

Introduction

THIS BOOK HAS its origins in a paper I wrote half a decade ago.¹ In it I suggested ways that would provide more rigorous answers than were then extant to a question that has animated policy makers, scholars, and plain folk for more than a century and a half, to wit, “Is Russia, was it, or will it ever be a normal country?”—by which people usually have had Western democracy in mind.² The first president of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, declared in 1994 that “we [Russians] live in a normal country.” Indeed, so determined was he to make this claim that the first chapter of his book *The Struggle for Russia* was titled “A Normal Country.”³ A decade later the Harvard economist Andrei Shleifer, writing either alone or with Daniel Treisman, a political scientist at UCLA, published a book and a series of papers, including a lead article in *Foreign Affairs* titled “A Normal Country.”⁴ In these publications, they advanced the argument that Russia’s political and economic system was about what one would expect for a country at its level of development—which at their time of writing was what the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) coded as a midlevel developing country. Their work in turn resulted in critical assessments in *Post-Soviet Affairs* by Peter T. Leeson and William N. Trumbull in 2006 and by me in 2007.⁵

The project turned out differently than I expected. Thinking about whether Russia was a normal country helped me organize my thoughts about the evolution of Russian politics. I have used simple statistical measures in comparing the Russian Federation with other states. I

¹William Zimmerman, “‘Normal Democracies’ and Improving How They Are Measured: The Case of Russia,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (January–March 2007), pp. 1–17. See also Peter T. Leeson and William N. Trumbull, “Comparing Apples: Normalcy, Russia and the Remaining Post-Socialist World,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (April–June 2006), pp. 225–49.

²There are exceptions. See, for instance, Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* (New York: Scribner, 1974), p. xxii, who asserts, “Russia belongs *par excellence* [italics in original] to that category of states which in the political and sociological literature it has become customary to refer to as ‘patrimonial.’”

³Boris Yeltsin, *The Struggle for Russia* (New York: Belka, 1994), pp. 7–8.

⁴Andrei Shleifer and Daniel Treisman, “A Normal Country,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 2 (March–April 2004), pp. 20–38; Shleifer, *A Normal Country: Russia after Communism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁵Leeson and Trumbull, “Comparing Apples”; Zimmerman, “‘Normal Democracies.’”

2 • Introduction

certainly benefited from bearing in mind the overarching theme of my 2007 paper, which was to avoid making simple mistakes. But as the book progressed, I realized how easy it was to become bogged down in the plethora of uses of the term “normal.”⁶ I have consequently focused on a use of normality where it was most relevant to the purposes of a volume focusing on the historical evolution of Russian political systems, 1917–2013. I have in mind what leading Soviet and post-Soviet Russian figures advert to when they make reference to normal political systems or situations. It turns out there was a fundamental divide, but that divide was not between Soviet and post-Soviet Russian public figures. Rather, it was between those Soviet and Russian figures for whom “normal” signified stability, security, absence of change and, often, Russian uniqueness, and those for whom it connoted becoming a political system similar to those in the West or some part thereof.

Stability, security, and the status quo were what Gennady Yanayev, vice president of the USSR during the abortive August 1991 coup against Mikhail Gorbachev, had in mind when he referred to returning to normal conditions. It is what Vladimir Putin has generally had in mind as well when he has spoken of normal, though this was not universally the case especially in his first years as president. Examples of those who have had Western political systems in mind in referencing normal (read: Western) political systems would include such diverse public figures as Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, and the highly visible blogger Aleksei Navalny. (See below, pp. 196, 197, and 301 respectively.)

It turns out though equating normal with Western systems has generally not constrained Russian leaders from seeking to minimize the electoral uncertainty that is central to well-institutionalized Western electoral systems. Rather, Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Putin all have used various artifices to create conditions characteristic of authoritarian systems where the incumbent is able to “rest easy on the eve of elections.”⁷ This is part of the reason why the optimistic talk about democratization with its teleological connotation, widespread at the beginning of the twenty-first century, rang increasingly hollow at the end of its first decade. As exemplified by the retrograde pattern of the 2000, 2004, and 2008 presidential elections, Russia was less appropriately termed

⁶ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), Richard Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice* (New York: Routledge, 1st ed., 2004; 2nd ed., 2008), Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991* (New York: Free Press, 1994), and Vladimir Shlapentokh, *A Normal Totalitarian Society* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001) are examples of the application of normalcy to Soviet or Russian politics or society.

⁷ Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 12.

a democratic country at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century than it had been at the onset of that decade.

As we shall see, Gorbachev found it easy to treat being defeated in a general election a normal occurrence for other party officials but not for himself. He was not himself elected by the Soviet citizenry as a whole. Rather, he was selected president by a vote of the Congress of People's Deputies. To be chosen president necessitated that he obtain an absolute majority of the members of the Congress. Without an opponent, he received less than 60 percent of the votes cast. Had the Soviet Union not collapsed in 1991, to continue in office he would have had to stand for election in 1995.

Yeltsin reneged on his promise to hold early presidential elections. He was on the brink of canceling the 1996 elections when he was persuaded not to by a host of public figures and others, most notably his daughter and the economist, Anatoly Chubais. (See below, p. 209, where Yeltsin's sense of guilt and shame for what he almost did is made clear.)

By contrast, Putin managed to finesse the constitutional limit of two successive terms by designating Dmitry Medvedev to be his successor as president in 2008 while he became prime minister. In this respect the 2008 presidential election became one characterized by a "selectorate" consisting of one or at the most two persons—Putin and, arguably, Medvedev. (Following Philip Roeder, I use "selectorate" throughout the book to refer to those who select and remove the leader by established procedures.⁸ I term those who have the power to remove through extralegal means such as rallies and coups the "ejectorate."⁹) Putin's decision to select himself again as president in 2012 with Medvedev becoming prime minister was met with strong opposition by some part of the Russian citizenry, especially Muscovites. That opposition at the mass level was so extensive that roughly a month before the March 2012 election Putin acknowledged he might have to face a runoff despite the weakness of the opposing candidates.

The possibility of a runoff in March 2012 brought out two points to which I refer throughout the text. It exemplifies the nonlinear process of the evolution of Russian politics over nearly a century, 1917–2013:

⁸Philip Roeder in *Red Sunset: The Failure of Soviet Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 24, refers to the selectorate as those who have the power "to select and remove." See also Susan Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

⁹Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper, 1947), p. 272 refers to the electorate's role in selecting a government as including the function of "evicting it."

4 • Introduction

the collapse of the Soviet Union tempted writers to attach teleological connotations to the term “democratization” and then yield to the opposite temptation, inferring that the retrograde pattern of the 2000, 2004, and 2008 presidential elections bespoke a linear process in which the 2012 election would be even less open and competitive than had been the fraudulent 2008 election—which had been less open and competitive than the 2004 election, which had been less competitive than the 2000 election.

To reduce the likelihood of yielding to these temptations in the future, in this volume I emphasize the importance of bearing in mind “the” Soviet system’s *within-system* differences and the analogous *within-system* differences in “the” post-Soviet Russian system.¹⁰

The accompanying typology (Table I.1) represents my effort to place Russian political systems in an overall context. What I have done is build on the trichotomy used by the broad-gauge comparativists Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way.¹¹ In their analysis of various regimes since the Cold War they have distinguished among democratic, competitive authoritarian, and what they term “full” authoritarian systems, differentiating among the three on the basis of the status of core democratic institutions, the status of the opposition, and the level of uncertainty.

I have added a fourth column labeled totalitarian or mobilizational. By mobilization I have in mind the use of pressure and/or exhortation to induce people to serve regime goals that they would not otherwise have chosen to engage in.¹² Adding the fourth column allows me to take into account those authoritarian systems with transformative goals that were far more fully authoritarian than Levitsky and Way’s “full” authoritarian systems. (I sometimes refer to the latter simply as normal authoritarian systems.) Also added were an additional two rows. One row accounts for the size of the selectorate—and the possibility of an ejectorate. The other considers the regime’s overall goals.

¹⁰In this book, the comparisons are largely intertemporal, and to a much lesser extent, cross-national at the level of the state. Much good work is being done by Westerners (e.g., Katherine Stoner-Weiss, Andrew Konitzer, Olesya Tkacheva) and Russians (e.g., Vladimir Gelman, Grigory Golosov) on intra-Russian spatial comparisons, holding the central government constant. Other good recent examples include William M. Reisinger, ed., *Russia’s Regions and Comparative Subnational Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2013) and the special issue of *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (May 2011), “Russian Regional Politics under Putin and Medvedev.”

¹¹Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, especially pp. 12–16 and 369–71.

¹²This differs only slightly from a definition of mobilization suggested to me by George Breslauer (personal communication).

Table I.1: Regime comparisons: democratic, competitive authoritarian, “full” authoritarian, and totalitarian (mobilizational)

	I. Democratic	II. Competitive Authoritarian	III. Full Authoritarian	IV. Totalitarian (Mobilizational)
Status of core democratic institutions (direct restraints — rule of law) elections	Systematically respected	Exist but systematically violated in favor of incumbent	Nonexistent or reduced to façade status	Façade status or nonexistent
Status of opposition	Competes on more or less equal status with incumbent	Major opposition exists legally but is significantly disadvantaged by incumbent abuse	Major opposition banned or largely in exile or underground	Major opposition banned, parties pro forma or in exile or underground
Level of electoral Uncertainty	High	Lower than democracy, higher than full authoritarianism	Low	Nonexistent
Size of selectorate, possibility of successful ejectorate	Largely universal adult suffrage; ejectorate rare	Largely universal adult suffrage; ejectorate possible	Handful actually select; ejectorate unlikely	Handful (max) actually select; ejectorate quite unlikely
Regime goals	Security international and domestic; largely open to external influence; adjusts policies to complexities of large scale societies	Security international and domestic; largely open to external influence; adjusts policies to complexities of large-scale societies	Security international and domestic; resists external influence; adjusts policies to complexities of large-scale societies	Transformative internationally and domestically; strongly resists external influence; aims to overcome major socializing agents (e.g., family), pluralism of large-scale societies

Sources: This table draws heavily on Zimmerman, “Mobilized Participation and the Nature of the Soviet Dictatorship,” in James Millar, ed., *Politics, Work, and Daily Life in the USSR: A Survey of Former Soviet Citizens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 332–53; Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Ideology and Power in Soviet Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1962), especially pp. 14–20. Columns I–III stem from Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, especially Table I.1, p. 13 and the accompanying textual elaboration and is reprinted with permission. Column IV relies heavily on Brzezinski, *Ideology and Power*. Rows 4 and 5 draw from Zimmerman, “Mobilized Participation.”

6 • Introduction

In constructing the fourth column I borrowed heavily from Zbigniew K. Brzezinski's *Ideology and Power in Soviet Politics*¹³ as well as from my previous work on mobilization systems.¹⁴ Totalitarian/mobilization systems are ones where the regime has overcome what Brzezinski termed "the natural restraints . . . [including] kinship structure, and particularly the primary social unit, the family,"¹⁵ and the pluralism inherent in large-scale societies,¹⁶ in addition to core democratic institutions, the latter either being nonexistent or having façade status. The citizenry of full authoritarian systems, while subject to repression, sometimes severe, are attentive to extranational sources of information. The regimes adjust their goals and policies to the realities of large-scale societies, the traditional practices and core values of their citizenry, and the dangers they perceive in extranational influences. Totalitarian systems strongly resist external influence by employing autarkic economic policies and by repressing those with ties abroad and are bent on transforming the attitudes and behavior of their citizenry rather than appealing to the citizens' core values.

The reality of Russian politics at various times will not always match up with all the rows in a single column. As a result, the four stylized columnar systems identified in Table I.1 inevitably require some intellectual shoehorning. In some instances the coding is straightforward. The Soviet Union in 1937–38 was clearly totalitarian and 2008 Russia was an easy illustration of what Levitsky and Way term full authoritarianism. Both the Soviet Union and Russia are harder to code for other points in time partly because we attribute to them in those years characteristics of what with hindsight we know they became, partly because they fit most but not every item in a columnar category, and partly because they were on the cusp between, for instance, competitive authoritarianism and normal authoritarianism or competitive authoritarianism and democracy. The schema employed here does, however, provide a method for organizing a complicated and evolving story.

With these criteria in mind the evidence does not sustain the proposition that the Soviet system was totalitarian "from beginning to end."¹⁷ My approach also diverges from that of many who in the 1960s

¹³Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Ideology and Power in Soviet Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1962), especially pp. 14–19.

¹⁴William Zimmerman, "Mobilized Participation and the Nature of the Soviet Dictatorship," in James R. Millar, ed., *Politics, Work, and Daily Life in the USSR: A Survey of Former Soviet Citizens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 332–53.

¹⁵Brzezinski, *Ideology and Power*, p. 16.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Shlapentokh, *A Normal Totalitarian Society*, p. 3. In fairness, Shlapentokh "acknowledges significant differences among the various periods in Soviet history," but he also

and 1970s challenged totalitarianism as a concept.¹⁸ What they should have been saying was that the Soviet Union at the time about which they were writing was not totalitarian but, rather, authoritarian. This would have involved differentiating between the Soviet Union circa 1970 and the dreadful years 1937 and 1938 where the case for terming the Soviet system totalitarian is the strongest. It would also have involved taking into account the sparkling research of a handful of Western and Russian scholars (e.g., Terry Martin, Sheila Fitzpatrick, Peter Solomon, and Oleg Khlevniuk)¹⁹ on the years 1937 and 1938 whose work in the Soviet archives documented the features of Stalinist totalitarianism—the atomization and hypermobilization of society, the depths of the terror, and the absence of inraelite norms.

Over time these attributes of Stalinist totalitarianism gradually diminished. Areas of privacy were created, the actual terror attenuated (the threat remained), the society became less mobilized, and modest but significant inraelite norms emerged. Gradually, the mobilization system evolved into a more conventional (read “full” or “normal”) authoritarianism, hence the need to distinguish two Soviet systems.

By the same token, Western and Russian scholars have struggled with how to characterize the postcommunist Russian political systems. There have, for instance, been a plethora of labels for the hybrids between democracy and dictatorship used to depict the Russian Federation circa 1996—competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way),²⁰ electoral democracy (Michael McFaul,²¹ drawing on Adam Przeworski), or a country that was “partly free” (Freedom House). There was no unanimity in the literature as to how to characterize Russia’s hybrid political system in the mid-1990s—democracy (Myagkov), electoral democracy (McFaul), competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way).

maintains that nevertheless “Soviet society was *totalitarian* [italics in original], as it has been described by various authors in the United States and abroad” and references the usual suspects.

¹⁸A balanced account of the evolution of thinking about totalitarianism may be found in Abbot Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁹Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*; Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); Oleg Khlevniuk, *1937: Stalin, NKVD, i Sovetskoe obshchestvo* (Moscow: Respublika, 1992); Khlevniuk, *Politbiuro: Mekhanizmi politicheskoi vlasti* (Moscow: Rosplan, 1996); Khlevniuk et al., *Stalinskoe Politbiuro v 30–e gody: Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 1995).

²⁰Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*.

²¹“This process of electing leaders must occur under certain or fixed rules, but with uncertain outcomes that cannot be reversed.” McFaul et al., “Introduction,” in McFaul et al., *Between Dictatorship and Democracy: Russian Post-communist Political Reform* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004), p. 2.

8 • Introduction

Most Western specialists, however they classified Russia circa 1996, agreed with Levitsky and Way's statement a propos Russia at that juncture, that "[t]he regime was quite open in the early and mid-1990s" with "highly competitive elections," a "legislature [that] wielded considerable power, and private mass media . . . [that] regularly criticized Yeltsin and provided a platform for opposition."²²

At the same time, whether using McFaul, Levitsky and Way, or Freedom House as their basis for judgment about how to categorize post-Soviet Russian politics, few scholars would dispute the within-system changes in the Russian political system in the dozen years subsequent to the 1996 election. Over that time period, the trend was away from what had been—warts and all—a highly competitive system. Instead, in the period between the 1996 Yeltsin electoral victory and 2008 when Vladimir Putin selected Dmitry Medvedev as his replacement as president, presidential elections became decreasingly open, decreasingly competitive, and increasingly meaningless. (These differences took on added significance at the cusp of the first and second decades of the twenty-first century, when substantial Western and Russian scholars published articles such as one titled "The Sovietization of Russian Politics"²³ and in light of the developments September 2011–May 2012.²⁴) There was hyperbole in Gerald Easter's characterization of Russia by 2008 as having become "a normal police state."²⁵ Grigory Golosov was not, however, out of line to term the 2008 selection of Dmitry Medvedev to serve as Vladimir Putin's replacement an "election-type event." This was much of the basis why, of the thirty-five states Levitsky and Way coded as competitive authoritarian in 1990–95, Russia and Belarus were the two that were coded as "full authoritarian" in 2008.²⁶

²²Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, p. 191.

²³Olga Kryshatanovskaya and Stephen White, "The Sovietization of Russian Politics," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (October–December 2009), pp. 283–309.

²⁴Cf. especially chapter 9 infra, Vladimir Gelman, "Treshchiny v stene," *Pro et Contra* (January–April 2012), pp. 94–115, his recently published *Iz ognya da v polyma i rossiiskaya politika posle SSSR* (St. Petersburg: BHV-Petersburg, 2013), and three articles, all published in *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (October–December 2012) by Graeme Gill ("The Decline of a Dominant Party and the Destabilization of Electoral Authoritarianism"), pp. 449–71, Gordon Hahn ("Perestroika 2.0: Toward Non-Revolutionary Regime Transformation in Russia"), pp. 472–515, and Karrie J. Koesel and Valerie Bunce ("Putin, Popular Protests, and Political Trajectories in Russia: A Comparative Perspective"), pp. 403–23.

²⁵Gerald Easter, "The Russian State in the Time of Putin," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (July–September, 2008), p. 206.

²⁶Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, pp. 370–71.

THE OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

In the first substantive chapter, I describe the pattern of elite decision making in the three to four years immediately after the October Revolution involving regularized voting within a narrow selectorate that bore little resemblance to Soviet high politics in the Stalin period. These observances of procedural norms steadily dissipate (Chapter 3) and take place against a backdrop of the repression of the non-Bolshevik parties. What remains are the institutions established in the early postrevolutionary years that facilitated the steady shrinkage of the selectorate to such an extent that from the mid-1930s until Stalin's death in 1953 one might properly argue Stalin himself constituted the selectorate.

Chapter 2 depicts the successes and failures of early efforts to mobilize the Soviet citizenry in the years between the October Revolution and World War II. In terms of relations between regime and society, the initial efforts during War Communism and the Civil War prefigured the worst years of Stalin's rule and illustrated a fundamental way in which for much of the Soviet period Russia differed from what we usually think of as traditional authoritarian states, namely, dictatorships intent on maintaining what they have but not committed to transformative goals. For some fraction of that era the Russian leadership pursued transformative goals, what Kenneth Jowitt termed a "combat task."²⁷ These in turn had profound consequences for regime-society relations. As we shall see, however, such was not always the case during the Soviet period: a major part of the story of the collapse of the Soviet Union is the steady decline over time in the regime's capacity to mobilize its citizenry to its purposes (Chapter 5).²⁸

Chapter 3 traces the gradual decline of the key Party organs, the Central Committee, and the Congress in the decade or so following the 1921 Tenth Party Congress. A decade or so later—the early 1930s—both the Congress and the Central Committee had been relegated at most to selectorate status, with the Politburo constituting the central decision-making body. As Chapter 4 relates, by the latter half of the 1930s, the boundaries between Party members, even Politburo members, and others in the Soviet population had lost all meaning. There were virtually no citizens in the sense that Bueno de Mesquita et al. use the term.

²⁷Kenneth Jowitt, "Soviet Neotraditionalism: The Political Corruption of a Leninist Regime," *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (1983), pp. 275–97.

²⁸For greater detail, see Zimmerman, "Mobilized Participation," pp. 332–53; William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Steven L. Solnick, *Stealing the State: Control and Collapse in Soviet Institutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

Everyone, with the exception of Stalin and a handful of his closest aides such as Aleksandr Poskrebyshv (“Stalin’s loyal shield bearer”), had become disenfranchised residents.²⁹

Chapter 4 focuses on the profound transformations of the 1930s that involved mass mobilization of the citizenry and the systematic application of terror to Old Bolsheviks; to peasants; to priests; to members of nationalities with populations some of whom were in the Soviet Union, and others elsewhere; and, by extension, to people with foreign experience or who had comparatively extensive contact with foreigners.

Chapter 5 shows how at the time, circa 1937, when the Soviet Union was most appropriately labeled totalitarian, when elite politics had basically disappeared—when there was essentially no selectorate save for Stalin himself—and the peacetime mobilization of the citizenry was most extensive, the societal transformations that had taken place and the goals Stalin had set proved counterproductive. In order to strengthen the Soviet state and the citizens’ attachment to that state, steps were taken by Stalin to reduce the actual implementation of terror and to render the political system more predictable. A process was set in motion that ultimately led to the stagnation of the Brezhnev era, a phenomenon evidenced by declines in the ability of the regime to mobilize its citizenry effectively and in growing manifestations of documentable group articulations and subtle but substantively important intraelite divergences in views. Chapter 5 also covers the post-Stalin period during which, under Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev, politics within a narrow selectorate reemerged, modest intraelite norms developed, and the ability of the regime to mobilize the Soviet citizenry attenuated noticeably. Absent the systematic application of terror and the kind of grandiose design characteristic primarily of the Stalinist period (but also, partially, the Khrushchev era), as the twentieth century wore on, regime-society relations and intraelite interactions came increasingly to conform to norms more characteristic of normal authoritarian regimes.

Chapter 6 describes Gorbachev’s emergence as a system-changing political leader.³⁰ It depicts his effort to create the preconditions for a system that involved a national selectorate and involved the uncertainty that attends democratization for others while retaining for himself the certainty appropriately associated with authoritarianism until several years down the road—after he had succeeded in transforming Soviet politics, the unsuccessful efforts by an ejectorate to remove him, and the emergence of Yeltsin as the dominant political force in Russian politics.

²⁹Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival*, p. 39.

³⁰George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Chapter 7 accepts the argument by Levitsky and Way that, while the 1996 election was highly competitive, it still fell short of democracy, whether one used their or Schumpeterian criteria. However competitive it was, the 1996 election was not, however, a data point presaging further democratization. Rather, the progression through 2011 described in Chapter 8 was one in the other direction, culminating in the mockery of an election that ratified Dmitry Medvedev's anointment as president in 2008.

Chapter 9 describes the extraordinary developments attending the 2011–12 electoral cycle. Once again Putin and Medvedev announced in September 2011 that one of them would be the candidate for president and the other would become prime minister. This time, however, they would reverse their roles. Putin would become president. On Putin's election as president, Medvedev would become prime minister. The December Duma election turned out, however, not to be as anticipated. The official count for United Russia was less than 50 percent, well short of the number required to amend the Constitution. Large rallies protesting vote falsification and agitating against Putin's presidential candidacy followed, which were in turn followed by electoral reforms. Roughly a month before the March presidential election the uncertainty that attends democratic and competitive authoritarian systems prevailed and it was problematic whether Putin would obtain a majority in the first round. The Kremlin, however, successfully marshaled enormous resources to avoid a repeat of United Russia's experience in December 2011, with the result that in March 2012 Putin was elected in the first round. In the months that followed, Putin and the majority in the Duma launched systematic efforts to ensure that anti-Putin rallies of the sort and magnitude of those occurring in the winter 2011–12 would not be repeated.

In the conclusion I build on the clear understanding on the part of many ordinary Russians (especially Muscovites), and Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin as well, that the Soviet system was abnormal. As the regime's ability to mobilize society diminished in effectiveness, all the above indicated a desire to live normally (*zhit' normalno*). Generally, this phrase translated to mean "live like a European" and ultimately adopt European institutions. These aspirations notwithstanding, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, it was unclear whether in the short run the bulk of the Russian adult population, after brief flirtations with authentic participation, would prove to be citizens or residents.

This showed up starkly in the retrograde movement exemplified by the 2000, 2004, and 2008 presidential elections, a trend somewhat reversed in the 2011–12 electoral cycle. That cycle lacked the attributes of a fully authoritarian regime that had been evidenced in the 2008

election cycle, though it bore some resemblance to a modernized analogue to the Soviet system with its “circular flow of power,”³¹ to wit, a one-person selectorate accompanied by some cheering from the sidelines by a small but growing group who felt entitled to express their views regardless of their actual impact on the outcome.

It was also not democratic, falling short by Schumpeterian criteria—largely free press, freedom of discussion, and all serious candidates competing—and by the criteria employed by Levitsky and Way—an opposition competing on more or less equal status with an incumbent, the latter operating at a high level of uncertainty.³² Instead, the 2011–12 electoral cycle fit well with the behaviors Levitsky and Way associate with competitive authoritarianism.

What about the longer run? It is manifestly clear that in the political realm Russian openness declined in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The outburst in response to the Putin “castling” in 2011 altered for a moment the relationship between the authorities and the public. The factors that would point to a more democratic outcome are fairly straightforward and are discussed at greater length in the conclusion. It is conceivable that the regime could convince the middle class in cities other than Moscow that the putatively draconic laws adopted after Putin’s May 2012 inauguration were for show and may be safely ignored. A year after Putin’s inauguration that does not seem to have been the case. By the same token, the regime has the capacity to bring about its own demise by inculcating mass protest and dividing the elite over some matter that large numbers discern as a moral issue.

The opposition could also bring about its own demise. The December 2011 Duma election was remarkable in that many people could oppose United Russia by voting for any approved party rather than by abstaining or destroying their ballot. Putin is unlikely to make voting strategically that easy often. On the basis of prior experience, the likelihood of a united opposition seems remote unless they pick their battles carefully. They have demonstrated a capacity to be clever and insistent. In the aftermath of the 2012 election, Boris Akunin, the distinguished writer, exercised his constitutional right to a morning constitutional. The well-known blogger Aleksei Navalny joined the board of

³¹Robert V. Daniels, “Soviet Politics since Khrushchev,” in John W. Strong, ed., *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev and Kosygin: The Transition Years* (New York: van Nostrand Reinhold, 1971), p. 20.

³²These are, intentionally, minimalist criteria. For an example of essays focusing on a broader conception of democracy and dealing with postcommunist systems, see Richard D. Anderson, Jr. et al., *Postcommunism and the Theory of Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Aeroflot (evidently only briefly);³³ his sponsor, the banker Aleksandr Lebedev, announced his intention to create a credit card (subsequently scrapped)³⁴ that would fund Navalny's anti-corruption efforts and declared he would give the first card to Putin. The editor of *Novaya Gazeta*, Dmitry Muratov, demanded an apology from the head of the Investigative Service, Aleksandr Bastrykin, for threatening to kill Sergei Sokolov, a *Novaya Gazeta* staff person—and got it.

But—and it's a big but—the Kremlin will probably retain control over three major resources: the various armed units, the media near monopoly, and persons subject to mobilization under threat to their jobs or their social welfare payments. If a leader who is a real focal point emerges and is able to put together some combination of the street, a fraction of a divided elite, and some key societal grouping in addition to the Moscow urban middle class—the elderly, say, the working class, even the urban middle class in the eleven³⁵ cities other than Moscow with a population of a million or more—in short, an opposition party, he or she might succeed in ousting Putin—assuming the latter remains in good health—at some point up to and including the 2018 presidential election. The more likely outcome, though, is that those with the most resources will carry the day and that it will again be Putin as it was in 2000, 2004, and 2008 (through his surrogate Medvedev) and 2012.

³³ Reuters, February 26, 2013, reported he was not on the list of board candidates for 2013.

³⁴ "Bank Buries Navalny Debit Cards," *RIA Novosti*, December 13, 2012.

³⁵ Perm did have more than a million residents, but in the most recent census its population dropped below a million.