

Putinism: Between Hegemony and Domination (Application of Antonio Gramsci's approach to Putin's Russia)

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Introduction: After the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the war conflict in the Eastern Ukraine, some experts (Timothy Snider) 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," "kleptocracy," "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?



"Passive Revolution" in post-Soviet Russia

- ❖ "shock therapy" (1992): market economy, liberalization of prices, privatization.
- ❖ "New elite" was formed from the former Soviet organizations (*nomenklatura*): Communist Party, Komsomol, KGB (Putin).
- ❖ **People:** mass unemployment; hyperinflation (2,600% in 1992); poverty (40% of population in 1998); decline of population. As the result: apathy, anomie, weakness of civil society (social consent), interregnum, timelessness, (*bezvremenie*), limitlessness (*bezpredel*)



Putin's Hegemony-Popular Consent

- The All Russia People's Front (2011)
- The Public Chamber (2005)
- Youth pro-Putin movements: "Nashi," "Molodaya Gvardiya"
- Ruling party United Russia
- Russian Orthodox Church
- Mass media



Public Consent after the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis:

DO YOU SUPPORT THE ACCESSION OF CRIMEA TO RUSSIA?

	2014*					2015			
	III	V	X	XI	XII	I	II	III	IV
Definitely yes	57	54	55	53	50	50	52	55	55
Probably yes	31	36	31	31	36	34	32	33	34
Probably no	6	4	7	6	7	8	9	6	6
Definitely no	1	1	2	5	3	4	3	2	2
It is difficult to say	4	5	5	6	4	4	4	4	4

Source: <http://www.levada.ru/eng/ukrainian-crisis>

WITH WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING POINT OF VIEW ABOUT WHY THE WAR IN EASTERN UKRAINE IS STILL CONTINUING DO YOU MOST AGREE?

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The war in Eastern Ukraine is continuing because the leadership of the US and other Western countries needs this conflict to place blame on Russia and restrain Russia's growth and influence in the world and elevate their own ideals	56
The war in Eastern Ukraine is continuing because the current leadership of Ukraine needs the war atmosphere to distract its citizens from the real economic and social problems in the country and preserve its grip on power	27
The war in Eastern Ukraine is continuing because of Russian interference in the conflict, by supporting the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics with soldiers, weapons, and equipment	6
It is difficult to say	11

Source: <http://www.levada.ru/eng/ukrainian-crisis>



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

Putin's Domination-Coercion

- Persecution of politically active "old oligarchs" in 2000-2003 (Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Boris Berezovsky, Vladimir Gusinsky) and redistribution of their property and businesses (Yukos, Sibneft, Media Most Group)
- Coercive legislature against liberal opposition: the law on "foreign agents" (2012), restriction of peaceful assembly and public gathering (2012), the LGBT propaganda law (2013), the law for bloggers and online media (2014), the "undesirable organizations" law (2015).



Caesarism

Organic Intellectuals

Vladislav Surkov: "I think Putin is a man who was sent to Russia by fate and by the Lord at a difficult time for the country, for our great and common nation."

Alexander Dugin: "There are no Putin's opponents anymore, and if there are, they are mentally ill and should be sent to the medical examinations. Putin - everywhere, Putin - all, Putin is absolute, Putin is irreplaceable."

Putin's Elite Hegemony-Consent



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.