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Russian Autocracy Redux:
Path Dependency and the Late Modern State



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Abstract

Path dependency emerged as a theoretical approach in the social sciences (specifically economics) in the 1980s, and has gradually been applied with greater frequency in political science. As a form of historical institutionalism, it shows promise of casting significant light on processes of political stability and change. The present study examines several large-scale defining traits of Russian politics and governance from the perspective of historical path dependence: to date, most applications of path-dependency theory to Russian studies have focused more on economics than politics and governance per se. This essay applies core ideas in path dependency theory to the case of Russia in the early twenty-first century, focusing on significant political traits that emerged during the Putin and Medvedev presidencies. This study proceeds from the view that politics revolves fundamentally around three core axes: identity, interests, and institutions; every aspect of political life, arguably, falls under one or more of these dimensions and all show path-dependent tendencies. The traits of Russian governance that show evidence of path-dependent self-replication include: (1) tendencies toward monocratic manifestations of political power; (2) political authority being conceived and exercised in neo-autocratic modes that deliberately control, marginalize, or patently exclude broad and efficacious participatory democracy; (3) an apparently instinctive trend toward political centralization; and (4) a tendency to vacillate historically between a weak and strong state, with powerful historical impulses toward the latter. By applying core ideas in path-dependency theory to the case of Russian politics in the early twenty-first century, our understanding is deepened.

James Warhola

Russian Autocracy Redux: Path Dependency and the Late Modern State

Introduction: Russian Democracy Derailed

Although Russia is generally regarded as having slid back into authoritarian patterns of governance in the first decade of the twenty-first century, after its brief flirtation with democratization following the collapse of the USSR in 1991, it is perhaps freer today than ever in its long history. The oft-noted authoritarian tendencies of the Putin era reflect a softened form of neo-autocratic constriction of liberties compared to Stalinist or czarist times, and thus represent a specimen-sample of the “new authoritarianism” described by Arch Puddington in 2008.¹ As articulated by Ivan Krastev, “Russia’s regime is only moderately repressive. Putin’s authoritarianism is a ‘vegetarian’ one. While political repression exists and human-rights organizations have documented the persecution of journalists and other opponents of the regime, it is fair to say that most Russians today are freer than in any other period of their history.”² Perhaps so, but the prevailing consensus among observers and students of Russian affairs (including Krastev) is that Russia in the 2000s reverted to a mode of governance more authoritarian, perhaps neo-autocratic, than democratic according to the canons of Western democracy. Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way offered Russia as an example of “competitive authoritarianism,” noting that “after 1999, effective state-and-party-building under Putin resulted in increased organizational power, which leads us to expect greater regime stability. Indeed, no serious regime crises emerged in the 2000s, and by decade’s end, virtually all serious opposition had disappeared.”³

How did this happen? Three major reasons explain the thwarting of democracy in Russia in the early twenty-first century, according to M. Steven Fish: “Too much oil, too little economic liberalization, and too weak a legislature.”⁴ This situation emerged despite much promise in the early 1990s, when Western-type liberal democracy was not only embraced as an ideal by

the new Russian leadership, but was emerging and expanding in numerous other regions of the world (more on this below). Has democracy been “derailed” in Russia? Although there is ample ground to dispute the specific causative factors, few would dispute Fish's characterization of the symptoms indicating a failure of liberal democracy to take root and flourish there. His *Democracy Derailed* was one voice among many in the academy, in the business sector, and among public officials and journalists, who undertook to describe in considerable detail the circumstances and indicators of the demise of Russian democracy.⁵ The consensus became nearly universal, outside of the Kremlin's own circle of power, by about 2010; Russian democracy was indeed derailed if not stymied altogether by the middle of the decade, if not earlier. At the very least, it is difficult to dispute Richard Sakwa's characterization: “Russian democracy was in crisis” by 2008 and the system, in “formal institutional terms was undoubtedly a democracy, but practice fell short of declared principles.”⁶

Russian as well as Western scholars have concurred, and have sought solutions to the puzzle of the return of Russian autocracy with concepts very similar to those found in historical-institutionalism studies. Notably, Yuri Pivovarov and Alexei Fursov asked: “Why has there been such a reversion? Why have the brief periods of democracy—and we've experienced two of them in the 20th century—inevitably come to grief? And why is it that such splashes of popular governance are reckoned by astute Russian analysts as necessarily transitory forms, as mere stages back to a more authentic, perhaps essentially immutable, historical pattern of Russian life?”⁷ Whether or not the resurgence of authoritarian rule may cycle back to a more democratic mode remains to be seen; but our understanding of the prospects of it doing so will be considerably helped if we can come to a deeper understanding of why political patterns change, and just as importantly, why they remain the same or revert to the defining traits of long-held conventions of governance.

Almost simultaneous with the appearance of Fish's book, the Swedish economist Stefan Hedlund published a work attempting to account for the “too little liberalization” aspect of Russia's overall post-Soviet experience.⁸ He tracked long-term, deeply rooted patterns in Russian economic, social, and political history within the framework of contemporary social science along

the lines of path-dependency theory. David A. Paul, one of the primary intellectual architects of the concept of path dependence, defined it generally as “a property of contingent, non-reversible dynamic processes, including a wide array of processes that can properly be described as ‘evolutionary.’ The set of ideas associated with path dependence consequently must occupy a central place in the future, historical social science that economics should become.”⁹

While Hedlund considers in some depth the political dimension of Russia's troubled post-Soviet transition, his focus is much more on the problematical character of the economic transition from a centrally controlled system to a market economy.¹⁰ The purpose of the present essay is therefore to explore in greater breadth and in greater detail aspects of the political system emerging in Russia since the resignation of Yeltsin that may be illuminated by applying path-dependency concepts. I argue that path-dependency theory helps explain the reassertion of neo-autocratic control in Russia by examining longer-term, deeply rooted causal factors. The resurgence of neo-autocratic governance was likely occasioned by the three factors noted by Fish, but the roots of the resurgence can be traced to the deeper history and culture of Russia, following path-dependent processes.

An important clue to the force of this factor is evident in the fact that the overall temporal international context at the time of the gelling of the return of Russian neo-autocracy appeared to favor political movement in the other direction—that is, generally away from authoritarian trends. Tellingly, the Russian regime's interpretation of, and response to, the “color revolutions” was anything but welcoming; rather, it was deliberate, calculated, firmly contrarian, and accusatory.¹¹ Further, although Russia was hardly unique in responding to the economic and political chaos of the 1990s with reversion to authoritarianism, it did so in a manner that so curiously replicates important, long-standing patterns in Russian governance as to raise suspicion that deeper processes of change were at work. These path-dependent processes appear to have presented key post-Soviet actors with a political milieu in which the costs of reverting to authoritarian rule were lower than pursuing a more democratic mode of governance.

The Theory: The Nature of Path Dependence, and the Core Axes of Politics

In many respects we really understand very little about the underlying dynamics of large-scale political change, although the presence of those hidden factors is unquestionable. Path-dependency theory differs from the truism of infinite causative regress: it is useful theory capable of explaining the past, predicting the future to a limited extent, and stipulating the limits of possible prediction. It does this by identifying a small number of critical causes with disproportionately significant effects, thereby shedding some light on dynamics that are otherwise opaque. Paul Pierson offers the following criteria:

1. *Multiple equilibria.* Under a set of initial conditions conducive to increasing returns, a number of outcomes—perhaps a wide range—are generally possible.
2. *Contingency.* Relatively small events, if they occur at the right moment, can have large and enduring consequences.
3. *A critical role for timing and sequencing.* In increasing returns processes, when an event occurs may be crucial. Because earlier parts of a sequence matter much more than later parts, an event that happens “too late” may have no effect, although it might have been of great consequence if the timing had been different.
4. *Inertia.* Once an increasing returns process is established, positive feedback may lead to a single equilibrium. This equilibrium will in turn be resistant to change.¹²

Path-dependency theory holds that causative mechanisms are most evident after the fact. A central problem—that of infinite regress of causation—has been addressed, with some effectiveness, by a deeper investigation into critical junctures and the role they play in shaping the path that a given set of political conditions (as choices), may take.¹³ An approach based on path dependency therefore looks to the past to deepen our understanding of both how Russian political evolution occurred, and why it took the course that it did. By applying an analytical approach which reveals critical aspects of political perdurability as well as change that other

approaches (such as quantitative analysis of allegedly causative factors) may fail to duly recognize, our understanding of why Russian political patterns replicated themselves may be advanced. To use Pierson's descriptor, the resurgence of Russian autocracy may be as much the product of "big, slow-moving" processes, originating in the distant past, as of recent short-term causative factors.¹⁴ In this essay I seek to identify such enduring processes based on the four criteria listed above. The formulation of predictions will occupy only a small part, if any, because path-dependence theory strictly limits its own predictive capability. This point is explained at greater length in the following section.

I also proceed from the view that politics revolve fundamentally around three core axes: identity, interests, and institutions.¹⁵ Every aspect of political life, arguably, falls under one or more of these dimensions. The matter of interests is intentionally placed at the core, following the Aristotelian point that the normatively determinative question in any given political arrangement is "whose interests are being served." Interests are also frequently the fundamental motive in political decisions, with pursuit of interests framing situations that endure, in a path-dependent fashion, long after the initial circumstances have expired. This approach is particularly helpful in illuminating the aspects of Russian political experience for which path-dependency concepts allow for a deeper understanding of how and why the more significant contours of contemporary Russian politics have emerged. This is so because: (1) the intersection of interests and identity occurs in ways that are demonstrably path dependent across time, and (2) the manner in which interests and (especially) identities tend to become embedded in institutions also displays evidence of path-dependent characteristics.

Scope and Method of Investigation

This essay will not address the apparently path-dependent characteristics of the post-Yeltsin Russian economy; those have been treated in considerable depth by Hedlund and others.¹⁶ My specific focus, rather, is on certain aspects of Russian politics for which a path-dependence approach is useful, specifically, in the areas of the perceived nature and purpose of public authority (*vlast*), the scope of legitimate state authority, and the content of

national identity. According to this approach, the derailing of Russian democracy was neither foreordained by previous failures, nor could it have been definitively predicted on the basis of any extant method of social science.¹⁷ The reason for the former is that path-dependent processes inevitably involve elements of unpredictability, with contingent factors possibly being the most powerfully operative. The reason for the latter is simply that grand-scale political changes involve long-term patterns of self-reinforcement and self-replication. In turn, these patterns (such as deeply rooted cultural values and beliefs) more or less necessarily involve an array of variables which may not lend themselves to quantitative analysis.¹⁸ In this respect, the cherished hope of predictability as a litmus test of social-scientific validity is best left in suspension. One might even say that such predictability necessarily gives way to Hegel's owl of Minerva, who famously spreads her wings "only with the falling of dusk." That is, large-scale historical change can only be understood after it has materialized, and not before.¹⁹ As Pierson noted, "Social processes may not only be slow-moving; they may also require a long time because there is a significant temporal separation between a key cause and the outcome of interest. In either case, the full process may not be visible unless the analysis considers a very substantial stretch of time."²⁰

Such methodological questions are of course deeply complex and significant, but are not pursued in depth in this essay. At the theoretical level, they hint at a different ontological foundation for research than that offered by conventional, quantitative, social science methods, at least for a certain category of questions dealing with large-scale, long-range historical processes.²¹ They also remind us that Russia's derailment from further democratization, and the swift return of autocratic aspects of governance, could hardly have been predicted in the early post-Soviet optimism. While there is certainly a place for "what if," counterfactual arguments regarding the possibility of post-Soviet Russian democracy having succeeded, I do not explore them in this essay; the focus, rather, is on the path-dependent forces that appear to have been behind the return of autocratic rule. Thus I do not discount the view expressed by Richard Sakwa, that "a democratic option is still open."²² The point of a path-dependence approach for a deeper

understanding of Russian autocratic governance is not just to account for why “history matters,” nor even that decisions matter, but rather why and how they matter so immensely over time.

This essay is attentive to Pierson's note of caution about the easy likelihood of “concept stretching” when employing path dependency as a concept to help understand politics, and the advisability for researchers to be as specific as possible when so conscripting path dependency for explanation. Thus, I employ the concept along the lines of Jacob Hacker's terse description that “path dependence refers to developmental trajectories that are inherently difficult to reverse.”²³ More specifically, Pierson's emphasis on “positive feedback” as the central driving force of “increasing returns” processes (and thus of path dependency in general) will be used to help explain why Russian autocracy reemerged as it did. At crucial point points in the re-forming of political order in Russia after the breakup of the USSR, positive feedback appears to have occurred repeatedly as political purchase was gained by simply reverting to long-standing patterns of governance rather than embarking on politically uncertain—and thus more costly—modes of rule; specific examples are explored below. Also, the revival of Russian autocracy did not occur in a geopolitical contextual vacuum, of course, but rather in a particular international environment whose nature calls for commentary before proceeding to the specifics of how positive feedback operated to give rise to Russia's post-Soviet competitive authoritarianism.

The derailing of Russian democracy occurred squarely in the context of a global expansion of democratic regimes, in which an array of international factors was operating to buttress nascent regimes emerging from one or another form of authoritarian rule. Russia's return to authoritarianism was occurring toward the end of Samuel Huntington's “third wave of democratization” in the world, such that by the end of the 1990s, a greater proportion of the world's population, and of their political regimes, was democratically ruled than at any time in history. Further, an array of institutions (such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union, the African Union) and broad formal acceptance of the principles of democracy had become more globally widespread than ever before.²⁴ Thus the larger, international context was arguably one that might

have favored a decisive turn away from longstanding, deeply entrenched political patterns. But it did not always do so. The period from 1977 to 2000, according to Freedom House, involved a dramatic expansion in the number and proportion of democratically ruled countries in the world, and involved a more or less steady expansion in the proportion of the world's population living in such a regime.²⁵ As became clear by the turn of the century, however, not all those regimes that appeared to have undergone a successful transition to democratic rule had remained democratic.²⁶ Significantly, in no region of the world was the reversal of an otherwise apparent process of nascent democratization so sharp and abrupt as in Russia and most of the post-Soviet states. This fact, in and of itself, intensifies the suspicion that deeply rooted factors were operating to push these countries' political regime type onto a certain path. If deeper forces were at work in the derailing of Russian democracy than simply the abundance of oil, an insufficient degree of economic liberalization, and a weak legislature, then it will be useful to examine what those forces might be, and how they operated. Again, Fish is almost certainly accurate in identifying these as proximately causative forces, but the larger historical context, certainly including the general contemporaneous trend toward greater democratization in the 1990s, suggests that deeper historical forces may have been at work.

Levitsky and Way propose that the three key elements of regime change operating among authoritarian regimes during the period from 1990 to 2008 were the degree of linkage to the West, leverage of the West over such regimes, and the political-organizational capability of the incumbent regime.²⁷ Russia ended the first decade of the twenty-first century with a "stable competitive authoritarian regime" according to Levitsky and Way; I concur, but argue that path-dependency theory can help provide another dimension of explanation as to why Russia's low linkage and low leverage combined with its increased organizational power to give rise to such a regime.

This section concludes by noting that by the end of the Yeltsin years, Russia had been downgraded by Freedom House from "free" to "partly free," and by 2003 down to "not free" altogether. Russia's return to neo-autocratic governance had large-scale ramifications for the entire post-Soviet space. Regarding the influence of Russia on the entire region of former Soviet direct

influence (e.g., Eastern Europe), Adrian Karatnycky noted: “Overall, 19 of the 27 postcommunist countries of East-Central Europe and the former USSR are electoral democracies. Ten of the region's states are Free, 12 are Partly Free, and five are Not Free. However, all of the Not Free states are from the former USSR; with the exception of the Baltic States, none of the former Soviet Republics is free. Stagnation and reversals for freedom characterized virtually all the non-Baltic Soviet states.”²⁸ Again, given the predominant and growing influence of Russia in the region, it is all the more useful to look into the deeper causes of Russia's return to authoritarian governance. Although the final section of this essay considers the large regional ramifications of this, I elaborate on this theme immediately below in describing the return of neo-autocratic patterns of governance to Russia.

Entrenchment of Neo-autocratic Rule: Russia and Beyond

After Putin's two presidential terms, there was scant if any evidence that political conditions had improved in the direction of liberal democracy. The evidence, rather, pointed toward an entrenchment of the neo-autocratic tendencies that had appeared in the early Putin years. Further, as noted above, these tendencies were also becoming more pronounced in numerous other countries in the post-Soviet space that were influenced by Russia, such as Kyrgystan or Uzbekistan. Arch Puddington identified a clear "pushback against democracy" in evidence in various countries of the world by 2007. Significantly, Russia and most former Soviet countries represented a suspiciously dense geographical concentration of such cases. Puddington's commentary is worth citing because of the connectedness of this pattern, and because of the reinforcement from Russia that regimes in the region received.

Russia's pervasive influence throughout the region bodes ill for reform prospects. President Vladimir Putin has systematically weakened or marginalized independent media, advocates for democracy, and regime critics generally...Russia thus serves as a model for authoritarian-minded leaders in the region and elsewhere. Although its relations with Belarus were briefly frayed due to a dispute over energy prices, Russia has otherwise gone out of its way to support the region's autocrats and to oppose efforts by the United Nations and other bodies to condemn or impose sanctions on dictatorships with records of blatant human rights

abuse...Leadership in all three share a ruthless determination to crush independent voices of opposition, whether in the press, the political arena, or civil society.²⁹

This is not to say that the post-Soviet countries in Central Asia, plus Azerbaijan and Belarus, would have otherwise gone down a different path had it not been for Russia's "going out of its way" to buttress authoritarian leaders. There was nonetheless substantial evidence of a civil society forming in most, if not all, of these regimes after the collapse of the USSR; had the political disposition of Russia been different, the type of political regimes emerging in Central Asia and Azerbaijan might very well have been different as well. Some observers see a clear and strong component of geographic proximity to successful consolidation of democracy, possibly even overriding other powerful factors such as culture and political legacy; the evidence mustered must be taken seriously.³⁰ In the case of most (but not all) of the post-Soviet countries, the overweening geopolitical influence appears to have been that of Russia pulling countries toward a neo-autocratic direction, rather than Russia itself being pulled—by the West or anyone else—toward liberal democracy.

Yet even the factor of geographical proximity must be considered in light of the larger context, the longer-term and slow-moving process of social change in which this factor works its influence. It is precisely here that path-dependence concepts can be especially useful. First, however, it will be helpful to consider the return to an essentially autocratic mode of governance in Russia itself.

Stephan Hedlund's description of the manner in which the Soviet regime replicated long-standing political practices of Muscovy, despite the profoundly different philosophical foundations of Muscovy and the USSR, sheds light on this matter. His remarks are perhaps hyperbolic, but identify a path-dependent character of the replication of similar patterns of political economy through various epochs of Russian history: "We may conclude that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had succeeded, much like the autocracy of Muscovy of old, in building an economic system that was eminently suited to mass mobilization for the purpose of total war. . . . Moreover, it had done so with a far greater degree of sophistication, allowing Moscow to reach the status not only of a regional Great Power but of a global

Superpower.”³¹ This was done on the basis of the Bolshevik program, whose main impact “must be traced on a more fundamental level, namely in the recreation of such self-reinforcing institutions amongst the higher levels of the power establishment that once had guaranteed the sustainability of the Muscovite and imperial autocracy.”³² From the perspective of our search for historical causation in path-dependency theory, the key element here is “self-reinforcing.” By late 2007, Dmitry Trenin concurred: “As Russia enters the 2007–2008 election cycle, there is no question that it has a czarist political system, in which all major decisions are taken by one institution, the presidency, also known as the Kremlin. The separation of powers, provided for in the 1993 constitution, is a fiction. All institutions of the federal government, from the cabinet to the bicameral legislature, are in reality mere agents of the presidency. The legal system is anything but independent, especially in dealing with opponents of the Kremlin, and the prosecutor general’s office has become a tool of choice in the hands of the presidency.”³³

This is decidedly not the type of political regime that Russia’s post-Soviet democrats had in mind; nor does it comport with the substantial body of late Soviet and early post-Soviet survey research which indicated that the Russian public was well aware of what democracy was all about, favored it, and anticipated it coming to Russia.³⁴ Hedlund perhaps went even further than Trenin, describing the Putin regime as not just neo-czarist in terms of its concept and practice of authority, but as “a striking return to old Muscovy.”³⁵ While certainly more metaphoric than literal, and perhaps overstated, this characterization should not be dismissed out of hand, especially in light of the core axes of politics around which much of the following commentary will revolve. For Russia to have arrived at the type of regime described by Trenin and Hedlund raises the question of what sort of historical dynamic might have been at work, such that old habits of governance returned so quickly and powerfully. The fact that they did so in the face of contemporaneous public opinion to the contrary, and a global environment in which democratizing pressures were increasing, only deepens the suspicion that “large, slow-moving” historical forces may have been at work.

Path-Dependency Theory and Russian Politics

How can the specific points of path-dependency theory help understand this turn toward neo-autocratic rule? The principle of increasing returns is at the core of path-dependency theory and has been increasingly specified in economic studies. The central point of Paul Pierson's seminal article in 2000 is that the principles of increasing returns are at least as powerfully operative in the realm of politics as in economics. If so, then such evidence may well be found in the Russian case. According to Pierson, four specific characteristics of increasing returns underlie their operation: fixed costs, learning effects, network effects, and adaptive expectations. All these operate in the political domain at least as powerfully as in economics, if not more so, and for four general reasons. I consider each of these in turn, after a quotation from Pierson, in light of the reassertion of long-standing Russian political patterns.

(1) The Central Role of Collective Action

Collective action frequently involves many of the qualities conducive to positive feedback. A central reason is the prevalence of adaptive expectations. . . . In addition, many types of collective action involve high start-up costs, which reflects the fact that considerable resources (material or cultural) need to be expended on organizing before the group becomes self-financing. That collective action processes in politics are very often subject to increasing returns explains why social scientists are often struck by the considerable stability of patterns of political mobilization over time.³⁶

No student of Russian history and politics can fail to be impressed with the seemingly odd tendency for certain patterns of political behavior to replicate themselves over time and to do so in distinctively different historical eras. Even skeptics of Pivovarov and Fursov's penchant for viewing the roots of Russian authoritarian tendencies as being deeply, historically rooted, such as Dubovstev and Rozov, recognize those tendencies.³⁷ These are explored below in greater detail, but as an example, the overall patterns of elite-mass relations in Russian politics show remarkable signs of continuity from the medieval to the present era (as noted by Trenin and others), despite the presence of massive socioeconomic changes domestically and globally. Such

continuity calls for explanation and the “positive feedback” aspect of collective action recognized by path-dependency theory is a useful launching point. As an example, the pattern of a historically recurring, sharp bifurcation in Russia between rulers and ruled (*dvoynaya Rossiya*, or “dual Russia”) goes at least back to the eighteenth century, when Enlightenment ideals of citizenship and popularly accountable governance were among the centerpieces of political discourse in the West.³⁸ Michael Urban has identified the powerful continuation of the historical Russian tendency by political elites to view “the people” as “inert,” “degraded,” and “manipulable”—hardly a basis for a democratic polity.³⁹ As we shall see below, the “central role of collective action” aspect of path-dependency theory helps explain a number of traits in contemporary Russian politics.

(2) The High Density of Institutions in Politics

In politics, institutional constraints are ubiquitous. Politics involves struggles over the authority to establish, enforce, and change the rules governing social action in a particular territory. In short, much of politics is based on authority rather than exchange. Both formal institutions (such as constitutional arrangements) and public policies place extensive, legally binding constraints on behavior.⁴⁰

This aspect of path-dependent forces is particularly useful for shedding light on patterns of political behavior at both the mass and elite levels of governance, but particularly so at the latter level. To the extent that Pierson's point is valid, a regime such as Russia—in which authority was both originally conceived, and historically exercised, in authoritarian fashion—could be expected to display a pronounced tendency for public authority to thus replicate itself. The specific traits of that mode of rule, and also the means by which they have replicated themselves over time, are explored later in this essay.

(3) Political Authority and Power Asymmetries

Power asymmetries can reflect the operation of positive feedback processes over substantial periods. Increasing returns processes can transform a situation of relatively balanced conflict, in which one set of actors must openly impose its preferences on another set . . . into one in

which power relations become so uneven that anticipated reactions . . . and ideological manipulation . . . make open political conflict unnecessary. Thus, positive feedback over time simultaneously increases power asymmetries and renders power relations less visible.

The allocation of political authority to particular actors is a key source of this kind of positive feedback. . . . When certain actors are in a position to impose rules on others, the employment of power may be self-reinforcing. Actors may use political authority to generate changes in the rules of the game (both formal institutions and various public policies) designed to enhance their power. Relatively small disparities in political resources among contending groups may widen dramatically over time as positive feedback sets in.⁴¹

Here again the historical experience of Russian political life is both insightful and useful as a specimen-sample of the general pattern described by Pierson. A useful way of looking at this aspect of the path-dependent character of Russia's neo-autocratic rule is to consider the core Aristotelian concept of citizenship, wherein both rulers and ruled know how to "do" the experiences of the "other": those being ruled know how to obey and also to rule, and rulers themselves also know both to rule, and to obey.⁴² This is a crucial, irreplaceable element of a community's self-governance as opposed to autocratic governance, and one that shows much evidence of having been repeatedly scuttled in Russian history. Aristotle's preferred form of regime is a polity, and for such to exist and function, the necessary "power asymmetry" between rulers and ruled manifests itself in a manner that is continually shifting, tenuous, uncertain, and open to change in leadership, or in specific policies, based on citizens' choice. Governance through citizenship conceived in this manner would be fundamentally different from governance on the basis of apparent certainty, stability, and effective one-directional flow of authority as offered in autocratic governance. Again, Michael Urban's study of Russian elites' political discourse demonstrates a strong tendency for authoritarian modes of governance to self-replicate.⁴³

Pierson points out that "relatively small disparities in political resources among contending groups may widen dramatically over time as positive feedback sets in"; this pattern is particularly germane to our understanding of the history of governance in Russia. According to Tatu Vanhanen's evolutionary theory of democracy, the distribution of power resources within

a society is the single most potent factor in determining whether democracy emerges and survives over time.⁴⁴ This theme is explored in greater detail below as we consider the tendency for monocratic-type governance to replicate itself over time, and especially after national crises. For now, we note that the left side of Ian Bremmer's J-Curve (where a regime is stable but not very open) appears to have emerged as a more or less conscious choice by the Russian electorate, even if by default through more or less passive acceptance of continuous aggregation of neo-autocratic power by the Kremlin.⁴⁵

(4) The Intrinsic Complexity and Opacity of Politics

Social interpretations of complex environments like politics are subject to positive feedback. The development of basic social understandings involves high start-up costs and learning effects; they are frequently shared with other social actors in ways that create network effects and adaptive expectations. The need to employ mental maps induces increasing returns. This is true at both the individual and the group level, as "communities of discourse" often come to share and reproduce a similar ideology.

This recent work converges with the long-standing views of those who study political culture as well as the recent contributions of cognitive science. Once established, basic outlooks on politics, ranging from ideologies to understandings of particular aspects of governments or orientations toward political groups or parties, are generally tenacious. They are path dependent.⁴⁶

After considering each of these four aspects of the special pertinence of "increasing returns" to the political realm, Pierson grandly concludes: "In each case [of the above four aspects], there are reasons to anticipate that steps in a particular direction can trigger a self-reinforcing dynamic."⁴⁷ Is there a "mental map" in Russia, or among Russians, that favors authoritarian rule? This theme has been pursued in the form of modern political psychology at least since the 1940s and indeed has been a recurring theme in Western observations of Russia since the sixteenth century.⁴⁸ Studies of the neurological roots of cognition, and psychological states more generally, show promise of providing significant insights into why patterns tend to replicate themselves.⁴⁹ Perhaps that which political scientists have long called

"political culture" might be a function of the mental maps that people use to navigate the complexities and uncertainties of life. If so, then perhaps such mental maps set in motion a pattern of disposition to politics that, over time, displays all the characteristics of path dependency.⁵⁰ For example, it seems reasonable to suspect that the response by the Putin regime to the Beslan tragedy of September 2004 displayed traits that were entirely characteristic of long-term Russian political patterns and substantially at variance with the response of the Spanish or British governments to similar (if smaller scale) outrages in the early twenty-first century. It is difficult to consider these cases comparatively and not conclude with Pierson that certain political ideologies are path dependent.⁵¹

Path-dependence theory, and historical institutionalism in general, has focused much attention on the self-reinforcing characteristics of patterns of political behavior, and particularly on the apparently self-replicating traits of institutions.⁵² The concept of "critical junctures" is central to path-dependency theory, but until recently has not been developed in much depth. Critical junctures represent opportunities for change, yet may end in a process by which key elements of the preceding institutions—or constellation of ideas—replicate themselves.⁵³ These may do so through self-reinforcing, essentially reactive and fear-driven responses, in turn evoking the most psychological (and perhaps physiological) deeply rooted survival mechanisms. It does not seem unreasonable that under conditions of especially pronounced uncertainty, such fear-based behavior would be most likely to materialize. This is a crucial point in light of the underlying concept of citizenship-based self-governance, since modern democracy centrally involves the "institutionalization of uncertainty."⁵⁴ To the extent that this is so, significant light may be shed on the persistent tendency in Russian national political behavior to forego such electoral uncertainty in favor of the promise of security by means of a predictable and predictably strong governing apparatus, even if that predictability comes at the expense of effectual limitations by a reasonably informed, reasonably engaged citizenry. The persistent reappearance of autocratic traits of governance over time, despite otherwise remarkably different historical epochs, raises the suspicion that deeply rooted historical-psychological factors, and perhaps even

bioneurological factors, continue to be operative. Below I consider the specific aspects of government, both conceptually and concretely, that demonstrate evidence of this persistence.⁵⁵

Specific Indicators of Path-Dependent Political Tendencies in Russia

Public authority is viewed (and exercised) as essentially monocratic in nature; autocratic in practice, if not also in theory; ideally centralized in form and practice; and embodied in a strong state.

Authority Viewed as Essentially Monocratic in Nature

There is a pronounced tendency in Russian political life to view political authority in such a manner as to make checks-and-balances upon public authority ineffective, even when such checks are formally instituted; recent data from the Levada Center, a credible Russian survey research institution, bear this out. Is this tendency historically rooted, and if so, how does the replication occur as a form of positive feedback, even despite massive socioeconomic change? The overall pattern of post-Soviet change in Russia leading to the monopolization of power by the political party United Russia in the 2000s suggests that it is so. Hedlund usefully calls attention to the scholarship of McDaniel which traces certain path-dependent characteristics of Russian political history to the prevailing "mental models."⁵⁶ There is good reason to suspect that the roots of these mental models go back very deeply into Russian history; perhaps the deeper roots of the recurring preference for monocratic power (*vlast* as indivisible) can be located in the sense of identity as well as the perceived interest in political order and stability. The tendency for public authority to be viewed and defended in monocratic form, and thus in monocratic terms, is in fact deeply rooted in Russian Orthodoxy itself: the czar represented the divine majesty on earth, whose authority was inherently indivisible.⁵⁷

As noted at the outset of this study, the consensus in the West is that the Russian Federation reverted to an authoritarian mode of governance during the Putin years. Indicators of this reversion included manipulated

elections, relentless centralization of political authority in the executive arm of government at the expense of the legislature, truncation of civil society, imprisonment and /or assassination of political enemies, and elimination of genuine political opposition.⁵⁸ Few if any in the Western world continued to defend the self-claimed democratic character of Russia, especially after the centralizing initiatives undertaken in the wake of the September 2004 Beslan tragedy. These initiatives were reinforced by the political condominium of the Putin regime with business elites, and found expression in numerous ways, including Russia's increasing assertiveness in regional and world affairs.⁵⁹ The regime nonetheless described and defined itself as democratic, despite occasionally frank acknowledgement of the deeply problematical character of that democracy. For example, as a presidential candidate for United Russia, Dmitry Medvedev offered the following:

On the one hand, we are returning to our traditions, to our own cultural values. They are the ones that specifically define our national identity. And herewith they represent an intrinsic, inalienable part of world civilization. On the other hand (and here there is no need to be shy about it), we still have our own particular, even conflicted life-experience with realizing the conditions necessary for actual democracy—political and economic democracy. Also, the democratic institutions established to date demonstrate this by their very constitution, notwithstanding the ongoing problems with realizing their further development.⁶⁰

Significantly, there is evidence that Russia's reversion to neo-autocratic conceptions and practices of authority is at least implicitly accepted by much of the population. This is suggested by a majority of respondents in public opinion surveys. Consider the question, "To whom should supreme power in Russia belong—to the president, the government [prime minister and cabinet], or the Federal Assembly?" By 2007, the percentage of those responding "the Federal Assembly" had shrunk to single digits (6 percent), whereas those favoring a locus of power in the president were at over 60 percent (table 1). It has been well established that stronger legislatures make stronger democracies, and that weak legislatures can be both cause and effect of the entrenchment of authoritarian rule.⁶¹ Contemporary Russia is a case in point, replicating the long-term historical pattern of legislative weakness.

Table 1: Monocratic Authority Preferences in Russia

To whom should supreme power in Russia belong—to the president, the government, or the Federal Assembly (parliament, in 1994)?

	1994	1999	2007
	(percent)		
President	33	37	61
Government	13	28	11
Federal Assembly	17	15	6
To no one; there should be separation of powers	0	0	9
Don't know	37	20	14

Source: Levada Center, nationwide surveys, 1994–2007; http://www.russiavotes.org/national_issues/engagement.php (accessed 9 September 2010).

What do you think would be better? [concentration or separation of powers]

	All replies (%)
For all power to be concentrated in one pair of hands	45
For power to be distributed between different structures, controlling one another	42
Don't know	13

Source: Levada Center, Nationwide Survey 26 February–2 March 2010, N=1,600; http://www.russiavotes.org/national_issues/engagement.php (accessed 9 September 2010).

Given the centrality of political parties in modern political processes, it might be expected that a country with a long history of monocratic concentration of authority would find itself with one or another form of one-party regime. Russia quickly established a one-party regime after the Bolshevik seizure of power, despite the presence of a wide array of political parties. In the twilight of the USSR, a multiplicity of parties and movements again emerged, only to be politically eclipsed by United Russia in the early years of the Putin regime. In a major work on the role of political parties in Russia, Henry Hale traces the Putin-era consolidation of United Russia at least partially to path-dependent processes.

Just as new institutionalist approaches have looked to path-dependent legacies of the past to explain the emergence of markets in world history, so this volume was led to Russia's particular legacy of communism and its ensuing path of postcommunist transition to understand how this [electoral] market came to be structured. In particular, the preceding pages found that Russia's institutional structure of strong executive power at both the regional and provincial levels, a legacy of its patrimonial communist past, helped stack the deck in favor of party substitutes over parties in many organs of power. So powerful that they saw little need to take on the political risk involved in building even a true presidential party, Russia's chief executives also frequently destroyed opposition efforts to convert major party substitutes into parties capable of being dominant players in the market for electoral goods and services.⁶²

Thus, Pierson's point about power asymmetries having path-dependent tendencies through increasing returns is evident in Russia's transition from a one-party state ruled by the Communist Party to a one-party state ruled through the agency of United Russia: "relatively small disparities in political resources among contending groups may widen dramatically over time as positive feedback sets in."⁶³ But how much support among the population does this arrangement find?

In terms of political competition along party lines, there is not much evidence of support among the Russian public for a vibrantly competitive political playing field. Although trust in and regard for political parties appears to have increased from the latter 1990s when they were characteristically viewed with disdainful contempt, the preference throughout

the Putin era is for either one strong party, or several big parties, as indicated in table 2.⁶⁴

Similarly, data from the Russian Public Opinion Research Center indicate a very low regard for political parties (fig. 1) other than the party of power, United Russia.

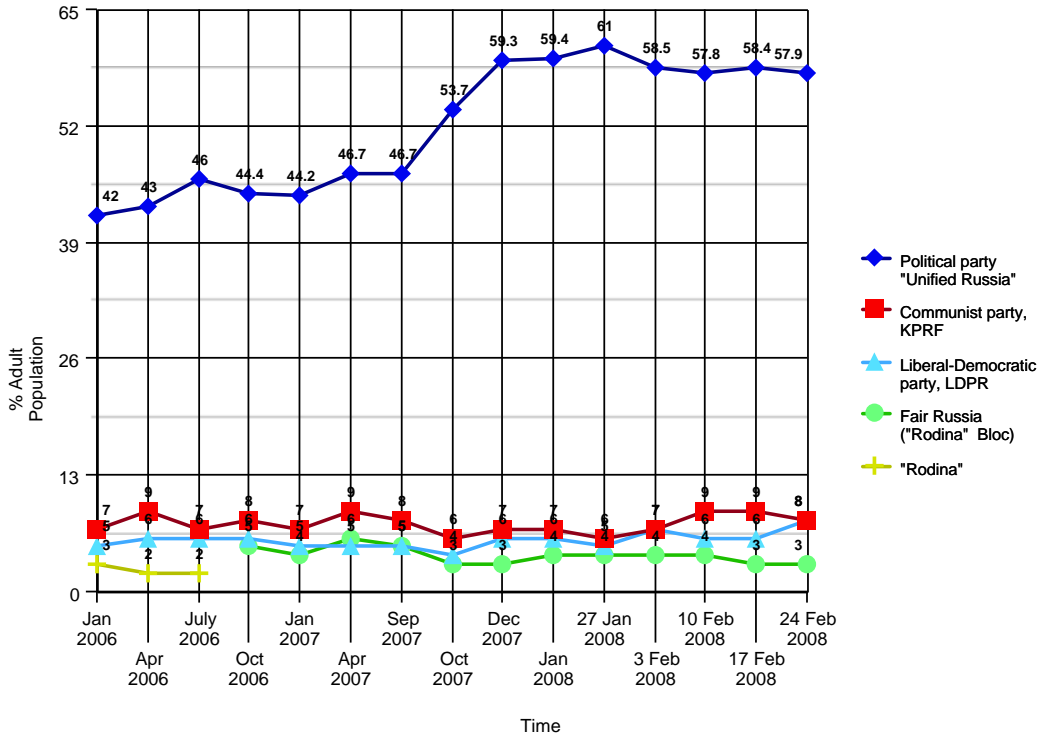
At a deeper theoretical level, the issue of the monocratic character of authority, as opposed to a polyarchical one, arguably returns to the issue of mixed government as outlined and advocated in classical Greco-Roman antiquity. Specifically, as outlined in *Politics*, book 4, the Aristotelian principle of mixed government derived from the notion that a monocratic configuration of authority was less desirable than one characterized by a mixture of regime-types, specifically aristocracy and polity. Even this configuration, of course, presupposed a certain unity of authority in terms of legitimate claim to power over the community. However, in order to

Table 2: How many political parties does Russia need now?

	Apr 04	Sep 04	Oct 05	Jul 06	Apr 07	Oct 07
	(percent)					
One strong ruling party	34	34	38	32	30	28
2 or 3 big parties	41	44	39	42	46	40
Many small parties	8	6	4	5	7	9
No need for any parties	7	6	7	7	6	7
Don't know	11	9	12	14	13	17

Source: Levada Center, Nationwide Survey, 2004–2007; http://www.russiavotes.org/duma/duma_vote_trends.php#489 (accessed February 27, 2008).

Fig 1: Support for Political Parties in Russia



Source: Russian Public Opinion Research Center;
<http://wciom.com/archives/thematic-archive/internal-policy/political-parties.html> (accessed February 27, 2008).

minimize the likelihood that such power would turn tyrannical, it should be configured so as to be self-accountable—the various parts among themselves—as well accountable to the citizenry that formed it. Contemporary political scientists refer to these two aspects of accountability as horizontal and vertical, and both are essential to avoid tyranny.⁶⁵ A regime with the type of monocratic concentration of power in the presidential apparatus, as in Russia, hardly qualifies. But such a regime very much resembles the pattern of lack of effective accountability to the public established in the Russian state that emerged in the fifteenth century from the Mongol-Tatar occupation.⁶⁶ That regime was thoroughly patrimonial, and strong echoes of those roots are viewed by Lynch, among others, as the defining characteristic of the post-Soviet regime. Significantly, those traits show evidence of having replicated themselves in a path-dependent way.⁶⁷ Perhaps very tellingly, as early as 1997 Giovanni Sartori referred to the 1993 Russian constitution itself as "essentially monocratic" and an "ill-conceived" attempt to institutionalize the underlying principle of an "oscillating diarchy" at the heart of the French-style dual executive system.⁶⁸ From this perspective, it should not surprise us that the institutional basis for the monocratic character of Russian politics under Putin had emerged so quickly after the demise of the USSR. One might offer that 'positive feedback' as a response to post-Soviet chaos came in the form of lower political "costs" of reverting to authoritarian form than to remaining on a tenuous democratic path.

State Authority as Neo-autocratic

This trait is about the directional flow of accountability for public authority. The argument here is that in contemporary Russia, as virtually throughout its history, political power flows downward from regime to society, and not the reverse. This is to say that the political regime was not accountable to society in any meaningful sense of the term: it is remarkable and deeply emblematic that in one thousand years of history no national-level ruler of Russia has ever been voted out of office. The state was, and remains, *rukovoditel'* (literally, one who "leads by the hand") over society, rather than being constrained, limited, and guided by

the underlying society, or by a shifting conglomeration of its more powerful parts. The path-dependent characteristics of this political trait will not be news to any student of Russian political history, yet the concepts of positive feedback, increasing returns, and self-reinforcing mechanisms of replication may shed considerable light on the why and how such traits have continued into the present century.

The wider the scope of political authority wielded by Putin, the more popular he appeared to have become. This pattern coincided with increasingly robust national macro-economic growth, and perhaps derived from it. But can such growth be said to have caused Putin's popularity, thus enabling a steady aggrandizement of power under his control? There is probably no way of disentangling the direction of causation, or the causative mechanisms, even with path-dependency theory; but the evidence suggests that aggregate public response to Russia's increasing economic power was not to demand a shrinking domain of state authority, but rather the opposite—to continue to support Putin and his approach to governance. To be sure, there were rather feeble, occasional objections to the aggrandizement of state power, but none were sufficient to bridle the trend away from pluralistic accountability. This may get to the very heart of Russia's reversion to autocracy, because such macroeconomic growth might very well have created the sort of objective and subjective conditions necessary and (perhaps) sufficient to spawn a political culture in which neo-autocracy might otherwise have been impossible, practically speaking. This process is outlined thus by Ronald F. Inglehart and Christian Welzel:

Socioeconomic development, emancipative cultural change, and democratization constitute a coherent syndrome of social progress, a syndrome whose common focus has not been properly specified by classical modernization theory. We specify this syndrome as "human development," arguing that its three components have a common focus on broadening human choice. (1) Socioeconomic development gives people the objective means of choice by increasing individual resources; (2) rising emancipative values strengthen people's subjective orientation towards choice; (3) democratization provides legal guarantees of choice by institutionalizing freedom rights.⁶⁹

The question immediately rises as to why, in Russia, "rising emancipative values" and "increasing individual resources" have produced so very little in the way of "institutionalizing freedom rights"? The answer posited here is that certain elements of Russia's historical experience have replicated themselves in a path-dependent fashion, specifically regarding the relationship of state and society, to exhibit positive feedback from the dominant-subordinate configuration between the Russian state and Russian society. Pierson's concept of power asymmetries in the political domain tending to accentuate path-dependent tendencies appears particularly germane here. When faced with various crises (real or imagined, such as Chechnya, terrorism, "color revolutions"), the "political costs" of pursuing an authoritarian option were evidently lower (meaning less risky) than holding to a more democratic path, precisely because the authoritarian option was more deeply embedded, less threatening, and offered greater promise of short-term utility.

Along these lines, Hedlund identifies the underlying philosophical concept of authority in Russian history as autocratic, and distinctively different from that in the West:

Where Western tradition has given rise to pluralism, power sharing and argumentation, Russia's Orthodox tradition has rested on posing absolute alternatives, with no room for compromise. Where there is no neutral zone, man has to take sides, and the winning side must be the absolute victor. After having fully crushed his opponent, the victor also seeks to radically annihilate the past. Lotman's own conclusion goes to the very heart of the problem: "True forward movement requires coming to terms with, and not simply rejecting, the past, for absolute rejection leads only to fruitless cycles of negation." McDaniel demonstrates how repeated Russian attempts to break out of the bad equilibrium consistently led the system to revert to its original institutional position. This is well in line with our assumption of revealed institutional preference. Each such failed undertaking, moreover, was accompanied by high social costs and a protracted period of disorder, known in Russian as *smuta*.⁷⁰

This image of Russian political authority is certainly not new, but rather reflects a long-held view, in the West at least, of the nature of political power in Russia. The Putin phenomenon, emerging as it has from Russia's perceived bad experience with a purported adoption of Western-style

democracy, thus may be seen as a replication of the recurring theme of a strong, essentially monocratic, centralized state rescuing Russia from the chaos and trouble of weak rule.⁷¹ Putin's popularity throughout his rule may be viewed as an indicator of the manner in which such a conception of authority resonates with the general culture, notwithstanding dissident voices and challenging mavericks.

Another significant aspect of Russian political life can be observed in the contemporary manifestation of the historically patterned tendency for political processes to be closed to significant, efficacious popular input. This aspect of autocracy in premodern Russia (and notably, in much of the rest of the medieval world) presumed a certain epistemic foundation: the emperor ruled by divine prerogative, with authority flowing from the top, downward; in the Russian case, this emperor was the czar (Russian for “Caesar”), who served as the image of divine majesty.⁷² The population at large could hardly be described as citizens in any meaningful modern sense of the term (nor in classical Aristotelian terms, either): the people were subjects, and as such their political obligation was to obey, not make political determinations.⁷³ This arrangement was of course endorsed and buttressed by the Orthodox church; much has been written about this and there is no need to revisit the issue here. In any case, recent survey research provides evidence that Russians’ sense of political efficacy is not high, and that “people like me” can’t really have much effect on governance (table 3).

Ian Bremmer's concept of the J-curve presents a way of understanding the connection between political openness and political stability. According to Bremmer, stability and openness are connected, not in a linear fashion, but in a J-curve manner: political change toward openness typically decreases political stability in the short-to-medium run, and only when an open, democratically responsible regime is established does the level of political stability rise.⁷⁴ The short-term effect of political openness in previously authoritarian regimes, however, is generally instability. The point here is that as Russia experienced greater openness of the 1990s, political stability indeed became problematical. By the time of Putin's ascent to power, the perception of the political elite was that the two were indeed connected: the openness of the Yeltsin years had created the perceived need for Putin’s “vertical of

Table 3: Political Efficacy in Post-Soviet Russia

Do you think that people like you can influence state decisions in this country?
Can you influence decisions in your region, city or district?

	Country	Local
	(percent)	
Definitely yes	1	2
To some extent	12	16
Total yes	13	18
Probably not	34	18
Definitely not	51	46
Total no	85	80
Don't know	2	2

Source: Levada Center, Nationwide Survey, 26 February–2 March 2010, N=1,600; http://www.russiavotes.org/national_issues/engagement.php (accessed 9 September 2010).

power.” The response of the regime, perhaps predictably, was to clamp down on the openness, at least regarding broad, popular input to the regime.⁷⁵ The manner in which that response occurred, however, bears numerous hallmarks of a path-dependent reversion to earlier form because the authoritarian option offered greater positive feedback to the interests of those wielding authority, and did so without significantly efficacious public opposition.

Also and perhaps rather ironically, another manifestation of the autocratic aspect of Russian political behavior may be seen in the historical tendency of the Russian military to remain aloof from politics. The irony resides in the fact that military involvement in politics is generally viewed as detrimental to democratic governance and emblematic of the sort of state weakness often associated with desultory political change lurching from

authoritarian to democratic rule, and back again. In the Russian case, however, the military's historical and contemporary aloofness from politics appears to be grounded in a similar political cultural trait of disengagement from politics that characterizes the population as a whole.⁷⁶ It is especially noteworthy that such disengagement has persisted throughout Russian history, such that even in the clearest circumstance of likely intervention—the October 1993 crisis between Yeltsin and the parliament—the military remained conspicuously aloof.⁷⁷ The overall pattern of military involvement in politics in the late modern world, and the Russian military's aversion to doing so even amid such inviting conditions as the 1993 October crisis, suggests that deeper, longer-term causes were at work than the typical short-term variables—such as immediate economic conditions, or contingent factors, such as specific personalities, that might otherwise account for the feeble resistance to a reassertion of neo-autocratic control by Boris Yeltsin.⁷⁸

Popular and Governmental-official Preference for, and Robust Intellectual Defense of, Centralized Authority

Russian political history is characterized by centralized political control, although episodically punctuated by decentralization efforts, particularly the so-called Great Reforms of the 1860s and the Yeltsin years of the 1990s. Since this feature of Russian politics is so pronounced, and since it has numerous traits of path-dependent self-replication, careful scrutiny of the "big, slow-moving" forces behind it may be very revealing. In late 1999, eight years after the collapse of the USSR, and also nearly the same amount of time before the full measure of Putin's centralizing concentration of power had been accomplished, Michael McFaul noted: "In the Fall of 1991, the presidential genetic code began to reorganize politics in Russia."⁷⁹ Even then it could hardly have been foreseen that this "genetic code" would come to reassert itself with a vengeance under the presidency of Putin. In fact, the movement toward serious and significant political decentralization stands as a remarkable break with the long-term characteristic of highly centralized governance. This was perhaps best captured by Boris Yeltsin's comment in mid-1991 that the regions of Russia would be welcomed to take "all the autonomy they could swallow." He proceeded to move in that direction, yet

in the process significantly weakened state capacity, and perhaps simply pushed authoritarianism out into the regions by giving regional executives more or less free rein over their territories. While it appeared for a while that the weakening of central authority might provide enabling circumstances for the emergence of regional self-rule, and thereby open the door for further democratization, in fact the opposite occurred.⁸⁰ By the early twenty-first century, President Vladimir Putin made abundantly clear that one of his top priorities was to reassert vertical authority and thereby restore sound governance to Russia. He did do so in a strikingly thorough manner, although in a stepwise process. The net result, significantly, was a return to long-standing Russian convention: centralization of power geographically as well as in concept.

It is also noteworthy that the latter decades of the twentieth century witnessed a remarkably broad global acceptance (among academic and many political leaders, at least) of the general proposition that decentralization was preferable to centralization, even though the soundness of this preference did not hold up well to intense scrutiny.⁸¹ In some cases, decentralization only compounded problems it was ostensibly designed to resolve; in this regard Russia stands as a clear example. In any case, specific aspects can be identified in Putin's reassertion of vertical authority. Cameron Ross is perhaps most direct in calling it "Putin's radical assault on the principles of federalism and democracy," which occurred in two stages, outlined below. Some components of that assault represent a clear reversion to long-established patterns of governance, suggesting a path-dependent dynamic at work.

Stage 1: May 2000–September 2004

1. Creation of Seven Federal Districts, most headed by military or security personnel, May 13, 2000
2. Reform of the Federation Council—members henceforth to be chosen by the region's governor and legislature
3. Establishment of the State Council, an advisory body to the president composed of all regional governors, September 1, 2000

4. New federal legislation granting the power to dismiss governors and dissolve regional legislatures to the president under certain conditions, 2000–2001
5. Putin's campaign to bring regional charters and constitutions of the ethnic republics in line with the Russian Federal Constitution
6. Heavy political pressure on the ethnic-based units to support the central government in Moscow, electorally and otherwise

Stage 2: September 2004 forward

1. Direct appointment of governors by the president with approval by regional legislatures
2. Drop the half-SMD / half PR formula for Duma elections and replace it with pure PR; increase the threshold for parties' eligibility for representation in the Duma from 5 percent to 7 percent—both changes effectively augmented the power of United Russia
3. New electoral laws after September 2004 designed to make it increasingly difficult for smaller parties to be legally recognized and thus run candidates for office
4. Change the internal rules of the Federation Council to make it nonpartisan, unlike the Duma's *fraktsiya*, or formally recognized, party-based factions
5. Considered legislation in late autumn of 2006 that would allow regional governors, who are appointed by the president, to appoint mayors of major cities (formerly elected)
6. Reduce the number of units of the Russian Federation, from eighty-nine to eventually around fifty. (as of late 2008, the number of units was at eighty-three)
7. Increase the pressure on the thirty-one ethnic-based federal units to support the central government electorally.
8. Establish a Public Chamber (2005), a 126-member body composed of representatives from various social organizations: one-third appointed by the president, one-third from major social groups, one-third selected by the first 84 members of the chamber.⁸²

Centralized control of the political party system, and more or less simultaneous reduction of the power of the Federal Assembly, represented critically significant aspects of this centralization drive. This occurred in the form of United Russia emerging with an effective monopoly on public authority, while leaving token opposition parties intact, legally operative, but politically marginalized.⁸³

A significant dimension of this effective monopolizing centralization of power has been the reassertion of control over the regional governments, largely by control of the regional legislatures through United Russia. Since the regional legislatures must ratify the president's choice of a given region's chief executive, Kremlin control of such legislatures is critical. By 2007 that process was largely completed: "With the Kremlin exerting more direct influence over the political futures of regional executives and with the 'United Russification' of regional parliaments, Russia's regions are becoming more compliant with the centre's wishes, as compared to the Yel'tsin era when regional 'lords' ruled over wildly autonomous 'fiefdoms.'"⁸⁴

How has the Russian public responded to centralization? Data-based evidence from Russian public opinion surveys indicates a decided preference for centralized political authority and a conception of democracy that is arguably at some variance with those prevailing in the West (table 4).

The word democracy, of course, can have numerous meanings: even in the Roman Empire the belief prevailed that, regardless of the concentration of power in the emperor, the people still exercised power through him. According to the myth of the *lex regia* of the first century BC, the Roman people had voluntarily and freely transferred their right of popular sovereignty to the emperor.⁸⁵ Thus, the myth of rule "by the people" endured, regardless of the degree to which subsequent emperors ruled dictatorially and with no genuine accountability to the populace. The analogy should not be stretched too far with twenty-first century Russia, but the type of regime developed by Putin reflected a problematical popular sovereignty at best.

Table 4: Preference for Centralization

Who Should Form the government of Russia?	2003	2007
	(percent)	
The president directly	54	46
The PM appointed by the president	8	16
The prime minister, appointed by the State Duma	3	7
Parties, which won majority in the Duma	12	5
All parties in the Duma	10	11
Don't Know	14	14

Source: Levada Center, nationwide surveys, 2003-2007; http://www.russiavotes.org/national_issues/engagement.php (accessed 9 September 2010).

In this context, presidential adviser Vladislav Surkov's concept of "sovereign democracy" appears more of a throwback to the *lex regia* than to modern conceptions of representative governance. Recent survey evidence points toward a prevailing concept of democracy in Russia that does not place a particularly high stock in popular selection accountability of leaders to the people. Significantly, perhaps, "direct election of all high state leaders" was seen as an important component of democracy by only about 15 percent of respondents in the year 2000, with the proportion dropping slightly by 2005 to only 13 percent (table 5).

Table 5: Definitions of Democracy

What in your opinion is “democracy”? (More than one answer possible)

	2000	2005
	(percent)	
Freedom of speech, press, religion	37	43
Economic prosperity of the country	33	32
Order and stability	28	30
Rule of law	29	26
Direct election of all high state leaders	15	13
Possibility for everyone to do as they please	10	10
Empty talk	6	6
Guarantees for minority rights	6	5
Anarchy, lawlessness	6	4
Domination of minority by majority	6	4
Other concepts of democracy	1	1
Don't know	8	5

Source: Levada Center, nationwide surveys, 30 Dec 1999—4 Jan 2000, and 13–17 May 2005, N=1,600 for each.

http://www.russiavotes.org/national_issues/national_issues_trends.php#066
(accessed February 12, 2008).

It is noteworthy that about one-third of the population declared that “economic prosperity of the country” is “democracy.” Under Putin, a growing proportion of the population considered its economic situation to be improving, thus perhaps making understandable the regime’s self-avowedly democratic character. The regime was thus able to enjoy high levels of popular support even while throttling political competition, constricting civil liberties (such as freedom of speech, press, and assembly, among others), and otherwise stripping citizenship of its essential Aristotelian core: the notion that both rulers and ruled need to know how to rule and how to obey. By the end of Putin’s second term as president, evidence that the regime was genuinely interested in knowing popular preference was in short supply, and evidence that it would be willing to obey it was even scantier. Autocratic restoration was evidenced by the regime’s continued centralization of authority, but as Trenin astutely notes, this is only half the picture. The other half has to do with the disposition of the population itself:

The critics who lay all the blame for the democracy deficit at the gates of the Kremlin are only half right. Certainly, Putin and his likely successors are not, and do not, consider themselves to be the champions of democracy. However, at the other end of the spectrum, there is still precious little demand for democracy. This does not mean that Russians are totally apathetic, passive, and submissive. Rather, it appears that their thoughts have turned from the sweeping slogans of the late 1980s to rather practical matters. But is it these same practical matters that will lead them back into politics, possibly through the back door.⁸⁶

This view is generally consistent with data from the World Values Survey, in which less than half of those polled in 1995 and 1999 indicated that democracy (with no elaboration of specific meaning by the poll-takers, apparently) was either “very good” or even “fairly good” (table 6).

The tragic events of Beslan in September 2004 prompted the Putin regime to further centralize authority and generally entrench the monocratic nature of state power. Direct appointment of governors, raising the State Duma electoral barrier to 7 percent, and reshaping the laws to thwart meaningful opposition parties, among other measures, all clearly had the effect intended by the Kremlin by the time of the March 2008 presidential election. There is scant evidence of much public outcry over this direction of political change, even though objections were raised in the ongoing national discourse. Instead of popular objection, data from the Levada Center indicated a growing sense that the country was politically moving in the right direction (table 7).

Table 6: Russians' Estimation of "Democracy"

	Russian Federation			
	1995		1999	
	N	%	N	%
Very Good	98	4.8	151	6.1
Fairly Good	819	40.1	1035	41.4
Fairly Bad	496	24.3	543	21.7
Very Bad	178	8.7	154	6.2
Don't know	449	22.0	601	24.0
No answer	0	0.0	15	0.6
Not asked in survey	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	2040	(100%)	2500	(100%)

Source: *World Values Survey*,

<http://www.wvsevsdb.com/wvs/WVSDData.jsp?Idioma=I> (accessed 19 February 2009).

Table 7: What do you think awaits Russia in the forthcoming months in politics?

	Mar 00	Mar 01	Mar 02	Mar 04	Mar 05	Mar 06	Mar 07	Jan 08	Mar 08
	(percent)								
Improve a lot	3	2	1	2	1	2	2	4	5
Improve some	33	28	32	34	26	27	28	35	44
Total improve	36	30	33	36	27	29	30	39	49
Worsen some	17	21	22	14	21	17	15	14	12
Worsen a lot	9	6	6	2	6	5	7	2	2
Total worsen	26	27	27	16	27	22	22	16	14
Don't know	38	43	40	49	46	48	48	45	37

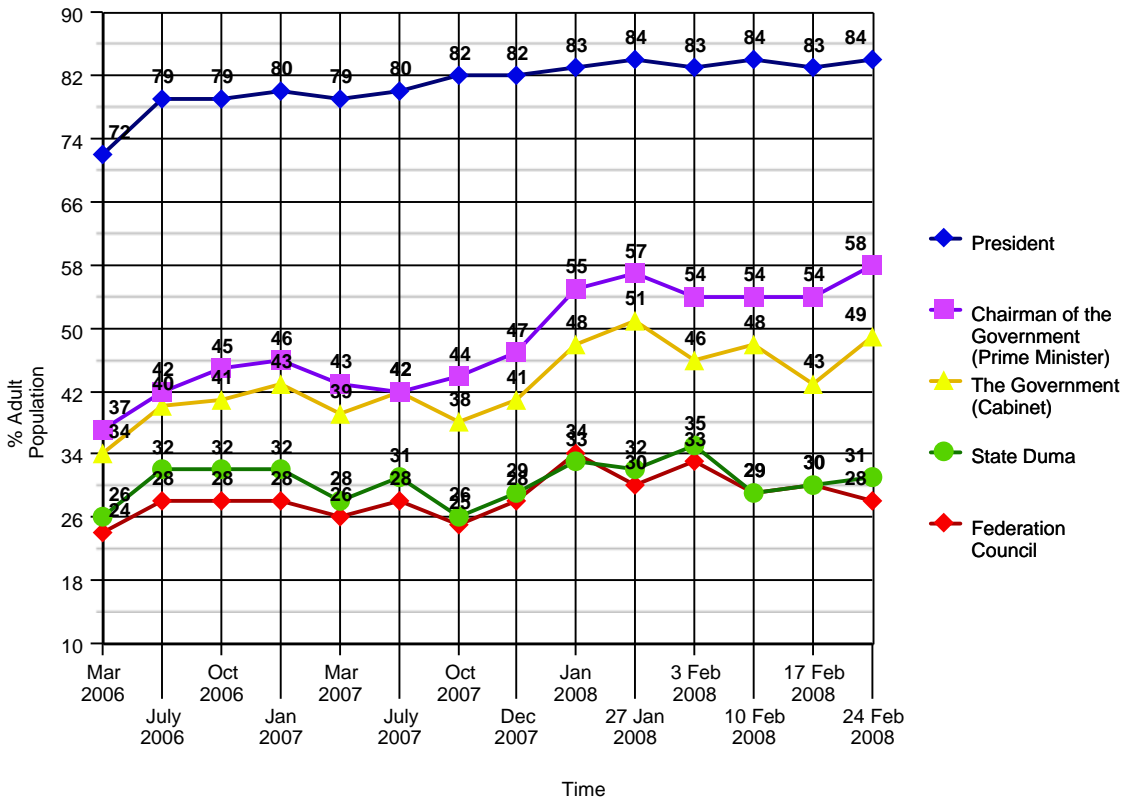
Source: Levada Center (formerly VCIOM) surveys, 2000–2008;

http://www.russiavotes.org/national_issues/national_issues_trends.php#486 (accessed 13 March 2009).

(note: The Levada Center was part of VCIOM until 2003; since then, both exist separately).

These data echo the high popularity of the Putin regime, and particularly the presidential apparatus, in relation to other formal branches of government. Figure 2 shows approval ratings of the president, chairman of the government (prime minister), the government (cabinet), state дума, and federation council, from top to bottom respectively, in most polling through early 2008:

Figure 2: Approval Ratings of Government Officials and Institutions

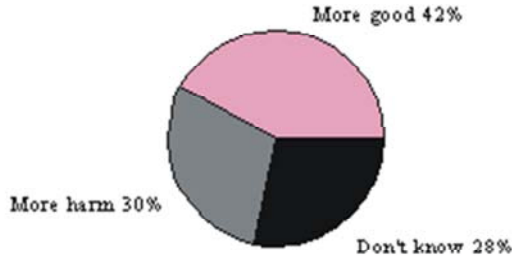


Source: Russian Public Opinion Research Center.
<http://wciom.com/news/ratings/ratings-of-state-institutions.html> (accessed 27 February 2009).

Finally, the centralizing concentration of power (vertikal vlasti) as the centerpiece of Putin's mode of governance has met a generally positive response from the population, as evidenced by data from the Levada Center in 2008. It is noteworthy, however, that those favoring it formed a clear plurality, but not a majority, of respondents, and 28 percent answered, "Don't know" (fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Russians' Estimation of the "Vertical of Power"

Do you think the "vertical power," when all problems are solved according to commands from the Kremlin and the influence of the government, Duma, and parties is minimal, does more good or more harm?



Source: Levada Center, Nationwide Survey, 18–21 January 2008, N=1600; "Putin's Performance in Office—Trends," http://www.russiavotes.org/president/presidency_performance.php#523 (accessed 7 September 2008).

The evidence shows that Russia's return to highly centralized state power was met with broad popular approval, much as it appears to have done in earlier episodes of Russian history. These episodes came at critical, defining points regarding the nature of relations between the central government and the vast regions composing Russia: Prince Ivan III's conquest of Novgorod in 1478, the emergence of the Romanov dynasty in 1613 from the Time of Troubles, the halt to the regional reforms in the 1880s, the Stalinist centralization drive, and Putin's reassertion of vertical authority from the administrative and political chaos of the Yeltsin years. Such survey data can

be variously interpreted, and are of course fraught with other validity issues; after all, the data do reflect the existence of a stratum, in Russian society, of support for democratic governance. Such a stratum has arguably always existed, however, yet was repeatedly overcome by the authoritarian alternative. All in all, however, the seemingly instinctual return to authoritarian form, in order to transcend national crisis, suggests that path-dependent forces were operating. The fact that the pattern repeated itself so powerfully only fortifies the suggestion.

Russian Tendencies Toward, and Preferences for, a Strong State

A final dimension of public authority in Russia that bears evidence of path-dependent replication is the tendency toward being a "strong state." This aspect of governance deals with the characteristic nature, over time, of the relationship between society and the state. A strong state is one that shapes and controls society more than being shaped and controlled by that society.⁸⁷ States, as sets of governing institutions, vary considerably in terms of their capacity to function autonomously from society, and to rule over it in a generally one-directional manner. The deepest roots of the Russian state have been described as placing it on a developmental path toward a strong state in this regard; this was traceable both to the patrimonial Byzantine conception of authority and to the pattern of economic relations, with the latter enabling, engendering, and historically reinforcing a strong state. Lynch perhaps sums up the matter best, especially regarding the very earliest historical roots:

Even before the Mongol conquest, throughout much of Russia (the commercial republic of Novgorod being a key exception), as distinct from the Kievan lands, there was an unusually wide gulf separating those in political authority from society. Unlike in England, where the Normans divided a richer land and soon turned into a native land-owning aristocracy, in Russia the Normans were primarily interested in the transit and extractive capabilities of the Russian lands between Scandinavia and wealthy Byzantium. Consequently, and by contrast to England, Norman rule was much more imposed on the native society and long retained a semi-colonial character, reflecting a proprietary manner of exercising authority. Russia's greatest Marxist historian,

Mikhail Pokrovskiy, noted in this respect that the limits on royal prerogative already established in England in the thirteenth century were still unknown in Russia in the middle of the seventeenth century.⁸⁸

One might offer that in actual practice, the absence of “limits on royal prerogative,” *mutatis mutandis*, continue to characterize Russian governance until today. Putin's determination to destroy the oligarchs in the early twenty-first century might be understood as a latter-day example of this pattern. But Russia clearly did not possess much of a strong state in the wake of the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Brian D. Taylor offers a useful summary of this aspect of governance in Russia, written at the general time (2001) of the Yeltsin-Putin transition:

The Russian state today is extremely weak. . . . A series of indicators of political capacity demonstrates the weakness of the post-Soviet Russian state. Russia is a new state, with a new constitution, that has undergone only one change in executive leadership since 1991 (and this took place with the irregular circumstance of President Boris Yeltsin's surprise resignation). This “liability of newness” facing the Russian state, highlighted in the literature on organizational and political development, has led to sharp political conflicts between the executive and legislative branches of power. The rules, norms, and divisions of power governing these relations are still highly uncertain.

Several other indicators also suggest the weak political capacity of the new Russian state. The inability of the state to collect taxes or to enforce federal laws at the regional level, and the absence of real political parties, are obvious signs of this weakness. The Russian state has also been unable to resist private pressure in key decision spheres. For example, enterprise managers were able to hijack the state's privatization program in pursuit of their own interests. The weakness of the Russian state prevents it from fulfilling its most basic functions, including collecting taxes, paying its own employees, and enforcing laws and the constitution.⁸⁹

A state so weakened that it cannot fulfill its most basic functions is of course doomed to extinction, hence something had to change: given the basic ideas of path-dependency theory, it is not surprising that the response to such governmental dysfunction was a return to deeply rooted patterns—back to a strong state, in other words, and not simply a rebalancing of state-society relations so as to provide for minimal state functionality. As noted above,

newly elected president Vladimir Putin was sufficiently determined to address these weak-state problems so as to make reassertion of vertical authority the centerpiece of his domestic political program. The manner and degree to which Putin succeeded in remediating Russia's weak state, and thus in bringing to Russia a state that is now quite strong in its relationship to society, suggests a historically causative connection. That connection, in turn, suggests a path-dependent replication by way of power asymmetry (state vs. society) reverting to long-term form by way of positive feedback in the form of the appearance of successive handling of Russia's problems that had bedeviled Yeltsin. In terms of the specifics of path-dependency theory, it appears that the political costs of remediation of the temporarily weakened state were lower in the form of reverting to authoritarian modes of governance than in the form of agonistic democracy: more positive feedback came to the regime by simply continuing with deeply rooted, neo-autocratic convention, albeit in novel forms. But has Russian society itself not undergone change in the transition from the Soviet to the Putin-Medvedev regimes?

Here the evidence from public opinion surveys presents an intriguing picture: on the one hand, some evidence suggests widespread public suspicion of an overly strong state vis-à-vis society, yet increasing support for the Putin regime as it created such a state. Specifically regarding the role of the media in society, over two-thirds of Russians surveyed viewed the state as a threat to press freedom (table 8), and most prefer a plurality of views expressed in the media (fig.4). Based on these surveys, the degree to which Russian public opinion supports a strong state—weak society configuration is questionable. As Remington points out (summing up research by James Gibson): “There is rather extensive support in Russia for democratic institutions and processes so long as people see these as rights for themselves; there is much less support for extending rights to unpopular minorities; and the segments of the population who are the most exposed to the influences of modern civilization (young people, better-educated people, and residents of large cities) are also those most likely to support democratic values. This would suggest that as Russia becomes more open to the outside world, support for democratic values will grow.”⁹⁰ Perhaps they will, and if so, then Sakwa's view (that a

democratic option is still open for Russia) could indeed materialize. If so, however, it would represent a critical juncture of the first sort in the form of a conscious choice having been made to put Russian governance on an alternative path. In the meantime, though, President Medvedev's stated goal of developing Russia as a democratic country open to outside influences has been severely compromised by post-Beslan legislation designed to restrict the influence of domestic and foreign civil society-type groups, and especially foreign ones.⁹¹ Nonetheless, by the end of the second Putin term, much evidence of a reappearance of a strong state had clearly materialized.

Restoration of a strong state might also enable Russia to resume its place among the major powers of the world, as called for in his June 2000 "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation."⁹² This foreign policy orientation,

Table 8: Views of Press Freedom

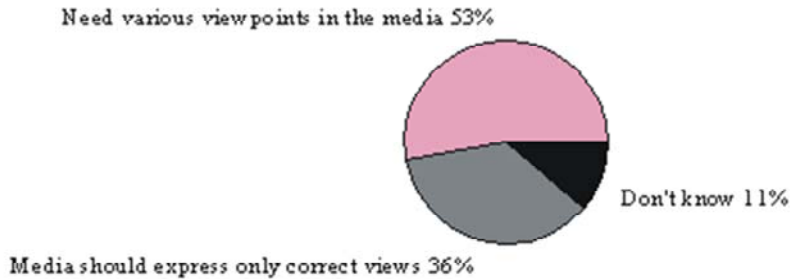
Can mass media under the control of a) the state and b) the "oligarchs" be considered independent?

	Controlled by	
	State	Oligarchs
Certainly can be independent	8	4
Probably can be independent	16	8
(Can be independent)	24	12
Probably cannot be independent	38	40
Certainly cannot be independent	26	36
(Cannot be independent)	64	76
Don't know	12	12

Source: Nationwide VCIOM survey, 18–22 January 2000, N=1600; http://www.russiavotes.org/admin/single_slide_display.php?sld=037 (accessed 7 September 2008).

Fig. 4: Media Preferences

Various points of view are expressed on TV, in newspapers and magazines about the authorities' policies and the situation in the country. With which of the following statements do you agree?



Source: Nationwide VCIOM survey, 20–23 April 2001, N=1600; http://www.russiavotes.org/admin/single_slide_display.php?sld=040 (accessed 7 September 2008).

in and of itself, can be seen as a continuation (or resumption) of Russian self-identity on the global stage since at least the early eighteenth century. Given the core orientations of this essay—that much of politics revolves around matters of interests, institutions, and identity, and that path-dependent forces constrain political choices—it will be useful to briefly consider some of the ways in which Russian political identity has reemerged in a manner that suggests the presence of long-term historical, indeed path-dependent forces.

Path Dependency and Russian Political Identity

One of the core elements of politics is the matter of identity, at the individual level and especially at the communal level. How can concepts from path-dependency theory help clarify the manner in which elements of Russian identity have appeared to replicate themselves and thus shape the character of government and politics, both historically and contemporarily? In 2000 Paul Pierson wrote that “recent work [on path-dependency theory] converges with the long-standing views of those who study political culture

as well as the recent contributions of cognitive science. Once established, basic outlooks on politics, ranging from ideologies to understandings of particular aspects of governments or orientations toward political groups or parties, are generally tenacious. They are path dependent. . . . there are reasons to anticipate that steps in a particular direction can trigger a self-reinforcing dynamic.”⁹³

One could argue that the entire process of political socialization, as the means by which political culture is transmitted generationally, has a fundamentally path-dependent character. In this case, positive feedback comes in myriad forms of raising the cost of political and social change by simply reinforcing the continuation of inherited modes of thought, behavior, and disposition. Trenin offers a particularly telling application of this idea to contemporary Russian politics and particularly to Russian political identity: “The Mongols came just as Russian national identity started to emerge. ‘Shaking off the Mongol yoke’ announced the birth of an independent Russian state. The two and a half centuries that lay between the Mongols’ coming and going mark the period of Russia’s gestation. This combination of Christian ‘soul’ and Asiatic political ways has forever stayed at the core of the Russian political identity. The Moscow grand dukes did not so much defeat the great Khans (or czars, as these Mongol rulers and the Byzantine Emperors before them had been known in Russia) as succeeded them and fully appropriate their legacy.”⁹⁴

In the realm of national security, survey evidence since the collapse of the USSR indicates a remarkable persistence of the long-harbored notion that Russia is beleaguered.

Perhaps this is understandable, given Russian history. Yet the underlying path-dependent consequence of this notion has resulted in long-term, mutually reinforcing, economic and political patterns that have perpetuated autocratic tendencies in governance. Hedlund makes much of this point: “In the previous chapters we have argued that over the centuries the Russian economy has been persistently underperforming. We have linked this underperformance to a strong preference for autocratic rule, which has precluded the formation of a society that is separated from the state by a set of individual rights, and we have argued that this type of rule has been sustained by a set of self-reinforcing social norms. The practical outcome has been what

Gerschenkron referred to as a distinctly ‘jerky’ pattern of economic development, all of which has been led by state-led forced mobilization of resources.”⁹⁵

Again following Pierson, if path-dependent forces are at work to effectively perpetuate economic patterns, they can be reasonably expected to have consequences that are at least as powerful in the more explicitly political realm. And as it turns out, they do in the case of Russia. Each of the four aspects of politics identified by Pierson that buttress the force of “increasing returns,” and thus enable path-dependent processes to replicate political patterns over time, are evident in the Putin-era authoritarian revival: the tendency for stability over time of patterns of collective action, the high density of institutions, the prevalence of power asymmetries in politics, and the complexity and opacity of politics. These tendencies in politics are useful to consider in light of Hedlund’s remarks regarding Russian historical patterns replicating themselves, *mutatis mutandis*, into the contemporary era:

Accepting that throughout Russian history there have indeed been a number of occasions where choices were being offered, and where the path dependence could have been broken, partly or wholly, we must ask what is it that has produced such persistently negative selection of inferior solutions [to optimal economic growth]. In the previous chapter we have suggested a partial answer to that question, in terms of an overriding preference for security over material well-being. . . . Over the centuries Russians have sought to enhance war-fighting capabilities of their country by deploying methods of forced resource extraction, which in turn has led to a reduction in overall production possibilities. . . . Arguments of the latter kind are important in highlighting that the institutional arrangements may well have been rational at the outset, under conditions of severe security threats and poor resource endowments. Over time, however, the focus on resource extraction and the associated suppression of markets and entrepreneurship became increasingly anachronistic.⁹⁶

Although Hedlund’s remarks pertain mostly to the near-obsessive fixation on national security, much the same could be said for the tendencies in Russian governance examined previously in this essay, namely the penchant for essentially monocratic political authority, the centralization of that authority geographically, and a strong state—weak society configuration. In any case, however, the national security aspect of Russian identity is reflected in the question of perceived threats to Russian security (table 9). It is

also reflected in the "neo-Eurasianist" orientation of Russian foreign policy, particularly during the second Putin administration and the leadership succession in spring 2008 from Putin to Medvedev.⁹⁷

Table 9. Perceived Threats to Russian Security

<i>Do you think that any of the following countries could be a substantial threat to the security of Russia?</i>						
	(% perceiving some or big threat)					
	2000a (January)	2000b (April)	2001	2003	2005	2007
USA	49	45	48	48	49	54
National minorities	44	56	44	47	48	30
Immigrants/refugees					37	24
Germany	15	18	11	11	17	14
Islamic countries				38		
China			22	31		
Iraq	25		18			
EU	23		18			
Ukraine	10		8			

Source: New Russia Barometer, numbers VIII, IX, X, XI, XIV, XV;
http://www.russiavotes.org/security/security_russia_place.php?PHPSESSID=7991b27ac4b8574970e795737948c4ba#nrb1 (accessed 20 February 2008).

Russian political identity has historical roots in Orthodox Christianity dating to the tenth century, and this aspect of Russian political and cultural history has been intensively explored for centuries. It is axiomatic that Russian identity is closely tied to Orthodoxy, both at the level of mass consciousness and once again in terms of regime legitimation, oddly enough given the seventy-four years of concerted antireligious practices of the Soviet regime. The political consequences of the religion-and-politics nexus have also been examined exhaustively, with predictably differing conclusions regarding the effect of Russian Orthodoxy on Russia's prospects for democratization. The general consensus in the West, however, is that Russian Orthodoxy over the centuries has not served to push Russian culture, or political institutions, in the direction of public authority that sees itself as directly, periodically, and ultimately accountable to the people. Rather, it has tended to buttress an autocratic conception of public authority both at the level of abstract ideas and in concrete social and political practice.⁹⁸ This is not to say that Orthodoxy is inimical to modern republican conceptions of government being directly accountable to, and responsive to, popular will. Arguably it is not.⁹⁹ Further, there is considerable evidence that the post-Soviet regime has sought to conscript the Orthodox identity referent to bolster the legitimacy of the state, even while retaining the letter of the formal-constitutional secular character of that state.¹⁰⁰ The spirit of that secularity, however, clearly reflects the post-Petrine tradition of subjugation of the church to state control domestically, and episodic use of the church and its emotional capital to buttress foreign policy initiatives as well (as in the Chechen conflict or the military incursion into Georgia in August 2008).

Conclusion

Core elements of Russian political life display evidence of path-dependent reinforcement throughout much of Russian history, and reappearing in the wake of the Yeltsin interlude from the period of perestroika and collapse of the USSR in 1991 to the reassertion of vertical authority of the Putin years. These elements include political authority that is monocratic in nature; authoritarian to the point of being neo-autocratic in practice, if not also in theory; ideally centralized in form and practice;

embodied in a strong state presiding over a rather weak society (as state-society relations are generally conceived in Western literature on civil society).

There is also a tendency for national self-definition to harbor something of a bunker mentality in which fear of threat, combined with a conviction of grand-scale national purpose, reinforce a primacy on security regarding concrete policies. Under the Putin regime, the soil for such a siege mentality was fertilized by several very real threats. As noted by Sakwa, these included exiled but conspiring oligarchs, the regionally expanding Chechnya insurgency, and the color revolutions.¹⁰¹ The aggregate costs of proceeding along a democratic path appear to have been less, in concrete political terms, than an authoritarian reversion.¹⁰² Although the premium placed on national security is hardly unique to Russia, the combination of the final element above, along with the preceding three, has served to reinforce over time strong autocratic traits in Russian governance. Such traits have been long noted, and are echoed in many contemporary analyses, particularly regarding Russian relations with former Soviet territories. These traits have also been noted to be deeply rooted in the past:

The unfortunate and persisting reality is that Russia translates any political move that is not favored by the Kremlin as a direct affront and infringement on Russia's national interests. Imbedded deeply in the national psyche is a fear of being left out, of becoming isolated and irrelevant. In the words of a Russian analyst, "the fear of being isolated, marginalized . . . in Europe . . . [is a fear that] goes deep into Russian history. There is a perception in Russia that we are not considered Europeans, and we are literally pushed out of Europe."¹⁰³ If Russia's security cannot be secured other than by surrounding itself with countries that have pro-Russian governments, then Russia must feel very insecure. As the largest country in the world, with abundant natural and human resources, with nuclear weapons and advanced military technology, this insecurity is problematic and indicative of old mentalities.¹⁰⁴

Thus, deeply rooted tendencies in the domestic governance of Russia, as elsewhere, have significant foreign policy implications as well. Several interesting questions immediately emerge from such considerations. To what degree might the temporal factor in political patterns be ascertained and demonstrated? Might the bases of preference for autocratic modes of political

control among a given population be as deeply rooted as the biological—and specifically neurological—particularities of a given people? Recent research in neurology and political psychology give reason to pause before summarily dismissing such suggestions. If so, then the path dependent nature of a given people's political orientation might indeed go much, much deeper even than conceived and articulated by Hedlund, Pierson, and others.¹⁰⁵ In that case, they would derive from the complex interaction of biological tendencies and patterns with human agency, rational or otherwise.

In any case, there are significant implications of the traits of Russian political habits and behavior that show path-dependent characteristics. If indeed the roots of such habits and behavior are deeply grounded historically, then they are not likely to be meaningfully altered by short-term pressures (such as castigations by the U.S. State Department, the EU, or others). Another implication is that research on Russian political behavior might be usefully shifted from Pierson's Quadrant I (short time-horizon of cause, and short time-horizon of effects) regarding investigations into political causation to Quadrants II, III, and IV (fig. 5).

Finally, consideration of path-dependent characteristics of Russian politics might usefully inform investigations of a wide array of issues in comparative politics, including causes and conditions of democratization. Perhaps even more so, they might shed invaluable light on the processes of de-democratization, as argued by Charles Tilly.

Freedom House's ratings illustrate Russia's de-democratization but miss the arc of state capacity: from high in the period before the Gorbachev reforms to declining during the Yeltsin years, then back sensationally to high levels under Putin. The two trends are obviously connected; Putin's regime was aggressively expanding state capacity as it squeezed out democracy. Yet in one regard Putin may surprisingly have been promoting longer-term changes that will eventually facilitate Russian democratization (Trenin, 2000). Although he was permitting the Russian military dangerously broad autonomy in the Caucasus, he was also subordinating capitalists who had acquired extraordinary independence from state control. If, in the future, the Russian state again becomes subject to protected, mutually binding consultation in dialogue with a broad, relatively equal citizenry, we may look back to Putin as the autocrat who took the first undemocratic steps toward that outcome.¹⁰⁶

Fig. 5: Time Horizon of Outcome: Historical Cause and Effect

		Time Horizon of <i>outcome</i>	
		short	long
Time Horizon of <i>cause</i>	short	I	II
	long	III	IV

Source: Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 92.

Perhaps this is so, perhaps not. Path-dependence theory, however, sheds valuable light on how such processes might unfold. Given the indeterminate character of human history and political affairs, and given Pierson's insights regarding the innate contingency and determinism even within positive-feedback historical sequences, it does appear safe to regard the Putin phase of Russia's governance as both an expression of path-dependent inertia and a self-reinforcing feedback loop. Whether it will be subsequently viewed as a critical juncture toward the sort of change pondered by Tilly, above, or whether it will come to represent a step in another feedback loop toward another long-range round of neo-autocracy, must await the “falling of dusk” and the “spreading of Minerva's wings.” Path-dependency theory cannot answer the question itself, and suggests that such a question cannot be answered prospectively. Nonetheless it provides a highly useful service by helping us understand why we must wait in order to know.

Notes

1. Arch Puddington, “Freedom of Association Under Threat: The New Authoritarians’ Offensive Against Civil Society,” (November 13, 2008), *Freedom House: Special Report Section*. November 13, 2008, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=145&parent=13&report=74> (accessed 8 June 2011).
2. Ivan Krastev, “Paradoxes of the New Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 2 (April 2011): 8.
3. Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 344.
4. M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).
5. These include Peter Baker and Susan Glasser, *Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin's Russia and the End of Revolution* (New York: Lisa Drew / Scribner, 2005); Andrew Jack, *Inside Putin's Russia: Can There Be Reform without Democracy?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Allen C. Lynch, *How Russia Is Not Ruled: Reflections on Russian Political Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Alfred B. Evans, Jr., Luara A. Henry, and Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom, eds., *Russian Civil Society: A Critical Assessment* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2006); Dmitri Trenin, *Getting Russia Right* (Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007); and Lilia Shevtsova, *Russia—Lost in Transition : The Yeltsin and Putin Legacies* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007).
6. Richard Sakwa, *The Crisis of Russian Democracy: The Dual State, Factionalism, and the Medvedev Succession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1.
7. Yuri Pivovarov, and Alexei Fursov, *Polis*, 2005, cited from V. A. Dubovtsev and N. S. Rozov, “Priroda ‘Russkoi vlasti’: ot metafor k kontseptsii,” [“The Nature of ‘Russian Authority’: From Metaphor to Concept”], *Polis*, no. 3, 2007: 8–23). In the original Russian: “Почему происходит такое возвращение? Почему недолгие периоды демократии — а в XX столетии мы

сталкивались с ними дважды — неизбежно уходят? И почему даже эти кратковременные всплески публичной политики расцениваются пронизательными русскими аналитиками как вынужденно-переходные формы и этапы аутентичного, равного самому себе, неизменного в принципе русского исторического бытования?” (8).

8. Stefan Hedlund, *Russian Path Dependence: A People with a Troubled History* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
9. David A. Paul, "Path Dependence, Its Critics and the Quest for 'Historical Economics'," Working Paper, 2000.
<http://www.econ.stanford.edu/faculty/workp/swp00011.pdf> (accessed 19 February 2008).
10. Hedlund writes that path-dependence theory in economics, as a form of "historical economics," "provides an important bridge between the traditional disciplines of economics and history, a bridge that is somewhat different from that already existing in the form of economic history. Where the latter is aimed, in a broader sense, at applying the tools of economic analysis to problems that are lodged in the past, 'historical economics' would be more specifically concerned with explaining matters of causation over the long run. . . . The point is that there has been insufficient attention paid to the full range of such factors that in various ways may influence processes of historical change. As originally suggested by Paul David [sic], in connection with his proposed theory of path dependence, the notion of 'historical economics' symptomatically comes across as a caution to fellow economists that more attention will indeed have to be paid to matters of long-run causation." *Russian Path Dependence*, 23.
11. Robert Horvath, "Putin's 'Preventive Counter-Revolution': Post-Soviet Authoritarianism and the Spectre of Velvet Revolution," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no.1 (January 2011): 1–25; see also Sakwa, *Crisis of Russian Democracy*, 20–21.
12. Paul Pierson, "Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics," *American Political Science Review*, 94, no. 2 (June 2000): 251–267.
13. Giovanni Cappocia and R. Daniel Kelemen, "The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism," *World Politics* 59 (April 2007), 341–369.

14. Paul Pierson, "Big, Slow-Moving, and . . . Invisible: Macrosocial Processes in the Study of Comparative Politics," in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 202–203. Also in the same volume, Peter A. Hall, "Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Research," 373–404: "Comparative politics is a river with many currents, but as Lijphart (1975), 165 notes, there has been a 'postwar trend in comparative politics' toward statistical methods, based preeminently on the standard regression model. Influential texts now give priority to such approaches, and many scholars have become critical of other methods (Geddes, 1990; King, Keohane and Verba, 1994; Goldthorpe, 1997). Over the same time period, the ontologies of the field have moved in a different direction: toward theories such as those based on path dependence or strategic interaction, whose conceptions of the causal structures underlying outcomes are at odds with the assumptions required for standard regression techniques and conventional comparative method to provide valid causal references" (374–375).
15. This approach is expanded to an introductory comparative politics text by Jeffrey Kopstein and Mark Lichbach, in *Comparative Politics: Interests, Identities, and Institutions in a Changing Global Order*, 2d ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). They summarize thus: "First, people are rational beings who pursue their interests. Second, people are meaning-seeking beings who are defined by their identities. Third, people's interests and identities are shaped and pursued within institutions. Interests, identities, and institutions are all, in turn, shaped . . . by the global context of development. The global context of development, therefore, matters to comparativists because it produces certain patterns of interests, identities, and institutions that persist over time and shape the countries in which we live" (22).
16. Hedlund, *Russian Path Dependence, Russia's "Market" Economy: A Bad Case of Predatory Capitalism* (London: UCL Press, 1999), and "Path Dependence in Russian Policy Making: Constraints on Putin's Economic Choice," *Post-Communist Economies* 12, no. 4 (December 2000): 389–407. Allen C. Lynch also explicitly applies a path-dependency approach to understanding the entrenchment of neo-autocratic rule in *How Russia is Not Ruled* 82, 93–94, and 167–169; and Michael McFaul, "Institutional Design, Uncertainty, and Path

- Dependency during Transitions: Cases from Russia," *Constitutional Political Economy* 10, no. 1 (March 1999): 27–56.
17. Interestingly, Nicolai Petro had argued early in the Yeltsin years that Russian democracy was being reborn in the postcommunist era and that significant strains of democratic political culture had existed in Russia for centuries, although persistently thwarted. *The Rebirth of Russian Democracy: An Interpretation of Political Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). If indeed democracy was reborn, it seems clear by the end of the second Putin administration that it was stillborn.
 18. Pierson, "Big, Slow-Moving," 177–178.
 19. McFaul concludes similarly: "No institutional design is ever permanently stable. Because Russia is still mid-stream in one of the greatest economic, political, and social transformations in the history of the modern world, we must still be humble and cautious about making any predictions about the long-term viability of any institution. And like all institutions everywhere, we will only know if Russia's new institutions have failed after the fact. . . . Rather than make predictions about the long-term viability of any institution, this paper more modestly has attempted to specify the reasons why some institutional designs outlive the original balance of power and preferences that created them, and why other designs do not" ("Institutional Design 48").
 20. Pierson, "Big, Slow-Moving," 197.
 21. Hall, "Aligning Ontology and Methodology." Here it is also useful to bear in mind Pierson's terse but powerful comment regarding the crucial aspect of sequencing in historical causation: "Path dependent arguments point to the significance of sequencing—the temporal order in which social events or processes unfold. Most variable-oriented research assumes a world without positive feedback, where history washes out and sequence is irrelevant. We only need to know the values of variables at the moment of interest, not the sequence through which these factors developed. In path-dependent processes, however, positive feedback means that history is 'remembered.' These processes can be highly influenced by relatively modest perturbations at early stages. . . . Thus, *when a particular event in a sequence occurs will make a big difference*" ("Big, Slow-moving," 44–45, emphasis in original).
 22. Sakwa, "Crisis of Russian Democracy," 1–3.

23. Jacob Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State: The Battle over Public and Private Social Benefits in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 54, quoted in Pierson, “Big, Slow-Moving,” 21. Pierson discusses in this context and elsewhere the innate problem of the expansive nature of path dependency as a concept.
24. Thomas Carothers, “Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve,” (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999). See also Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), and *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World* (New York: Times Books, 2008).
25. “Democracy's Century: A Survey of Global Political Change in the 20th Century,” (New York: Freedom House), <http://www.freedomhouse.org> (accessed 19 February 2008)
26. Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and Leonardo A. Villalon and Peter VonDoepp, eds., *The Fate of Democratic Experiments in Africa: Elites and Institutions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).
27. Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 186–187.
28. Adrian Karatnycky, “The 1999 Freedom House Survey: A Century of Progress,” *Journal of Democracy*, 11, no. 1 (2000): 195.
29. Arch Puddington, “Freedom in the World 2007: Freedom Stagnation Amid Pushback Against Democracy,” *Freedom House Essays: 2007 Edition*, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=130&year=2007> (accessed 19 February 2008); <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2004> (accessed 21 February 2008).
30. Jeffrey S. Kopstein and David A. Reilly, “Geographic Diffusion and the Transformation of the Postcommunist World,” *World Politics* 53, no. 1 (2000): 1–37.
31. Hedlund, *Russian Path Dependence*, 224, 253.
32. *Ibid.*, 243.

33. Trenin, *Getting Russia Right*, 9. Regarding the truncation of the legislature, see M. Steven Fish, "Creative Constitutions: How Do Parliamentary Powers Shape the Electoral Arena?," in Andreas Schedler, *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2006), 181–198, and also Fish's more expansive "Stronger Legislatures, Stronger Democracies," *Journal of Democracy* 17, no. 1 (2006), 5–20.
34. James L. Gibson and Raymond M. Duch, "Emerging Democratic Values in Soviet Political Culture," in Arthur H. Miller, William M. Reisinger, and Vicki L. Hesli, eds., *Public Opinion and Regime Change: The New Politics of Post-Soviet Societies* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 69–94; James L. Gibson, "The Resilience of Support for Democratic Institutions and Processes in the Nascent Russian and Ukrainian Democracies," in Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., *Political Culture and Civil Society in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1995), 53–111.
35. Hedlund, *Russian Path Dependence*, 224.
36. Pierson "Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics," *American Political Science Review*, 94, no. 2 (June 2000), 258.
37. Dubovtsev and Rozov, "Priroda."
38. For a useful summary of this concept and its pertinence to post-Soviet Russia, see Thomas F. Remington, *Politics in Russia*, 5th ed., (New York: Pearson / Longman, 2008), 87–91.
39. Michael Urban, *Cultures of Power in Post-Communist Russia: An Analysis of Elite Political Discourse* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 79, 179.
40. Pierson, "Increasing Returns," 259.
41. Ibid.
42. Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III.
43. Urban, *Cultures of Power*, 42–53. He asks: "Despite massive changes in regime over the past century, from tsarism to communism to republicanism, authoritarianism has persistently characterized the prevailing political order. Why?" His answer is that in discursive aspects of political life, democratic

- accountability and responsibility are conspicuously absent, and in a manner that replicates itself over time (187).
44. Tatu Vanhanen, *Prospects of Democracy: A Study of 172 Countries* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 42–66.
 45. Ian Bremmer, *The J-Curve: A New Way of Understanding Why Nations Rise and Fall* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006).
 46. Pierson, “Increasing Returns,” 260.
 47. Ibid.
 48. Margaret Mead, *Soviet Attitudes Toward Authority: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Problems of Soviet Character* (New York: Schocken Books, 1951).
 49. John T. Cacioppo and Penny S. Visser, “Political Psychology and Social Neuroscience: Strange Bedfellows or Comrades in Arms?,” *Political Psychology* 24, no. 4 (December 2003): 647–656; this issue is devoted largely to the general theme of neuroscience and political psychology. In the realm of language acquisition, developmental processes in the brain are highly path dependent: e.g., Japanese speakers who were never exposed, as infants, to European-language “r” and “l”-related phonemes experience extreme difficulty, if not outright impossibility, of making these sounds—evidently due to neurological reasons. Might similar patterns of thought, as well as expression in language, be neurologically based?
 50. Pierson writes that “the need to employ mental maps induces increasing returns. This is true both at the individual level and at the group level, as ‘communities of discourse’ often come to share and reproduce a similar ideology (Wuthnow, 1989). This recent work converges with long-standing views of those who study political culture as well as the recent contributions of cognitive science” (“Increasing Returns,” 260).
 51. Ibid. See also Urban, *Cultures of Power*, especially chap. 3, “Community,” 69–90.
 52. Pierson, “Increasing Returns,” 259. See also Kathleen Thelen, who devotes considerable attention to how institutions evolve, while retaining much of their earlier forms, in “How Institutions Evolve: Insights from Comparative Historical Analysis,” in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., *Comparative*

Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 208–240.

53. Giovanni Capoccia and R. Daniel Kelemen, "The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism," *World Politics* 59 (April 2007): 341–369, esp. 343: "The paucity of conceptual instruments available to define, study, and compare critical junctures is striking when compared with the rich conceptual apparatus (for example, increasing returns, lock-in, sequencing) used to analyze path-dependent processes themselves."
54. Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 10–14.
55. The theoretical innovations of Taylor C. Boas along the lines of a "composite-standard" variation of path-dependency theory are noteworthy here; these innovations may well shed even further light on self-replicating patterns of governance even while substantial change is occurring in the large context of that replication. His explication of "layering effects" and "conversion" are particularly insightful in this regard. Taylor C. Boas, "Conceptualizing Continuity and Change: The Composite-Standard Model of Path Dependence," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 19, no. 1 (2007): 33–54.
56. "We may turn to a study by Tim McDaniel, which charts a history of 'cyclical breakdowns,' of attempted reforms that harbour within themselves the seeds of their own failure: 'Reform in Russia: over the centuries it has always failed, sometimes to be replaced by a reactionary regime (Alexander III's reversal of Alexander II's "great reforms" of the 1860s and 1870s), and sometimes culminating in the collapse of the system (1917 and 1991)' (McDaniel, 1996, 147). What McDaniel shows, without making specific reference to this area of research, is a powerful Russian path dependence, entrenched in a Russian ideology, as represented in a set of private mental models of the surrounding world (also Hedlund, 1999, chapter 8). His work has been strongly influenced by the Russian semiotician Yuri Lotman's writings about the Russian binary logic of oppositions." (Hedlund, 395).
57. This trait has been noted by historians for centuries, and with good reason. David Remnick's *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), summarized the point well, and in doing so, clearly

grasped the self-replicating nature of this aspect of governance in Russia's history: "The history of the spirit's subservience to state authority goes back centuries before the first Bolshevik. As opposed to the Catholic Church, which developed its independent structures after the fall of the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Church was always dependent on the state. The Byzantine emperors presided over all the synods of the church and were considered 'God on Earth.' In a sign of things to come, the great dukes of the early Moscow period urged the clergy to reveal the mysteries of confession, especially if state security was at issue" (360–361).

58. Fish, *Democracy Derailed*. See also Lynch, *How Russia Is Not Ruled*, particularly 82–84 and 167–169; Shevtsova, *Russia—Lost in Transition*; Trenin, *Getting Russia Right*; and Richard Sakwa, *Crisis of Russian Democracy*.
59. See Alexei Kuznetsov, "Russian Companies Expand Foreign Investments," *Russian Analytical Digest*, No. 34 (February 5, 2008), 2: "The largest investors are typically Russian integrated business groups with subsidiaries mainly in oil and gas, ferrous and nonferrous metals, telecommunications, and machinery. Nevertheless, big businesses are not the only Russian companies expanding their presence abroad. Many other companies, both in and outside the resource sector, are establishing themselves in foreign markets. The main destinations for Russian investment expansion are the CIS (30 percent of Russian FDI stock) and the European Union (almost 40 percent of FDI stock). While the role of North America is growing gradually, most Russian TNCs prefer to work in their immediate neighborhood." Vladimir Shlapentokh explores the manner in which the concentration of wealth in Russia has stymied democracy in "Big Money as an Obstacle to Democracy in Russia," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 24 (2008): 512–530.
60. Dmitrii Medvedev, "Власть существует не для себя самой," Выступление Дмитрия Медведева на Гражданском форуме [Authority does not exist for its own sake], speech at the Civic Forum transcribed and printed in *Izvestiya*, 24 January 2008, www.izvestia.ru/politic/article3112249/index.html (accessed 30 January 2008). In the original Russian, С одной стороны, мы во многом вернулись к нашим традициям, к собственным культурным ценностям. Именно они и составляют нашу национальную идентичность. И при этом являются неотъемлемой частью всей мировой цивилизации. . . . С другой стороны (здесь нечего стесняться), у нас уже есть собственный и очень ценный, пусть и противоречивый, опыт жизни в условиях реальной

демократии. Демократии и политической, и экономической. А сформированные за это время демократические институты успели доказать свою состоятельность, несмотря на проблемы в их развитии.

61. Fish, "Stronger Legislatures."
62. Henry E. Hale, *Why Not Parties in Russia? Democracy, Federalism, and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 236.
63. Pierson, "Increasing Returns," 259.
64. Regarding the conscious and deliberate push in Russia toward a de facto one-party system, see Hale, *Why Not Parties in Russia?* See also Sakwa, *Crisis of Russian Democracy*, (2011), 13–15.
65. Fish, "Stronger Legislatures," 12–13.
66. See Donald Ostrowski, *Muscovy and the Mongols: Cross-Cultural Influences on the Steppe Frontier, 1304–1589* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), and James W. Warhola, "Revisiting the Russian 'Constrained Autocracy': 'Absolutism' and Natural Rights Theories in Russia and the West," in Christopher Marsh and Nikolas K. Gvosdev, eds., *Civil Society and the Search for Justice in Russia* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Press, 2002), 19–39.
67. Lynch, *How Russia Is Not Ruled*, esp. chap. 4, "Russia's 'Neopatrimonial' Political System, 1992–2004," 128–165. Lynch is among the few political scientists who specifically references and employs path-dependency theory in his characterization of the post-Soviet regime (82, 93, 169–70).
68. Giovanni Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry into Structures, Incentives, and Outcomes* 2d ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1997): "The Yeltsin Constitution is considered semi-presidential in that it was inspired by the French model. However, it stands, like the constitution of Sri Lanka, at the extreme edge of the category. The Russian president appoints the prime minister and his deputy; but if the Duma rejects their nomination three times, then the president may dissolve the lower house and call for new elections. And the same applies to a no-confidence vote in the government expressed twice. What I read between the lines of these provisions is that the president must win anyhow. And the efficient secret of the French formula—an oscillating diarchy—is completely lost in its Russian reformulation. The Yeltsin constitution is essentially monocratic; and when a president does not control a

- majority in the Duma, the executive-parliament relation is left to confrontation. If this is a semi-presidential system, it is an ill-conceived one” (138–139).
69. Ronald F. Inglehart and Christian Welzel, "The Theory of Human Development: A Cross-Cultural Analysis," *European Journal of Social Research* 42, no. 3 (2003): 341.
 70. Hedlund, "Path Dependence," 395.
 71. Sartori and Grigorii Rummyantsev, among others, raised serious questions about the democratic prospects of the post-Soviet regime quite soon after the 1993 constitution was crafted and ratified; see Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering*, 121–140, and Oleg G. Rummyantsev, *Osnovi Konstitutsionnogo Stroya Rossii* (Moscow: Iurist, 1995), which is devoted entirely to the theme of the ill-advised construction, ratification, and application of the Yeltsin constitution, largely from the perspective of its replication of the historical traits of concentration of authority and lack of effective checks and balances on state power.
 72. For the deepest intellectual roots of this idea, see Joseph Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought* (London: Routledge, 1996), 1–8.
 73. See Timothy Colton, *Transitional Citizens: Voters and What Influences them in the New Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), esp. chap. 1, "Subjects into Citizens," 1–33.
 74. Bremmer, *The J-Curve*.
 75. This is arguably true despite the otherwise sound claim by Trenin (2007) regarding the unprecedented degree of openness of Russia even as Putin further aggrandized power increasingly in his second term. Trenin refers to a different aspect of openness, I would argue, than Bremmer. It is one thing, for example, to be open to trade, ideas, etc.—and quite another to be "open" regarding the permissibility of genuinely efficacious political opposition movements, and in this sense, the Putin regime is distinctively neo-autocratic, as Trenin freely recognizes. See *Getting Russia Right*, esp. 17–19.
 76. Brian D. Taylor's works on this theme include "Russia's Passive Army: Rethinking Military Coups," *Comparative Political Studies* 34, no. 8 (2001): 924–956; "The Soviet Military and the Disintegration of the USSR," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 17–66; and more expansively, *Politics and the Russian Army: Civil-Military Relations, 1689–2000* (New York:

Cambridge University Press, 2003). He finds an "organizational culture" approach most useful in explaining the lack of military coups throughout Russian history, even through the turmoil of the 1990s: "An organizational culture approach to military involvement in sovereign power issues, then, focuses on the norms held by officers on the question of who should rule the state. Actors' behavior cannot be understood simply with reference to their forward-looking utility calculations; their socially formed subjective understandings and values also must be considered. Armies with different norms will respond differently (intervene or not intervene) to the same stimuli. In addition, norms often serve as a guide to action under conditions of uncertainty" ("Russia's Passive Army," 932).

77. Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army*, 259–269.
78. Ruslan Khasbulatov, "Yeltsin Destroyed Parliamentary Democracy in Russia," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, September 29, 2008, http://www.rferl.org/content/Yeltsin_Destroyed_Parliamentary_Democracy_In_Russia/1292496.html (accessed 17 October 2008). See also his *The Struggle for Russia: Power and Change in the Democratic Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1993), 215–221.
79. McFaul, "Institutional Design," 37.
80. James W. Warhola, "Is the Russian Federation Becoming More Democratic? Moscow-Regional Relations and the Development of the Post-Soviet Russian State," *Democratization* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 55–58.
81. Daniel Triesman, *The Architecture of Government: Rethinking Political Decentralization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–5, and 271–274. Triesman's grand conclusion is that decentralization in and of itself cannot necessarily be counted upon to bring the virtues claimed by its advocates: "In short, it is hard to reach any general conclusions about whether political—or administrative or fiscal—decentralization will improve or impair the quality of government and economic performance. They will have many effects, driving in different directions on different dimensions. These effects depend on numerous conditions, many of which are difficult to disentangle in theory and practice, as one would expect, empirical studies have found almost no solid, general results about the consequences of decentralization. Decentralizing government in a particular place and time is very much a leap into the dark" (274).

82. Cameron Ross, "Federalism and Electoral Authoritarianism Under Putin," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 13, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 355.
83. Vladimir Gel'man, "Party Politics in Russia: From Competition to Hierarchy," *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 6 (September 2008): 913–930; see also Thomas Remington, "Patronage and the Party of Power: President-Parliament Relations Under Vladimir Putin," *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 6 (September 2008): 959–987, for an examination of the way in which Putin used the party as a vehicle for aggrandizing his power, and how the party itself used this opportunity for entrenching itself in power. See also Hale, *Why Not Parties in Russia?*
84. Stephen K. Wegren and Andrew Konitzer, "Prospects for Managed Democracy in Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 6 (September 2007): 1045.
85. Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought* 8–11. Significantly, this concept was embraced in early Christian thought to justify imperial authority and continued to do so in Byzantium. The idea was also, thus, embraced in early Russian concepts of authority, and perhaps remains a psychological fixture, even quite unconsciously, until the present time.
86. Trenin, *Getting Russia Right*, 24. See also Urban, *Cultures of Power*, 177–189. Nevertheless, Putin and Medvedev have increasingly "talked-the-talk" about democracy, civil society, good governance, etc. See, for example, virtually any of Putin's or Medvedev's speeches at www.kremlin.ru.
87. This general formulation is used by Goran Hyden to compare Africa's characteristically weak states with states elsewhere; drawing on James C. Scott (*Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed*; New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998), Jeffrey Herbst (*States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) and Joel Midgal (*Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), Hyden establishes a typology according to which states are considered on continua of "weak to strong" (vertical axis) and "firm to soft" (horizontal axis): "States differ in their capacity to act autonomously: a strong state is one that is capable of shaping society rather than being shaped by it; a weak state is the opposite—it fails to exercise such control. States also differ in terms of how closely officials adhere to rules, be they procedures, law, or constitutions. A state is firm when its officials act in

accordance with formal rules and thus provide a measure of certainty as to what can be expected. A state is soft when officials do not follow these formal rules but find ways of circumventing or subverting them on their own or in collusion with others. . . . That problem that states face in their interaction with society is not just in terms of their capacity to exercise social control of groups in society. It is also, as the figure suggests, a matter of how easily the state can be penetrated by groups in society using informal means to acquire influence." Goran Hyden, *African Politics in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 68–69. Although his focus is on Africa, most of whose states he describes as both "weak" and "soft," the model is applicable to Russia under Putin, whose aspirations were clearly to be a "strong" state, albeit "soft" regarding the delimitation of state power by legal-constitutional means.

88. Lynch, *How Russia Is Not Ruled*, 31–32.
89. Taylor, "Russia's Passive Army," 932–933.
90. Remington, *Politics in Russia*, 127.
91. Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 186–201.
92. "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm> (accessed 15 September 2008)
93. Pierson, "Increasing Returns," 260.
94. Trenin, *Getting Russia Right*, 53. For more on this legacy and its Mongol-Tatar derived roots, see Ostrowski, *Muscovy and the Mongols*. See also Warhola, "Revisiting the Russian 'Constrained Autocracy'" in *Civil Society and the Search for Justice in Russia*, 19–39.
95. Hedlund, *Russian Path Dependence*, 307–308.
96. *Ibid.*, 307–308, 310.
97. Andreas Umland, "Moscow's Rising Influence Peddler: A Russian Imperialist, linked to neo-fascism, is the new head of ideology of Vladimir Putin's United Russia Party," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), March 17, 2008, A13.
98. For a succinct overview of the range of views on this matter, with links to related literature, see Christopher Marsh, ed., *Burden or Blessing? Russian*

- Orthodoxy and the Construction of Civil Society and Democracy* (Boston: Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs, Boston University, 2004).
99. See in particular Nikolas K. Gvosdev, *Emperors and Elections: Reconciling the Orthodox Tradition with Modern Politics* (Huntington, NY: Troitsa Books, 2000), and by the same author, *Eastern Perspectives on Church-State Relations: Ideology and Models of Interaction* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001).
100. See, however, James W. Warhola, "The Kremlin's Religion Temptation," *Current History*, volume 106, issue no. 702 (October 2007), 340–345; "Political Order, Identity, and Security in Multinational, Multi-Religious Russia," with Alex Lehning, *The Nationalities Papers* 35, no. 5 (November 2007): 945–968; and "Religion and Politics Under the Putin Administration: Accommodation and Confrontation within 'Managed Pluralism,'" *The Journal of Church and State* 49, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 75–95.
101. Sakwa, *Crisis of Russian Democracy*, 30.
102. Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 339–343. Significantly, they refer to the costs of one or another course of action by political elites; without referencing the concepts of path dependence and specifically increasing returns, it seems clear that their analysis at least implicitly recognizes that the outworking of political processes—especially involving situations of regime fluidity and fluctuation—involves such considerations.
103. Andrei Kortunov, in "Uneasy Alliance," PBS News Hour, February 7, 1997. This citation is from endnote no. 1, chapter 5 of Georgeta Pourchot, *Eurasia Rising: Democracy and Independence in the Post-Soviet Space* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008), 170.
104. Pourchot, *Eurasia Rising*, 119, 142.
105. See Jean-Pierre Changeux, *The Physiology of Truth: Neuroscience and Human Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); and Sam Harris, et. al., "Functional Neuroimaging of Belief, Disbelief, and Uncertainty," *The Annals of Neurology* 63, no. 2 (February 2008), 141–147.
106. Charles Tilly, *Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 137.

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