV-AIDS epidemic or a civilian nuclear accident. However, this would undermine political support only if the regime were blamed for a disaster. The immediate challenge to the regime's equilibrium of support is the term-limits rule that will require President Putin to pass control of government to a successor in 2008 or amend or bend the constitution. The response of ordinary people to the president's actions will show the extent to which Russians continue to support whatever regime the political elite supplies.