

**Introduction:** After the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the war conflict in the Eastern Ukraine, some experts (Timothy Snyder) and politicians (Hillary Clinton, John McCain) compare Vladimir Putin’s regime with totalitarian expansionist power of Josef Stalin or Adolf Hitler. Of course, Putin is not Hitler or Stalin. He created a new postmodern hybrid political regime, so-called “Putinism,” combining authoritarianism with democracy, capitalism with oligarchy, and national state building with imperial ambitions.

There are a lot of definitions of Putin’s system in contemporary political science: “competitive authoritarianism,” “managed pluralism,” “crony capitalism,” “neo-feudalism,” “neo-paternalism.”

**Questions:** How does Putinism differ from classical authoritarian regimes? Can we find a theoretical framework which could describe the origin and main principles of Putin’s system?

**Why Gramsci?**

“Passive revolution” = revolution-restoration; revolution without revolution

*Risorgimento* (“resurgence”) = unification of Italy (1815 – 1861/1870) and *Transformismo* (1876-1920s):

- corrupted government;
- exclusion of the people from real politics;
- alliance between the big bourgeoisie and the old feudal elite;
- no consent within civil society;
- absence of strong parliamentary tradition;
- powerful local elites;
- large national debt, budget deficit, unemployment;
- no modernization and industrialization;
- absence of entrepreneurial market economy;
- underdevelopment of democracy;
- political weakness of liberals and socialists

Outcome: changes from above – fascist regime of Benito Mussolini (1922-1945) who created political regime based on combination of:

**Hegemony**

“consent, given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group”

= Civil Society (“private” apparatus of hegemony)

= Consent

**Domination:** the apparatus of state coercive power which “legally” enforces discipline on those groups who do not “consent” either actively or passively

= Political Society (administrative apparatus) = State

= Coercion

**Conclusion: What does Gramsci help us to see?**

1. Legitimation of Putin’s system is based on popular consent (hegemony) and state domination over civil society rather than the rule of law and development of modern institutions (free market economy, democracy, free elections, independent civil society);
2. Putinism was established as a result of conservation of the post-Soviet “passive revolution” and management of post-Soviet instability (anomia, timelessness, interregnum) rather than real social changes and transformation;
3. Russian state plays function of “educator”: hegemony is exercised via discourses of stability developing by pro-Kremlin “organic intellectuals,” the Orthodox Church, and mass media;
4. Caesarism is a form of legitimation of Putin’s personal power (cult of personality, body politics);
5. There are some historical parallels with Mussolini’s fascist regime (e.g., Zbigniew Brzezinski, Alexander Motyl), but Putinism is more complex phenomenon, the combination of different political practices and techniques, the balance between hegemony and domination.