



University
of Glasgow

White, S. and Mcallister, I. (2008) *The Putin phenomenon*. Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics, 24 (4). pp. 604-628. ISSN 1352-3279

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/5927/>

Deposited on: 03 June 2009

The Putin Phenomenon

STEPHEN WHITE AND IAN McALLISTER

The Putin presidency in Russia became increasingly popular as it progressed and a leadership cult developed around the president himself. Not only was there general satisfaction with the leadership as a whole, there was also evidence that it was regarded as increasingly successful in all fields of policy, particularly in international affairs; and focus group discussions as well as surveys suggested the newly elected president, Dmitri Medvedev, would be expected to continue those policies. A closer examination of the survey evidence suggests that the Putin leadership in fact had relatively weak roots in the wider society, and drew widely but superficially on public support. More than anything else it was the strong economic performance of these years that generated support for the Putin presidency, and this suggested that any future leader would depend for his position on maintaining that economic performance in what were now more difficult circumstances.

On paper, the powers of the Russian president are formidable – so formidable that some have described it as a ‘super-presidency’, with an ability to make appointments, take decisions and define the main directions of public policy that leaves the other branches of government in a wholly subordinate position.¹ But for others it has remained a ‘semi-presidential’ system, with a dual executive: as well as the president, a prime minister who is accountable to an elected parliament.² Much depended on what was understood by the ‘accountability’ of the prime minister in this connection. It was certainly some distance from the French system: the Russian prime minister did not depend on a parliamentary majority, he did not necessarily represent the largest party (or any party at all), and although the parliament could pass a vote of no confidence, this did not necessarily result in the replacement of the government – the president could choose instead to dissolve the parliament and call fresh elections. ‘If this is a semi-presidential system’, Sartori concludes in apparent despair, ‘it is an ill-conceived one’.³

Several attempts have been made to develop a scale against which the strength of presidential powers can be evaluated within a broadly comparative context. The most influential of these formulations has identified a critical set of variables that extend across a president’s legislative and extra-legislative powers.⁴ Measured in this way, the powers of the Russian president are certainly extensive, but they are not all-encompassing. The president can veto legislation, but his veto can be overridden by the legislature, and he cannot veto part of a piece of legislation. The president can issue decrees on his own authority, but only if they do not contradict the Constitution and existing legislation, and he has no monopoly of the right to initiate legislation. The Russian president does not introduce the annual budget – this is the responsibility of government; and he cannot call a referendum on his own authority, although he issues a decree to this effect when the legal requirements have been satisfied – normally, when at least two million citizens have signed a petition to this effect.

StephenWhite is James Bryce Professor of Politics at the University of Glasgow, and Ian McAllister is Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University in Canberra. They are currently engaged on a project on ‘managed democracy’ with the support of a collaborative award from the Economic and Social Research Council (UK) and the Australian Research Council.

Apart from this, the Russian president appoints members of the government, although his nomination to the premiership requires the approval of the lower house, and he can dismiss individual ministers or the government as a whole without reference to parliament, which is a power as extensive as any that exists in any other presidential system. Parliament can express its lack of confidence in the government, in which case the president must either accept its resignation or call new elections. The president, finally, has the power to dissolve the legislature, but can do so only if the Duma (lower house) refuses to accept three consecutive nominations to the premiership, if it passes a vote of no confidence in the government twice in three months, or if it refuses to support the government when the prime minister himself puts a vote of confidence (these are 'restricted' powers of dissolution in terms of the Shugart–Carey classification). Taken together, this range of legislative and non-legislative powers suggests a presidency that is more dominant than the French, and about as powerful as the American, but well short of the Mexican or several other Latin American presidencies.

The Shugart–Carey scale, however, misses a number of important variables. The Russian president, for instance, enjoys very far-reaching powers of appointment within the judiciary, including the Supreme Court, the Higher Arbitration Court and the Constitutional Court, which is supposed to monitor his actions: the president enjoys the exclusive right of nomination in this case, although the Federation Council (upper house) must formally approve his proposals; in all other cases the president is entitled to make the appointment on his own authority. The scale makes no reference to emergency powers, which some regard as 'crucial';⁵ nor does it take account of the increasingly common practice of judicial review, by which a president can ask the courts to rule on the constitutionality of legislation before he signs it, or mention the ultimate sanction of impeachment. Perhaps most fundamentally of all, any exercise of this kind equates formal powers with political authority in a system in which a great deal still depends on the individual office-holder. As Elster has pointed out, a president who looks powerful on paper may be 'quite weak in reality (and vice versa)', and in any case the powers of the presidency are difficult to distinguish from the particular qualities of the 'exceptional personalities that have held this office over the relatively short period of postcommunist rule'.⁶

The importance of 'exceptional personalities' has certainly been borne out in the early years of Russia's post-communist presidency. It was Boris Yeltsin who personally decided to face down his opponents in the Russian parliament, and then imposed his own rules of the game in a new Constitution that underpinned his dominant position. The war on breakaway Chechnya began in 1994 on the basis of a secret presidential decree; much of the privatization programme rested on a similar foundation. The arbitrary replacement of five prime ministers in 1998–99, and then the choice of Putin as successor, were entirely personal decisions; not even his own family, apparently, knew he would be retiring at the end of 1999 until 'practically the last minute'.⁷ It was Vladimir Putin, in turn, who restored the political authority of the presidency, using his decree powers to establish a new system of federal districts at the start of his administration, and his powers of appointment to bring forward a new leadership that drew heavily if not exclusively on his former colleagues in the security services.⁸ It was Putin, once again, in his speech of September 2004 following the Beslan hostage-taking crisis, who initiated a new series of centralizing changes in the structures of government, and who introduced a system of 'national projects' the following year by presidential decree.

In what follows we focus on this ‘personal’ element in the Russian presidency, at a time when the formal powers of the office are no longer sufficient to define the incumbent as the dominant member of the leadership, and in which it is Putin, as prime minister since May 2008, who holds that position and who clearly does so because of his personal authority rather than his constitutional prerogatives. We examine, first of all, the remarkable ‘cult of personality’ that developed around Putin as Russian president over the course of his two presidential terms. We move on to consider the popular evaluation of his performance as president over the same period, in general and more policyspecific terms, using focus group discussions as well as more conventional quantitative evidence. We conclude with an analysis of the sources and nature of his support, drawing on a national representative survey that was conducted between the two elections in the early months of 2008.⁹ To anticipate, we find that Putin’s support is widely and evenly distributed; this provides a basis for record approval ratings, but little evidence of a commitment to the person or the office that will be sufficient to insulate them from a judgement about the success of their policies, and particularly their economic performance, over the years to come.

Towards a Leadership Cult

Putin took over the presidency on an acting basis at the end of 1999, and finally left office in May 2008 (see Table 1). Within a year of his accession, foundry workers in the Urals were casting him in bronze; not far away, weavers were making rugs with the president’s face inside a golden oval. In Magnitogorsk, the overalls Putin had worn during a visit were on display in the city museum.¹⁰ A factory in Chelyabinsk had begun to produce a watch with a presidential image on its dial, and a local confectioner was selling a cake with the same design; a ‘Putin bar’ had opened elsewhere in the town, selling ‘Vertical power’ kebabs and ‘When Vova was little’ milk-shakes.¹¹ An all-female band had meanwhile ‘taken the airwaves by storm’ with its single ‘Someone like Putin’ (someone who, among other things, ‘doesn’t drink’ and ‘won’t run away’).¹² Putin’s fiftieth birthday in September 2002 brought further tributes: *Argumenty i fakty* readers wanted to present their president with a samurai sword, a portable toilet ‘so that he can wipe out whoever he wants whenever he wants’,¹³ or even ‘my love and perhaps a child as well’.¹⁴ The most original

TABLE 1
RUSSIAN PRESIDENTS AND PRIME MINISTERS, 1991 – 2008

<i>Presidents</i>	<i>Elected</i>	<i>Inaugurated</i>	<i>Re-elected</i>	<i>Left office</i>
Boris Yeltsin	12 Jun 1991	10 Jul 1991	3 Jul 1996	31 Dec 1999 ^a
Vladimir Putin	26 Mar 2000	7 May 2000	14 Mar 2004	7 May 2008
Dmitri Medvedev	2 Mar 2008	7 May 2008		
<i>Prime ministers</i>	<i>Nominated</i>	<i>Approved</i>	<i>Re-appointed</i>	<i>Left office</i>
Yegor Gaidar	8 Dec 1992	-	-	9 Dec 1992 ^b
Viktor Chermomyrdin	14 Dec 1992	14 Dec 1992	10 Aug 1996	23 Mar 1998
Sergei Kirienko	23 Mar 1998	24 Apr 1998	-	23 Aug 1998
Yevgenii Primakov	10 Sep 1998	11 Sep 1998	-	12 May 1999
Sergei Stepashin	12 May 1999	19 May 1999	-	9 Aug 1999
Vladimir Putin	9 Aug 1999	16 Aug 1999	-	7 May 2000
Mikhail Kas’yanov	7 May 2000	17 May 2000	-	24 Feb 2004

Mikhail Fradkov	1 Mar 2004	5 Mar 2004	12 May 2004	12 Sep 2007
Viktor Zubkov	12 Sep 2007	14 Sep 2007	-	7 May 2008
Vladimir Putin	7 May 2008	8 May 2008		

Notes:

^a Yeltsin resigned before the end of his second term and Putin became acting president until his election and inauguration the following May.

^b Gaidar was acting prime minister from 15 June 1992 but his formal nomination was rejected by the Russian Congress of People's Deputies on 9 December 1992.

was from a former deputy prime minister of Bashkortostan: a three-page ode that consisted exclusively of words beginning with the letter 'p' and concluded with the assurance that 'Po planete postavyat pamyatniki Pervomy Prezidentu Planety Putin' ('All around the planet they will put up monuments to the first president of the planet, Putin').¹⁵

Matters went even further in Izborsk, an unprepossessing town in the Pskov region where the presidential motorcade had made an unscheduled stop in August 2000. Visitors were offered a tour 'In Putin's footsteps' that included the places 'where Putin bought a cucumber', 'where Putin took off his jacket and tried water from a spring', and 'where Putin touched a tree and made a wish'.¹⁶ The interior minister, the human-rights ombudsman and the Latvian ambassador were among the many state officials who had taken the tour, all of whom had 'come up to the wishing tree and made their secret wish just as Putin did'; a local paper meanwhile reproduced the recipe for the cucumber, warning that they should be picked early in the morning and 'washed three times, preferably in holy water'.¹⁷ In Irkutsk the chair on which Putin had sat during his April 2002 visit was sold at public auction to the local veterinary inspector, who hoped the 'Putin spirit [would] infect us with its energy, decency and honesty'.¹⁸ In St. Petersburg a tree the future president had planted was decorated with a commemorative plaque; elsewhere, ski slopes and churches were being renamed in his honour.¹⁹ And there were tours of the president's home town – not of its familiar tourist sights but of the back streets and alleys in which the young Putin had grown up, and of the 'clean and orderly' communal flat in which the whole family had lived during those years.²⁰

The president appeared to enjoy particularly high levels of support among women. *Pravda* reported a distressing case from Yaroslavl, where there was a 'new category of patients – women who are madly in love with President Vladimir Putin'. Lyudmila, in her late thirties, had started to collect newspaper articles about the president; she soon accumulated a thick file, which she kept in a locked bedside cabinet. She asked her husband to turn down the television when Putin was speaking on the radio, and made no move to feed him two weeks later when he came home starving from work, sitting 'bedazzled' in front of the television as Putin gave an interview (they had such a fight they stopped speaking to each other for three days). Finally she moved into the children's room, where she hung a portrait of the president above the bed, but her husband came in and threw everything on the floor. Lyudmila dissolved in tears, and the only way forward appeared to be a private psychiatrist. Lyudmila's case, he explained, was 'not unique'; women saw Putin as a 'superhusband, the ideal partner', someone who would 'never betray them, and never get dead drunk' (there was hope meanwhile that Lyudmila would 'soon recover').²¹

The president figured as the fictitious hero in two plays that were premiered in 2004, at the end of his first term of office. In one of them, Oleg Bogaev's 'Secret

Society of Bicyclists', a mother unexpectedly finds herself pregnant to the president, who appears to her every night in a dream. In the other, Konstantin Kostenko's 'Radio Serial', one of the female characters explains that she is

going to vote for Putin. . . . Wouldn't it be nice if, say, you went to the polling station and everyone who voted for Putin was given a little Putin, a little president – one for every customer? In a nice little package? They cloned Dolly the sheep, but they can't clone Putin and make one for every Russian woman! Give every woman a good husband! A little president for every Russian woman to have at home. I'd put mine on the TV, or a doily, and use a little rag to wipe the dust off him. And on weekends I'd take him to bed with me. To sleep with me. . .

One thing I'm sure of. Even though he's a Russian, I'm absolutely sure Putin doesn't drink! Not a lot, anyway. And he doesn't reek of alcohol in bed! And he has everything in working order down there, in *that* department. Now he's a man I'd go to bed with. .

..²²

The papers carried real-life experiences as well, including the story of Vera, now a married pensioner, who told *Sobesednik* about their New Year's Eve game of spin the bottle. 'When Volodya spun the bottle, it stopped on me', she recalled. 'Our kiss was short, true. I suddenly became very hot'.²³

There was a particularly strong reaction when a series of photographs of a bare-chested Russian president riding horses, rafting and fishing in a Siberian river were published on the Kremlin website in the summer of 2007. *Komsomol'skaya pravda* splashed one of them over its entire front page with the advice that its readers could 'be like Putin' if they undertook a set of recommended exercises.²⁴ There was a very positive response from the paper's female readers, who posted comments on its website praising the president's 'vigorous torso'; gay chat-rooms, apparently, were also intrigued by the photographs, some of them claiming that 'Putin, by stripping to his waist, was somehow pleading for more tolerance for homosexuality'.²⁵ The following year the president featured in another action-man sequence when he seized a rifle and fired a tranquillizer dart into an Ussuri tiger when it escaped and began to threaten scientists and a film crew during a visit to a national park in the Far East.²⁶ A gossip magazine, *Secrets of the Stars*, rapidly sold out when it issued a special edition 'wholly devoted to [Putin's] virility and reputation' and promising revelations about his youthful romances. 'There's not a single woman', the magazine explained, 'who would not dream of embracing and kissing Vladimir Vladimirovich and hearing his declaration of love'.²⁷

The name Putin, it became clear, could be used for all kinds of purposes. An Astrakhan company, for instance, began to produce a range of pickled aubergines under the 'PuTin' label (they ingeniously avoided the restrictions that applied in such matters by substituting a sword for the letter 'T'). Sales increased by a quarter, encouraging the company to move into a similar line of fish products.²⁸ In Omsk, 'Putin *pel'meni*' [meat dumplings] were on sale; elsewhere, an enterprising confectionery firm had prepared a full-size chocolate bust, and chocolate portraits were on offer.²⁹ Ordinary portraits could be picked up in any large bookshop; enthusiasts could buy a more elaborate version made of Swarovski crystals, or order a picture from a professional artist for a thousand dollars upwards.³⁰ A Urals vegetable farmer was disappointed when he tried to patent a tomato he had named after the president because it was 'so fit and hardy'.³¹ But there was a popular vodka called Putinka (though it 'tasted like all the others'),³² and a 'Putin collective farm',³³ and a computer game called 'The Four Oligarchs' in which the president recovered banks

and oil companies from his opponents and installed his loyalists in parliament.³⁴ An exhibition in St Petersburg was meanwhile offering visitors 'Three Minutes with V.V. Putin', an opportunity to spend a little time with a model of the president in his study reading a book of essays on the history of the Baltic fleet with his faithful Labrador dog by his side.³⁵

Putin's name was invoked in another way by a fashion designer who was also a leading member of the pro-Kremlin youth movement, *Nashi*. Responding to the president's appeals for larger families, she launched a new line of ribboned red-and white knickers with the words 'Vova, I'm with you' emblazoned on the crotch. There were also patriotic T-shirts, the most popular of which had the words 'Government Health Warning: Reproduction is Good for your Health' across the front (president-elect Medvedev had bought one of the T-shirts, but not the frilly undergarment).³⁶ There were Putin sayings, or at least there were supposed to be: for instance, 'When Putin smiles, a child is born. If the smile is wider than usual, expect twins'; or 'A fork that Putin ate from can kill a vampire with a single stab'.³⁷ And there were Putin jokes, some of them taking their cue from the president's celebrated assurance that he would 'wipe out the terrorists, even if they were on the john'. A Russian general, for instance, is asked: 'Why haven't you killed a single terrorist?' He replies: 'They don't use the john. . .' Or an announcement on the door of the toilet: 'Don't come in! Wiping out terrorists. Putin'. Or 'It's Gusinsky's turn for the john'.³⁸

Some accounts were already suggesting that the president might have more than ordinary powers. In Alexander Olbik's novel *Prezident*, published in 2002, a badly wounded Putin knocks the Chechen leader Shamil Basaev to the ground and sinks his teeth into Basaev's throat. "It seems I have the grip of a bulldog", was the sick thought that came into [Putin's] head, and he squeezed his teeth tighter. He savaged the vein until his tongue and palate could taste the salty blood, which was thick like oil". In between killing Chechens the president reads the Roman poet Seneca, and eats the *borshch* that is brought to him by his wife.³⁹ In a play called 'Putin's Holiday', which opened in October 2007 on his 55th birthday, a helicopter with Putin and his biographer crashes in the remote forest of northern Siberia. Apparently uninjured, the president carries the unconscious writer to a woodcutter's cottage where a discussion develops about Russia and its future destiny.⁴⁰ Elsewhere, local people in Stavropol' found they could protect a small wood where a building had been planned by calling it 'Putin grove' and attaching a portrait to every one of the threatened trees. 'They only cut down trees without a picture of Putin', *Izvestiya* was told; 'if the tree has a portrait on it, they're afraid'. In the event, a court decided that the construction had been illegal and the building was halted. 'Truth and Putin', declared the triumphant activists, 'are on our side'.⁴¹

Matters reached the point of a fully fledged cult in the village of Bol'shaya yel'nya in Nizhnii Novgorod, home to the 'Rus' Resurrecting' sect, where a group of local residents had come to the conclusion that Putin had been the Apostle Paul in a previous life, not to mention Prince Vladimir (who had embraced Christianity in the tenth century and made it the official faith of Kievan Rus') and the Biblical King Solomon. 'We didn't choose Putin', Mother Fotiniya told *Moskovskii komsomolets*, explaining how she had first set eyes on the 'holy one'. 'It was when Yeltsin was naming [Putin] as his successor. My soul exploded with joy! A Superman! God himself has chosen him'. Yeltsin, Fotiniya went on, 'was a destroyer, and God replaced him with a Creator'. The sect had a President Putin icon that Mother Fotiniya claimed had mysteriously appeared one day; Fotiniya herself claimed to be related to the Russian president, although 'not in this century'. 'He has given us everything', she

told reporters, pointing meaningfully at the sky (another paper unsportingly reported that Fotinya's real name was Svetlana Frolova, and that she had been sentenced to a year and a half in prison in 1996 on fraud charges; there were more than five hundred sects of this kind in Russia, one of them celebrating a former provincial traffic policeman as the second coming of Christ).⁴²

Dimensions of a Leadership Cult

By the end of Boris Yeltsin's presidency his reputation was in terminal decline. The peak of his popularity, with an approval rating of 80 per cent, was in July 1990 after he had been elected chairman of the Russian parliament; his support rose again, to 74 per cent, after the attempted coup in August 1991.⁴³ Once in office, however, Yeltsin's support declined rapidly. It had fallen to about 45 per cent at the time of the collapse of the USSR at the end of 1991, and fell still further after the spring of 1992 as Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar's economic policies began to bite. The president's popularity recovered a little at the time of the April 1993 referendum, and again during the conflict with the Russian parliament in September and October 1993, but then began to fall again, and by the end of 1994 his support was down to 34 per cent. Just 3 per cent of Russians, by this time, were ready to say that they 'completely shared' his views and policies; 10 per cent supported him 'in the absence of other worthy political leaders'; but 25 per cent had become 'disappointed' in the Russian president, and 26 per cent were his declared opponents (another 5 per cent were prepared to support 'anybody but Yeltsin').⁴⁴

It was at this point, in December 1994, that Yeltsin sent Russian forces into Chechnya to restore federal authority and perhaps to recover his personal standing in what was expected to be a 'small, victorious war'.⁴⁵ If this was the intention, it came badly unstuck. Chechen resistance proved unexpectedly stubborn; the Russian campaign was incompetently conducted, particularly in its early stages; and losses were heavy, up to 30,000 within the first year. Yeltsin's support, in the event, plunged still further, a majority holding him personally responsible for the war and just 6 per cent prepared to support him in the event of an early presidential election.⁴⁶ In the end, with the help of a compliant media, Yeltsin recovered sufficiently to win the second round of the presidential election that took place in July 1996, but his reputation continued to decline and as his second term came to an end it was at a very low ebb indeed. By the end of 1999 just 1 per cent mentioned the president among the five or six politicians in whom they had confidence, and more than two-thirds were prepared to support demonstrations calling for his removal; if there had been elections 'next Sunday', just 0.2 per cent would have voted for the incumbent.⁴⁷

Putin became acting president when Yeltsin stood down on New Year's Eve, six months before the end of his second term. A second Chechen war was already in progress, prompted by a series of attacks on residential buildings in the late summer that had taken more than 300 lives. There were persistent rumours that the attacks had been encouraged, if not directly instigated, by the federal authorities themselves so that domestic opinion could quickly be mobilized behind Putin, who had already been identified as Yeltsin's chosen successor as well as his prime minister.⁴⁸ It was certainly clear that Putin's vigorous prosecution of the war had been closely paralleled by a rise in his own popularity – just 2 per cent were prepared to back him for the presidency in August 1999, but by January 2000, as federal troops tightened their grip on Chechnya's capital Grozny, he had the support of 62 per cent of those who were

intending to vote in the election that was due to take place two months later.⁴⁹ He won on the first round, and again in 2004 (see Tables 2 and 3);

TABLE 2
THE RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 26 MARCH 2000

<i>Name</i>	<i>Nominated by</i>	<i>Vote</i>	<i>%</i>
Vladimir Putin	Independent	39,740,467	52.94
Gennadii Zyuganov	Independent	21,928,468	29.21
Grigorii Yavlinsky	Independent	4,351,450	5.80
Aman-Gel'dy Tuleev	Independent	2,217,364	2.95
Vladimir Zhirinovskiy	Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia	2,026,509	2.70
Konstantin Titov	Independent	1,107,269	1.47
Ella Pamfilova	Electoral association 'For Civic Dignity'	758,967	1.01
Stanislav Govorukhin	Independent	328,723	0.44
Yuri Skuratov	Independent	319,189	0.43
Aleksei Podberezkin	Independent	98,177	0.10
Umar Dzhabrailov	Independent	78,498	0.10
Against all		1,414,673	1.88
Invalid votes		701,016	0.93

Source: Adapted from *Vybory Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii*. 2000. *Elektoral'naya statistika* (Moscow: Ves' mir, 2000), pp.189–91, which incorporates the corrections made on 7 July 2000 (*Vestnik Tsentral'noi izbiratel'noi komissii Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, No.19 (2000), pp.55–61). The registered electorate was 109,372,043, of whom 75,181,073 'took part in the elections' by receiving a ballot paper (68.74 per cent), and 75,070,770 cast a valid or invalid ballot (68.64 per cent). 'Independents' were nominated by 'initiative groups' of at least 100 electors that were themselves obliged to collect at least a million signatures in support of the nomination.

throughout the two terms of his presidency his approval rating never fell below 60 per cent and it was sometimes well above 80 per cent, an exceptional level of support for the leader of a modern state and one that Russian commentators themselves described as 'Turkmenian'.⁵⁰

There were certainly some fluctuations in Putin's approval rating from month to month (see Figure 1). In August 2000, for instance, when his reaction to the sinking of the *Kursk* submarine was widely regarded as belated and callous ('It sank', he told the Larry King show on American television, without any obvious sign of remorse). But there was no loss of support in the spring of 2001 following the takeover of NTV television, an action in which 'the majority of the population did not see Putin as being actively involved'.⁵¹ His apparently resolute action during the hostage-taking crisis of October 2002 won almost universal approval, and there was substantial if less universal support for his behaviour during the Beslan hostage-taking incident of September 2004.⁵² He lost ground in the early months of 2005 as protestors took the streets to denounce the conversion of social benefits into what they regarded as inadequate monetary equivalents, but recovered his position by the end of the year, and by March 2008, when he stood down at the end of his second presidential term, his rating stood at a spectacular 85 per cent.

TABLE 3
THE RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 14 MARCH 2004

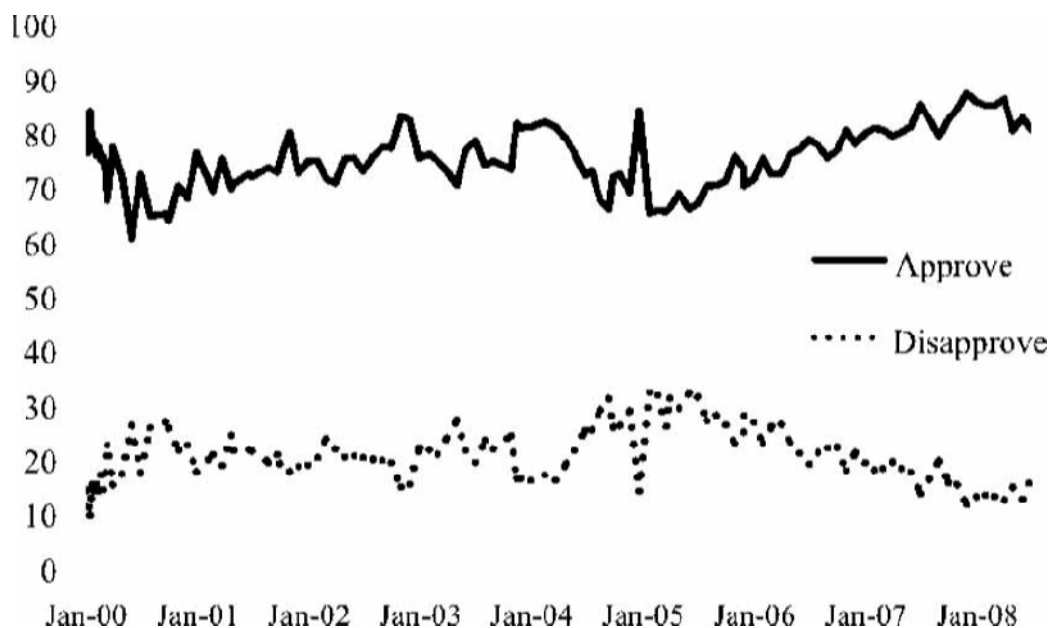
<i>Name</i>	<i>Nominated by</i>	<i>Vote</i>	<i>%</i>
Vladimir Putin	Independent	49,558,328	71.31
Nikolai Kharitonov	Communist Party of the Russian Federation	9,514,554	13.69
Sergei Glaz'ev	Independent	2,850,610	4.10

Irina Khakamada	Independent	2,672,189	3.84
Oleg Malyshkin	LDPR	1,405,326	2.02
Sergei Mironov	Russian Party of Life	524,332	0.75
Against all		2,397,140	3.45
Invalid votes		578,847	0.83

Source: Adapted from the corrected results as reported in *Vestnik Tsentral'noi izbiratel'noi komissii Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 2006, No.5, pp.19–20. The registered electorate was 108,064,281 (*Vybory Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii. 2004. Elektoral'naya statistika*, Moscow: Ves' mir, 2004, p.106), of whom 69,572,177 'took part in the elections' by receiving a ballot paper (64.38 per cent) and 69,501,326 cast a valid or invalid ballot (64.31 per cent). 'Independents' nominated themselves but were required to have the support of an electors' group of at least 500, and were registered on the basis of the signatures of at least two million electors.

Surveys had already found that he was placed ahead of all other Russian leaders in a list of those that were regarded with 'admiration, respect or sympathy': 78 per cent opted for Putin, ahead of Lenin and Andropov (both on 47 per cent), Nicholas II and Brezhnev (39 per cent), and Joseph Stalin (36 per cent);⁵³

FIGURE 1
PUBLIC APPROVAL OF PUTIN, 2000 – 8



The question was: 'On the whole, do you approve or disapprove of the performance of Vladimir Putin as President?' Figures are percentages.

Source: Levada Centre.

he came fifth, behind Pushkin, Peter the Great, Stalin and Lenin, in a list of the 'outstanding people of all times and peoples'.⁵⁴

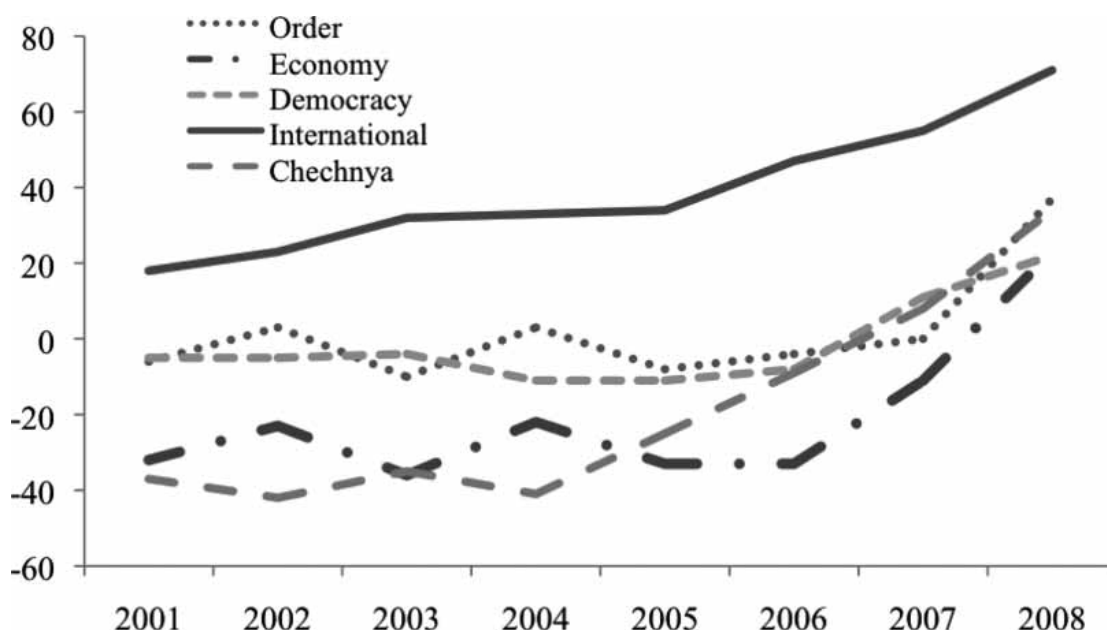
Measures of 'approval' or 'disapproval' are not the only measure of a president's standing. The national opinion research centre also asks respondents to rate the president on a scale of 1 (the worst mark) to 10 (the best). By the end of 1999, as Yeltsin concluded his second term, his rating was a miserable 1.9; Putin never fell

below 5, and as his own second term concluded at the end of 2007 his score was an impressive 7.2.⁵⁵ A massive 70 per cent at this time believed the Russian president could be ‘completely trusted’, and another 19 per cent thought he could be ‘partly trusted’; this was far in advance of the level of trust in any other civic institution, including the churches.⁵⁶ As for their personal views, 9 per cent ‘admired’ the Russian president at the end of his second term, 41 per cent regarded him with ‘sympathy’, and another 34 per cent could simply ‘find nothing bad to say about him’.⁵⁷ What was it about Putin that attracted ordinary Russians? More than anything else, according to the surveys, it was the perception that he was ‘energetic, decisive and strong-willed’; almost half of those who were asked found it hard to identify anything that dissatisfied them in the Russian president, and the single characteristic that attracted the most disapproval – that he was ‘connected with Yeltsin and his entourage’ – was of diminishing significance.⁵⁸

Putin, for his own part, deliberately appealed to the widest possible constituency. He was elected in 2000 and 2004 as an independent, nominated by citizens directly rather than a political party; and although he became the formal leader of United Russia in 2008, he did not become a party member. Just as United Russia was nebulous, Russians also found it difficult to identify Putin with a political position. About half associated him with a ‘market economy’, for instance, but 30 per cent of those who were asked found it impossible to classify him in terms of any of the main political philosophies.⁵⁹ As the pollster Yuri Levada put it, Putin was ‘a kind of mirror in which everyone, communist or democrat, sees what he wants to see and what he hopes for’.⁶⁰ In the words of another commentator as Putin approached the end of his second term, the Russian president ‘consistently appeal[ed] to supporters of different values – conservative, social, liberal’; a ‘national leader can act in no other way’.⁶¹ Putin, in a further view, had remained the ‘president of all Russians and national leader. He is president of the Zhirinovskites, and of the Just Russianists, and unfortunately of the liberals and communists as well, because his policies combine liberal changes, great-power logic with its rhetoric, appeals for social justice, and the robust defence of national interests’.⁶²

Not only was he supported individually: an overwhelming majority, according to the Public Opinion Foundation, thought the Russian president had been much more successful (78 per cent) than unsuccessful (8 per cent) in what he had sought to achieve, and nearly as many (67 per cent) thought the president himself would be satisfied; on top of this, almost half (47 per cent) said their attitude towards the Russian president had improved over the course of the two terms (only 7 per cent took a less favourable view).⁶³ Asked about his performance in various fields of policy, the picture was still a positive one although less uniformly so (see Figure 2, which is based on Levada Centre data and our own survey). At the end of his first year of office, only international affairs were seen on balance as a success; by the end of his second term ordinary Russians thought he had been more successful than unsuccessful in every field of policy, including the war in Chechnya, where the improvement was more striking than anywhere else. All the same, it was still his success in strengthening Russia’s position in international affairs that was seen as the most unqualified; there was a more equivocal verdict, over the years, on his contribution to the strengthening of democracy and political liberties, and still more serious doubts about his contribution to the improvement of living standards and the strengthening of public order, including a reduction in levels of corruption that were widely agreed to have worsened considerably over the same period.

FIGURE 2
SUPPORT FOR PUTIN'S POLICIES, 2001 – 8



The question was: 'How successfully in recent years has Vladimir Putin coped with the problems of: restoring public order; improving the economy and living standards; strengthening Russia's international position; achieving a political settlement in Chechnya? Very successfully; fairly successfully; without much success; completely unsuccessfully; hard to say'. Figures show the percentage saying 'very successfully' or 'fairly successfully' minus the percentage saying 'without much success' or 'completely unsuccessfully'.

Source: Levada Centre and authors' 2008 survey.

The Public Opinion Foundation also asked whether the Putin presidency had been positive or negative, then in which respects particularly (these were open questions that respondents could answer in their own words). Once again, there were more positives than negatives (see Table 4), and overwhelmingly, both were related to the economy and living standards, although Russia's more influential position in world affairs was also regarded favourably. 'Before Putin we were poor' was a typical response. The 'standard of living' had gone up; so had agriculture. Social issues had 'begun to receive more attention'; there had been more 'support for small and medium business'; 'the rouble had strengthened'; there was 'more employment'; everywhere they were 'building houses'; salaries had been increased, and were 'being paid regularly'. For some, Russia had 'renewed itself' and 'come out of its crisis'. Life at the same time had become more stable and predictable, in an almost Soviet sense: 'certainty in the future' had returned, and 'things had become calmer'. And internationally, Russia was regarded with more respect. Among the negatives, prices had risen, but salaries (in the view of those who offered this opinion) had stayed where they were, so that 'ordinary workers lived in poverty then, and still do'.⁶⁴ Overall, just a small plurality were likely to believe their living standards had improved, rather than declined; the evidence of official statistics, as Putin himself pointed out in his programmatic speech of February 2008, was in fact that real incomes had more than doubled over the two terms of his presidency.⁶⁵

TABLE 4
POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE FEATURES OF THE PUTIN PRESIDENCY

<i>Positive^a</i>		<i>Negative^b</i>	
Increase in salaries, pensions, standard of living	19	Inflation and price rises	16
Growth in Russia's international authority	11	Poverty, low salaries and pensions	7
Increase in stability and certainty in the future	9	Lack of attention to agriculture	4
Timely payment of salaries and pensions	8	Increase in bribery and corruption	3
Improvement in country's economy	7	Economic regression	2
Improvement in living conditions	7	Increase in crime	2
Improvement in social policies	5	Poor social policy	2

Notes:

^a Other positives (in percentages) were: end of crisis and strengthening of the state 3; increased employment 3; housing construction 3; more consumer goods 2; better defensive capacity 2; less corruption 2; stabilization of the situation in Chechnya 2; positive changes in public health and education 2; development of the national projects 2; demographic policy and the increase in the birth rate 2; others 1 or less.

^b Other negatives (in percentages) were: widening social inequalities 2; others 1 or less.

Source: Adapted from 'V. Putin: itogi prezidentstva', 30 April 2008, at <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/dominant/dom0817/d081721>, accessed 5 May 2008; responses to open questions, in rounded percentages.

Many of the same themes were reflected in the comments of the participants in a series of focus group discussions that took place at the beginning and just after the end of his two-term presidency.⁶⁶ In the first instance, in the view of the Muscovites who were asked in December 2001, it was Putin's appearance and manner that attracted approval, and the way in which they contrasted with those of his immediate predecessor. The new president, for a start, was 'young and forward-looking'; all his predecessors had been elderly, and 'now a person had been found who could lift up the country after its collapse'. Putin, other participants suggested, had 'always conducted himself in a dignified way' and was 'always neatly dressed'. He was 'young, blond and energetic', suggesting that he would lead the country along the 'right path'. He never interrupted, did not speak too much himself, and never shouted. Moreover, he was 'a man of his word' – even in the case of the Kursk, which had sunk in the summer of 2000, 'he said he would raise the submarine and he did'. Some were impressed by his athletic background – especially in judo, which was 'not a sport for the weak'; this, almost certainly, was one of the reasons for his ability to sustain a punishing work rate. And there was generally little concern that he had spent his earlier career in the security service.

But there had also been some early successes in the various fields of policy. For instance, he was apparently able to make up his mind quickly, and had been encouraging foreign investors to help the Russian economy to advance. New factories were being established, and new jobs created, so that Russia would no longer be obliged to import all its necessities as finished products. He was also having some success in the struggle against terrorism, and Russia had begun to act with more authority in world affairs. Nobody, at this early stage, had much idea what kind of programme Putin was putting forward, although it had 'been published somewhere'. And perhaps in any case it was too soon to make a judgement; better to do so when he had reached the end of his period of office. But some were ready after just a couple of years to say that they had 'not been disappointed', in spite of the difficult situation the new president had inherited from his predecessor. There had indeed been 'shock without therapy'. But even the elderly were still supportive, on this evidence,

believing that any shortcomings could be attributed to Putin's associates and that in any case it would take time for his various policies to show results. 'What can a single person do?', asked one elderly pensioner; 'He inherited a state in total collapse. Local people everywhere just have to work'.

Many of the same themes were taken up by the participants in a separate series of discussions that took place in the summer of 2008 in a variety of urban locations⁶⁷ that focused more particularly on the outgoing president and his newly elected successor Dmitri Medvedev (the election result itself is shown in Table 5). What were the differences between them, as Medvedev took over the presidency and Putin moved back into the prime ministership? One obvious physical difference was that the new president had a full head of hair; another was his wife, a 'real first lady' who was 'much nicer and better dressed than Lyudmila Putina. But otherwise, Medvedev was seen as a 'lapdog' and a president who was likely to play a 'secondary role'. Putin had at least 'tried to do something', but Medvedev had just 'appeared on the screen', like a 'grey mouse'. Indeed it was sometimes hard to work out who was really the president; Putin, for instance, appeared more often on television and received more public attention. Medvedev, it seemed, 'was needed to avoid having to change the Constitution for Putin's benefit, and in this way to create the appearance of democracy, but at the same time to preserve Putin's policies'; he was 'too weak himself to begin to conduct some kind of policy of his own'.

The same views were echoed in other discussions. If Putin had a shortcoming, it was that he 'looked like a KGB colonel', whereas Medvedev reminded at least one of our participants of the last tsar, Nicholas II. But once again they were a 'single team', and 'Putin [was] still in charge, just acting through Medvedev'; they were 'two drops of water'; Medvedev 'just repeat[ed]' whatever Putin said; alternatively, he was just an 'element of the "Putin" project'. Indeed for some Putin still *was* 'the president', and 'still had that aura'; in another view, 'everyone still mixe[d] them up'. Medvedev in any case was a 'feeble successor . . . short and thin, with narrow shoulders', not what a head of state should look like. Putin wasn't particularly tall, admittedly, but he was handsome, and 'what a body'! For those who were supportive of the Putin leadership, this identity was all to the good: Putin had been 'leading them to stability', and had pointed out the way forward to 2020 in his

TABLE 5
THE RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 2 MARCH 2008

<i>Name</i>	<i>Nominated by</i>	<i>Vote</i>	<i>%</i>
Dmitri Medvedev	United Russia	52,530,712	70.28
Gennadii Zyuganov	Communist Party of the Russian Federation	13,243,550	17.72
Vladimir Zhirinovskiy	Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia	6,988,510	9.35
Andrei Bogdanov	Independent	968,344	1.30
Invalid votes		1,105,533	1.36

Source: Adapted from the Central Electoral Commission website www.vybory.izbirkom.ru, last accessed 15 Sept. 2008. The registered electorate was 107,222,016, of whom 74,746,649 (69.71 per cent) cast a valid or invalid ballot (it was no longer possible to vote 'against all' and with the abolition of minimum turnout requirements the number who 'took part' had no legal significance). Bogdanov was the leader of the Democratic Party of Russia but was nominated on the basis of the signatures of electors.

programmatic speech of February 2008.⁶⁸ But even those who were less supportive took much the same view. Putin and Medvedev, from this perspective, were 'one big mafia', who would 'sooner or later all be presidents of one of the corporations, the oil

and gas companies'; other leading figures, such as the nationalist Dmitri Rogozin or the left-wing economist Sergei Glaz'ev, would have made more effort to represent the interests of ordinary people.

Explaining a Leadership Cult

Our own conclusion, at the outset of his presidency, was that Putin drew 'almost randomly' for his support on all sections of the electorate. Those who declared a religious affiliation were slightly more likely than others to be Putin supporters, but there were no particular effects for church attendance itself, which is the more conventional measure of religiosity. There were slightly lower levels of support among those not in current employment, but taken as a whole the statistical evidence was 'most remarkable for the lack of strong effects of this or any other kind' – for instance, age, gender, education and income. There was an association between Putin support and economic reform, although for whatever reason, there was more support among those who *opposed* the stated policies of his administration than among those who supported them. But when everything else was equal, Putin supporters were no more likely than others to support the sale of land, or a move to insurance-based social policy; and they were no more likely than others to support the principle of strong leadership. Here as elsewhere they were 'close to a cross-section of the entire society'.⁶⁹

How far had these patterns been maintained throughout the two terms of the presidency? We looked first at the various ways in which Putin's support base was structured, and the extent to which his support was disproportionately concentrated in particular social groups. The survey included a single question that asked about approval or otherwise; a more reliable measure is to combine the five items used in Figure 2, which show how far respondents considered Putin had been successful or unsuccessful in the various policy areas. By combining these items into a single scale, scored from a low of zero to a high of 10, we derive an overall measure of how voters viewed Putin's performance as president.⁷⁰ Table 6 regresses a range of factors on this new variable; overall, they accounted for just 8 per cent of the variation in opinions about Putin's policies, and just three of the nine factors were statistically significant. Most important by far were self-assessed living standards, with those who enjoyed higher standards of living much more likely to express support for his policies when other factors were constant.⁷¹ Next in importance was age, with those who were younger more likely to be supportive, following by being female. We can conclude from

TABLE 6
SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR PUTIN'S POLICIES

	Means	Regression coefficients	
		Partial	Stand.
Gender (male)	.46	-.22*	-.06*
Age	44.36	-.01*	--.07*
Ethnic Russian	.92	.36	.05
Urban resident	.75	.03	.01
<i>Religion</i>			
Secular	.14	-.20	-.04
Regular church attendance	2.27	.08	.04
<i>Education (primary)</i>			
Secondary	.63	-.07	-.02

Tertiary	.19	-.20	-.04
High living standards	2.89	.62*	.26*
Constant		4.24	
Adj R-squared		.08	
(N)		(2,000)	

* statistically significant at $p < .0$

OLS regression estimates predicting support for Putin's policies scored from zero to 10. All independent variables are scored zero or 1 except for age (years), church attendance (from 1, never attends, to 5, attends once a month or more), and high living standards (from 1, very poor, to 5, very high).

Source: Authors' 2008 survey.

this analysis that support for Putin has relatively weak roots within the social structure, with the partial exception of those who are more affluent.

If social structure has relatively little impact on support for Putin, to what extent do attitudes matter? Putin had made it clear he wanted to enhance Russia's economic performance, and his successes in this area were widely applauded. His attempts to move Russia towards more open and consultative forms of politics have been more ambiguous, so it is unclear to what extent his support is predicated on support for democratization itself. At the same time, the freedoms to take part in competitive elections and to express a variety of opinions were genuine reforms that Yeltsin supported during his period in office, and Putin has normally professed to favour them. Table 7 examines the extent to which opinions in these various areas – the economy, the political system, and public influence – served to predict support for Putin's policies. The results show strong support for economic performance, and all three economic measures (especially the perception that the economy had performed well over the previous year) were statistically significant. Next in importance was the belief that there were opportunities to participate and influence events, and those who believed there had been major changes in

TABLE 7
ATTITUDINAL SUPPORT FOR PUTIN'S POLICIES

	Means	Regression coefficients	
		Partial	Stand.
<i>Economic performance</i>			
Economy doing well	3.03	.22*	.10*
Economy doing well in past year	3.30	.33*	.17*
Satisfied with things in country	2.96	.27*	.15*
<i>Political system</i>			
Country moving to democracy	2.22	.13*	.06*
Democracy better than alternatives	2.86	.11	.04
More power to president	3.81	.22*	.12*
<i>Changes in opportunities</i>			
More opportunity to participate	7.68	.16*	.15*
More opportunity to influence events	5.08	.15*	.17*
<i>Efficacy</i>			
People can influence government	1.74	.09	.05
Officials treat citizens more equally	1.60	.15*	.06*
Constant		-.34	
Adj R-squared		.38	
(N)		(2,000)	

* statistically significant at $p < .01$

OLS regression estimates predicting support for Putin's policies scored from zero to 10. All independent variables are scored as follows: economy doing well and economy past year (from 1, very bad, to 5, very good); satisfied with things (from 1, very unsatisfied, to 5, very satisfied); country

moving to democracy (from 1, more democracy in Soviet times, to 5, proper democracy); democracy better than alternatives (from 1, strongly disagree, to 4, strongly agree); presidential power (from 1, parliament much more power, to 5, president much more power); influence government (from 1, no influence, to 4, significant influence); officials treat citizens equally (from 1, never, to 4, always). Changes in opportunity are both zero to 10 scales; see text for details.

Source: As for Table 6.

these respects were more likely to support Putin when other factors were held constant.⁷² Finally, those who felt the country was moving towards democracy were more likely to support Putin, as were those who wished to see power moved from parliament to the presidency.

These results suggest that Putin's popularity has strong roots in how ordinary Russians view what he has achieved in Russia, and more especially in the country's economic performance. The effect of perceptions of the economy is about twice as great as the effect of all the social structural variables we have considered taken together. In turn, perceptions of the economy account for almost half of the effect of political attitudes. Clearly, then, the performance of the economy and the material wealth that it has delivered to ordinary Russians must be a major part of any adequate explanation of the 'Putin phenomenon'. And indeed, it was notable to what extent the president himself laid his emphasis on economic performance in considering the success of his various policies, for instance in his programmatic address to the State Council in February 2008. Public finances, he reminded the State Council members, had been in crisis at the time of his accession; inflation had been running at over 36 per cent; and real incomes had fallen to as little as 40 per cent of their value at the end of the communist period. At the end of his second term, living standards were higher than ever before; economic growth was running at more than 8 per cent annually; real incomes and pensions had more than doubled, and unemployment had fallen by half.⁷³

The final stage in the analysis is to examine the extent to which it was attitudes towards Putin personally – rather than a broader range of political values – that accounted for United Russia's overwhelming majority in the 2007 parliamentary elections (Putin had been the single candidate on the party's federal list, and its election manifesto was entitled 'Putin's Plan: a worthy future for a great country',⁷⁴ when the result was announced, newspapers declared that Putin had 'won on the first round'⁷⁵). Table 8 isolates these

TABLE 8
PUTIN'S POLICIES, ATTITUDES AND THE VOTE FOR UNITED RUSSIA

	Logistic regression coefficients	
	Partial	(SE)
<i>Support for Putin's policies</i>	.27*	(.06)
<i>Economic performance</i>		
Economy doing well	.11	(.13)
Economy doing well in past year	.20	(.11)
Satisfied with things in country	.31*	(.09)
<i>Political system</i>		
Country moving to democracy	.21	(.11)
Democracy better than alternatives	-.09	(.12)
More power to president	.17	(.08)
<i>Changes in opportunities</i>		
More opportunity to participate	.15*	(.05)
More opportunity to influence events	.03	(.05)
<i>Efficacy</i>		
People can influence government	.06	(.11)

Officials treat citizens more equally	.14	(.12)
Constant	-5.29	
Nagelkerke R-squared	.28	
(N)	(1,397)	

* statistically significant at $p < .01$

Logistic regression estimates predicting vote for United Russia in the 2007 election. See Tables 6 and 7 for scoring of variables. Estimates are for voters only.

Source: As for Table 6.

various effects by means of a logistic regression analysis, predicting the United Russia vote from support for Putin and the range of political attitudes included in Table 7.⁷⁶ As the figures show, support for Putin is by far the most important single predictor of a vote for United Russia, and indeed it contributes almost half of the variance that is accounted for by the entire model. In contrast to the previous table, economic performance is unimportant, with the sole exception of general satisfaction with the state of affairs in the country as a whole: evidently, most of the effect of positive feelings about the economy on the vote is mediated through support for Putin as an individual.⁷⁷ The only other factor of significance is the belief (whether valid or not) that opportunities to participate have been expanding, and this significantly increases the likelihood of voting for United Russia.

In general, our analysis suggests that there is indeed a ‘Putin phenomenon’, but that it is not for the most part associated with Putin as an individual. It is rather that a high value is placed on economic prosperity, which itself is associated with Putin’s leadership. On our evidence, the ‘Putin phenomenon’ has weak roots within the various groups of which Russian society is composed – or rather, continues to have, as we were able to draw the same conclusion from an examination of the survey evidence at the outset of the Putin presidency. As we expected, there were also some additional effects from political attitudes: whether or not it was thought that opportunities to participate had increased, and that individuals could exercise more influence on the political process. Economic judgements had much stronger effects: but they made relatively little difference to voting choices, once support for Putin individually had been included within the equation. This is rather different from a ‘charismatic’ leadership, in which supporters are committed to the person of the leader without particular regard to policy outcomes; and rather different from a Western-style parliamentary system, in which support is a function of the procedures by which a leadership is selected and only secondarily of the policies that are pursued or the personal qualities of its individual members.

In turn, this suggests a Russian leadership with a basis of support that is ‘a mile wide but an inch deep’.⁷⁸ Notwithstanding the Putin personality cult, which presumably owed something to orchestration from above, this was a leadership that owed more than anything else to its apparently successful stewardship of the national economy – a consequence, at least in part, of a rise in the world price of oil that had begun before Putin’s accession and already led to a resumption of economic growth.⁷⁹ But future prospects were less clear, as Putin’s second term came to an end: growth rates were slowing, inflation was increasing, and corruption was proving difficult to eliminate or even contain. For ordinary Russians, the Putin leadership had essentially continued after May 2008: only 9 per cent thought ‘real power’ was in the hands of Medvedev, compared with 36 per cent who thought it was still held by Putin; and 82 per cent thought he would entirely or substantially continue Putin’s policies.⁸⁰ It seemed unlikely that the relatively lightweight figure chosen as a means of continuing the Putin leadership by other means would generate any greater support – and rather

more likely that the public standing of the Russian leadership would continue to be an artefact, sustained by policies that of themselves commanded support or (if these failed) by the use of force but not on the basis of the personal qualities of the individuals that held the presidency itself.

NOTES

¹ See for instance Stephen Holmes, 'Superpresidentialism and Its Problems', *East European Constitutional Review*, Vol.2, No.4 and Vol.3, No.1 (Fall/Winter 1993–94), pp.123–6; Oleg Rummyantsev, *Osnovy konstitutsionnogo stroya Rossii* (Moscow: Yurist, 1994), p.123; G.V. De'gtev, *Stanovlenie i razvitie instituta prezidentstva v Rossii: teoretiko-pravovye i konstitutsionnye osnovy* (Moscow: Yurist, 2005), p.220; and for what is perhaps the strongest statement of this view, M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.193–245.

² See for instance Eugene Huskey, *Presidential Power in Russia* (Armonk NY and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), and Timothy J. Colton and Cindy Skach, 'The Russian Predicament', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.16, No.3 (July 2005), pp.113–26.

³ Giovanni Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry into Structures, Incentives and Outcomes*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1997), p.139.

⁴ Matthew Shugart and John M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Designs and Electoral Dynamics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.148–66; see also James P. McGregor, 'The Presidency in East Central Europe', *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol.3, No.2 (14 Jan. 1994), pp.23–31; Timothy Frye, 'A Politics of Institutional Choice: Post-Communist Presidencies', *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol.30, No.5 (Oct. 1997), pp.523–52; and Lee Kendall Metcalf, 'Measuring Presidential Power', *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol.33, No.5 (June 2000), pp.660–85.

⁵ Colton and Skach, 'The Russian Predicament', p.126

⁶ Jon Elster, 'Afterword', in Ray Taras (ed.), *Postcommunist Presidents* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.226.

⁷ *Kommersant*, 5 Jan. 2000, p.1.

⁸ See Olga Kryshtanovskaya and Stephen White, 'Putin's Militocracy', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol.19, No.4 (2003), pp.289–306.

⁹ Our survey was conducted under the auspices of Russian Research between 30 January and 27 February 2008 (n ¼ 2000), and is representative of the over-18 population of the Russian Federation. We acknowledge the support of the UK Economic and Social Research Council under grant RES-000-22-2532 to Stephen White and Ian McAllister.

¹⁰ *Obshchaya gazeta*, 24 May 2001, p.7.

¹¹ *Argumenty i fakty*, No.9 (2001), p.5; and on the bar, *The Guardian*, 29 June 2002, p.16 (it was later closed down: *Izvestiya*, 28 Sept. 2002, p.1).

¹² RFE/RL *Newsline*, 28 Aug. 2002; the group and their director were featured in *Ogonek*, No.40 (2002), pp.28–9.

¹³ This was a play on the president's celebrated promise that he would 'wipe out the terrorists even if they were on the john' (*Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 25 Sept. 1999, p.1).

¹⁴ *Argumenty i fakty*, No.40 (2002), p.4.

¹⁵ Quoted in *The Moscow Times*, 11 March 2008, p.1.

¹⁶ *The Guardian*, 12 March 2001, p.14.

¹⁷ *St Petersburg Times*, 3 Nov. 2000, p.1.

¹⁸ *Izvestiya*, 29 June 2002, p.3.

¹⁹ *The Guardian*, 12 March 2001, p.14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12 Oct. 2004, p.4.

²¹ 'In bed with President Putin', 20 Sept. 2001, at <http://www.english.pravda.ru/fun/2002/09/20/15789.html> as quoted in Stephen White and Ian McAllister, 'Putin and His Supporters', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.55, No.3 (2003), pp.383-99 (pp.389-90).

²² *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 23 April 2004, p.12. For more examples of the representation of Putin in literary output see below, and the contribution by Andrei Rogatchevski to the present collection.

²³ Quoted in *The Guardian*, 3 March 2006, p.28.

²⁴ *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 22 Aug. 2007, p.1.

²⁵ 'Putin Gone Wild: Russia Abuzz Over Pics of Shirtless Leader', 22 Aug. 2007, at <http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2007/08/22/putin-shirtless.html>., accessed 15 Sept. 2008.

²⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, 1 Sept. 2008, p.15.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 20 June 2008, p.19.

²⁸ *Izvestiya*, 27 June 2007, p.1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.4, and 9 Aug. 2007, p.5 (portraits).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 27 June 2007, p.4.

³¹ *Daily Telegraph*, 22 June 2007, p.18.

³² *Izvestiya*, 27 June 2007, p.1.

³³ *Izvestiya*, 19 July 2007, p.4.

³⁴ Aleksandr Kolesnichenko, 'Nesting Dolls, Vodka, and Underpants', *Transitions Online*, 5 May 2008, at <http://www.tol.cz/look/TOL>., accessed 15 Sept. 2008

³⁵ *Izvestiya*, 14 Aug. 2007, p.2.

-
- ³⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, 7 April 2008, p.17.
- ³⁷ *The Moscow Times*, 11 March 2008, p.1.
- ³⁸ *Anekdoty pro Putina* (St Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Bukovskogo, 2001), p.11.
- ³⁹ *The Moscow Times*, 11 March 2008, p.1.
- ⁴⁰ *Daily Telegraph*, 5 Oct. 2007, p.20.
- ⁴¹ *Izvestiya*, 6 April 2007, pp.1, 3.
- ⁴² *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, 11 December 2007, pp.1, 4; and on the number sects, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20071211/91857622-print.html>, accessed 9 Nov. 2008.
- ⁴³ *Argumenty i fakty*, No.38 (1993), p.2.
- ⁴⁴ *Ekonomicheskie i sotsial'nye peremeny: monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniya*, No.1 (1995), p.5.
- ⁴⁵ *Izvestiya*, 14 Dec. 1994, p.3 (this was a saying originally attributed to Interior Minister Plehve in conversation with General Kuropatkin in January 1904 on the eve of the ill-fated war with Japan).
- ⁴⁶ *Kommersant'-daily*, 10 March 1995, p.3.
- ⁴⁷ *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniya*, No.1 (2000), pp.58, 59.
- ⁴⁸ The journalist David Satter was one of those who concluded that the bombings had been 'organized not by the Chechens, who had nothing to gain from them, but by those who needed another war capable of propelling Putin into the presidency in order to save their corruptly acquired wealth. These could only have been the leaders of the Yeltsin regime itself': see *his Darkness at Dawn: The Rise of the Russian Criminal State* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), p.69. The most elaborate statement of this conspiratorial view is Yuri Felshtinsky and Alexander Litvinenko, *Blowing Up Russia* (London: Gibson Square, 2007).
- ⁴⁹ *Trud*, 27 Jan. 2000, p.1.
- ⁵⁰ *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 28 Dec. 2001, p.2.
- ⁵¹ *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 16 May 2001, p.10.
- ⁵² Some 85 per cent of those who were asked by the Levada Centre rated Putin's actions 'positively' or 'very positively': <http://www.levada.ru/press/2002102900.html>, accessed 15 Sept. 2008; there were less favourable opinions about his actions in relation to the Beslan hostage-taking incident, but only 16 per cent thought he should resign and 72 per cent took the opposite view: <http://www.levada.ru/press/2004091501.html>, accessed 15 Sept. 2008.
- ⁵³ *Izvestiya*, 12 May 2006, p.2.
- ⁵⁴ Levada Centre data, 1 Sept. 2008, at <http://www.levada.ru/press/2008090104.print>.

html., accessed 15 Sept. 2008.

⁵⁵ *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniya*, No.6 (2007), p.64.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.70.

⁵⁷ See <<http://www.levada.ru/prezlich.html>>, accessed 25 Aug. 2008.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Richard Rose, *Russians Under Putin: New Russia Barometer 10* (Glasgow: Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Strathclyde, SPP 350, 2001), p.42. By March 2004 Putin was more generally identified with a pro-market economy – by 66 per cent: see Richard Rose, *New Russia Barometer XIII: Putin's Re-Election* (Glasgow: Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Strathclyde, SPP 388, 2004), p.52.

⁶⁰ *Kommersant*, 17 March 2000, p.2.

⁶¹ *Izvestiya*, 10 Dec. 2007, p.2

⁶² *Ibid.*, 4 Dec. 2007, p.2.

⁶³ 'V. Putin: itogi prezidentstva', 30 April 2008, at <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/dominant/dom0817/d081721>, accessed 5 May 2008; 13 per cent were undecided.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 9 Feb. 2008, pp.1–3 (p.2).

⁶⁶ We draw at this point on the focus groups conducted under the direction of Roger Eatwell and Elena Korosteleva for their project on charismatic leadership funded by EU-INTAS (99-00245), with thanks to Elena Korosteleva for making them available to us. Some attempts have also been made to use the insights of social psychology to explain Putin's appeal to ordinary Russians. He was for instance associated with 'healthy', 'pleasant' and 'natural' smells, and with 'light', 'warm' and 'bright' colours. He was also associated with strong animals, 'especially with predators': Ye.B. Shestopal, T.N. Pishcheva, Ye.M. Gikavyi and V.A. Zorin, 'Obraz V.V. Putina v soznanii rossiiskikh grazhdan', *Polis*, No.3 (2004), pp.6–21 (p.21).

⁶⁷ We draw at this point on the focus groups conducted for the authors by the Institute of Applied Politics in Moscow under the direction of Ol'ga Kryshtanovskaya and with the financial support of the UK Economic and Social Research Council under grant RES-000-22-2532 to Stephen White and Ian McAllister. Six focus groups were conducted in June and July 2008: two in Moscow, one in Podol'sk in the Moscow region, two in Novomoskovsk in the Tula region, and one in Kursk.

⁶⁸ Cited in note 65 above.

⁶⁹ White and McAllister, 'Putin and His Supporters', pp.392, 394, 396. The survey agency ROMIR found similarly that Putin's support 'almost completely coincide[d] with the structure of the Russian population', which was a 'unique phenomenon in the contemporary Russian political process': Ye.I. Bashkirova and N.V. Laidinen, 'Prezident: fenomen obshchestvennoi podderzhki', *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, No.9 (2001), pp.29–36 (p.30); see also Richard

Rose, Neil Munro and Stephen White, 'How Strong is Vladimir Putin's Support?', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol.16, No.4 (2000), pp.287–312.

⁷⁰ The five items have a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 and a mean inter-item correlation of .50. The correlation between this multiple-item scale and approval of Putin is 0.65.

⁷¹ The survey also included a measure of income, but 38 per cent of the sample did not answer the question, and for this reason self-assessed living standards is used instead.

⁷² More opportunity to participate includes items dealing with freedom of religion; joining an organization; participating in politics; and freedom of speech. More opportunity to influence events includes officials treating citizens equally; influencing politics; and not getting arrested. The two scales were identified by factor analysis, and the Cronbach's alpha for the first set of items is 0.81, and for the second, 0.83.

⁷³ *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 9 Feb. 2008, pp.1–3 (p.2).

⁷⁴ *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 9 Nov. 2007, p.14.

⁷⁵ *Izvestiya*, 3 Dec. 2007, p.2.

⁷⁶ Since social structure had relatively little impact in Table 6, in the interests of parsimony it has been excluded. Including it in the analysis does not significantly change the results in Table 8.

⁷⁷ Rose finds similarly that 'the higher the approval shown President Putin as an individual, the more an individual is inclined to support the current regime'; but support for Putin himself added little to explanations of regime support and it was judgements of the current economic situation that were overwhelmingly dominant: Richard Rose, 'The Impact of President Putin on Popular Support for Russia's Regime', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol.23, No.2 (2007), pp.97–117 (pp.109–10).

⁷⁸ To adapt the title of James L. Gibson, 'A Mile Wide But an Inch Deep (?): The Structure of Democratic Commitments in the Former USSR', *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol.40, No.2 (1996), pp.396–420.

⁷⁹ We agree here with Rose that Putin has been the 'beneficiary, not the cause, of economic conditions that have boosted support for the new economic system' and that '[a]s and when the popular evaluation of the new economic system turns down, this could have a substantial impact on regime support', although the passage of time would also operate to its advantage: 'The Impact of President Putin', pp. 112, 113.

⁸⁰ Levada Centre data for July 2008 at <http://www.levada.ru/press/2008073104.html>., accessed 15 Sept. 2008.