The Logic of Vladimir Putin’s Popular Appeal

by Aleksandar Matovski

Abstract

This chapter traces the roots of the popularity of Vladimir Putin – arguably the most important, controversial and perplexing aspect of his reign. Based on his image of an indispensable strongman, reversing Russia’s catastrophic post-Soviet decline, Putin’s popularity allowed him to consolidate an authoritarian regime largely through the ballot box and with minimal resort to coercion. But this strongman appeal faded as Russia began to stagnate under his reign. The chapter analyzes how Putin resuscitated his decaying brand with the interventions in Ukraine and Syria, and why he cannot back down from his dangerous crusade to “make Russia great” again.

Keywords: Vladimir Putin, popularity, Russia, authoritarianism, interventions in Ukraine and Syria

Ever since his emergence in 1999, Russia’s Vladimir Putin has been perceived in the West as a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma, as Winston Churchill famously quipped about his country. Looking for clues to Putin’s motives and behavior, analysts have resorted to everything from psychological profiling and deep personality analyses to esoteric interpretations of Russia’s geopolitical doctrines and historical visions that he supposedly channels. However, relatively scant attention has been paid to one of the most vital and vexing aspects of his rule: the roots of his popular appeal in Russia.

Vladimir Putin’s popularity has been as sudden as his rise and as steadfast as the grip he managed to establish on power. When Putin was first appointed as acting prime minister in August 1999, he was virtually unknown and had negative approval ratings. A month later, in September of 1999, a string of terrorist attacks and Russia’s decisive military response in the breakaway region of Chechnya turned him into an instant star. In the eyes of the crisis-weary Russian public, the brutal prosecution of the second Chechen war made Putin appear like the man who can reverse Russia’s seemingly unstoppable post-Soviet decline. Unlike the other leadership alternatives at the time – the frail and erratic outgoing president Boris Yeltsin, the leader of the unreformed Russian Communist party Gennady Zyuganov, and the septuagenarian presidential wannabe Yevgeny Primakov – the 47 years old Putin appeared youthful, vigorous and promising (Colton and McFaul 2003).
Putin’s approval ratings, shown in Figure 1 below, jumped from practically zero to 80 percent from August to November 1999. And they stayed high ever since. Across the entire period between 2000 and 2016, Vladimir Putin’s popular approval averaged at about 75 percent, hovering around this level during his two presidencies and the 4-year stint as prime minister in between. In the wake of his controversial return to the presidency in 2012 and the protest wave that ensued, Putin’s approval ratings dropped to an all-time low of 62 percent in 2013. But it rebounded in the after the war in Ukraine in 2014 – reaching a peak of 89 percent and an average of 85 percent in the two years since the annexation of Crimea in February 2014.

![Figure 1: Percent Approving and Disapproving Vladimir Putin's Performance in Office](image)

Source: Levada Center Surveys

Such consistently high approval ratings are virtually unachievable for the leaders of stable democracies. The average popular approval of the U.S. presidents since 1968, for instance, was 51
percent, and has ranged between 45 percent (for President Jimmy Carter) to 61 percent for (President George H.W. Bush). Moreover, the popularity of U.S. Presidents was far more variable than Vladimir Putin’s. President George W. Bush, for example, had both the highest (90 percent in September 2001) and lowest approval rating (25 percent in October 2008). The seven other presidents that served since 1968 all had popular approval percentage point lows in the 20s and 30s during their terms in office – much worse than Putin’s record low approval rating of 62 percent.²

Democratic leaders also tend to become less popular over time. Vladimir Putin, on the other hand, did not seem to suffer from this problem for a long time. We can see this in Figure 2, which compares Putin’s and U.S. presidential approval by months in office. While most American presidents experienced declining or relatively flat ratings over time, Putin’s ratings gradually increased both in his first and second terms. And after 16 years of effectively holding power – the equivalent of four U.S. presidential terms – Putin’s approval skyrocketed again and then remained steady at over 80 percent.

It is hard to overstate just how essential this unrelenting popularity of Vladimir Putin has been for the regime he established. Above all, it allowed him to achieve towering electoral dominance.
without egregious vote fraud – a feature that discouraged opposition and bestowed a veneer of democratic legitimacy to his rule. Also, far more than any other resource at his disposal, popularity enabled Putin to rein in Russia’s quasi-feudal, self-serving and notoriously capricious bureaucracy, and the country’s political, economic and regional elites. The reason is simple: Putin’s popular appeal meant that he would only emerge stronger from confrontations with any of Russia’s widely despised officials, local bosses and robber baron oligarchs – while they would essentially be destroyed. Hence, members of the Russian elite quickly learned to fall in line to avoid the fate of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Boris Berezovsky and others who challenged Putin’s authority (Rogov 2015).

Putin’s popular appeal had an even deeper, and more perverse effect. Russian bureaucrats, regional bosses and oligarchs did not just fear Putin’s popularity: they became utterly dependent on it. As long as Putin stayed popular, and they remained in his good graces, Russia’s elites could be sure that their unchecked power and ill-gotten wealth would be safe from expropriation by anyone, ranging from resurgent communists to the angry masses rising in rebellion. Totally lacking any legitimacy of their own, Russia’s unaccountable, kleptocratic officialdom and oligarchy could only be sustained by aligning themselves with someone of Putin’s popular stature. This makes Putin’s towering popularity essential for the day-to-day functioning of the Russian system of government. Without it, Russia’s otherwise unchecked bureaucrats would have no credible signal that Putin will hold power for long enough to reward their compliance, punish their transgressions and protect them from reprisals. Without Putin’s high ratings to anchor their expectations of the future, they will almost certainly become unwilling to carry out orders on a whole host of issues, ranging from mundane tasks of government to perilous assignments, like repressing the opposition or committing electoral fraud (on this dynamic, see e.g. Rundlett and Svolik (2015) and Gehlbach and Simpser (2015)).

But the most sinister effect of Putin’s appeal has manifested beyond Russia’s borders. For its ability to command unprecedented popular support even as it transformed Russia into a bastion of authoritarianism, Putinism became a role model for authoritarian leaders and forces across the world, who sought to achieve the same in their countries. So much so that the leaders of EU and NATO members Hungary and Turkey – who have taken decidedly authoritarian turns in recent years – have openly praised Vladimir Putin’s style of governing as an inspiration (Caryl 2015; Orban 2014). And amidst the rising political turmoil and anti-establishment sentiments, it appears
that admirers of Putinism could assume power in some of the established Western democracies (Foa and Mounk 2016; Kelemen 2016).

The Puzzle of Putin’s Popularity

How did Vladimir Putin become and stay so popular? The simplest explanation for his broad popular acclaim is that it is not real: that Russian responders simply lie to pollsters that they approve their authoritarian leader because of fear and intimidation. But this assumption is wrong. First, there is broad consensus that Russia’s most highly regarded pollsters have not tampered their surveys to paint a rosier picture of Putin’s popularity. The prime example is Russia’s independent Levada Survey Center, which has been known for its professionalism since Soviet times, and has been relentlessly pressured by the Putin regime because its objective analysis (see Treisman (2013)).

Second, there is mounting evidence that Russians have not falsely professed adoration for their leaders (for an overview, see e.g. Rose (2007)). The most recent and methodologically sophisticated confirmation that Putin’s popularity is genuine is provided by two studies conducted in 2012 and 2015 (see Colton and Hale (2014) and Frye, Gehlbach, and Marquardt (2016)). Using the list experiment technique, which allows surveyed individuals to provide anonymous responses on sensitive issues, these analyses find that only about 6-9 percent of survey respondents seem to have falsely claimed they support Putin when asked a direct question – a proportion that is small relative to Putin’s overall approval, and close to the estimation error for the list experiment technique.

But the most compelling indication that Russians have not held back their true feelings about Vladimir Putin is far more straightforward. It is evident from in their responses to other survey questions about him. Despite approving Putin’s overall conduct, Russian survey respondents have been remarkably critical of Putin’s actual achievements in office. I illustrate this in Figure 3, which shows popular evaluations of Vladimir Putin’s achievements in 8 key issue areas on the eve of his reelection in 2012.³ A clear majority (of about 60 percent) have registered improvements in only one major issue area during Putin’s reign: the global influence of Russia. On the other hand, fewer than 50 percent of respondents believed that Russia’s political stability and the stability of the North Caucasus – two of Putin’s most touted achievements – increased during his rule. All other
performance assessments are negative. 71 percent of the respondents found that income inequality increased under Putin, and a majority of 51 percent deemed that corruption worsened in his time in office. Only 33 percent detected improvements in the standard of living – the other showcased accomplishment of Putin’s rule – opposite to 34 percent who thought that living standards actually worsened. Yet in the end, despite these bleak evaluations, a full 66 percent of respondents in the same survey said they voted for Putin in the 2012 election.

Contrary to some interpretations (see e.g. Pipes (2004)), Russians did not harbor any inborn cultural predispositions or habituated fondness for authoritarian rule, which might have explained this behavior. Indeed, Russian citizens have voiced their dislike of the Putinist system in this regard too: by accurately assessing it as semi-authoritarian, and expressing a desire to live in a considerably more democratic society. I depict these outlooks in Figure 4 below, which records the average assessments Russians gave their actual and desired political system on a 1-10 scale, ranging...
from closed authoritarianism to full democracy.\textsuperscript{4} This graph shows that throughout the first 10 years of Putin’s rule, Russian citizens, on average, gave their current regime a remarkably accurate grade of slightly above 5 on this scale – the midpoint between democracy and full dictatorship. At the same time, they consistently expressed a desire to live in a system that is about 2 points higher on this scale – substantially closer to the Western standard of democracy.

*Figure 4: Current and Desired Democracy in Russia on a 1-10 Scale*

\begin{figure}[ht]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4.png}
\caption{Current and Desired Democracy in Russia on a 1-10 Scale}
\end{figure}

*Source: New Russia Barometer Surveys, Rose(2010)*

The Logic of the Strongman Authoritarian Appeal

The real puzzle of Putin’s popularity, as these sentiments suggest, is not whether it is real or faked, but how it was even possible when people had such poor evaluations of his performance, and desired to live in a more democratic system than the one he maintained. The key to understanding this phenomenon, I argue, lies in Russia’s cataclysmic decade of post-Communist transition, and its
traumatic effects on Russian mass opinion. Following the Soviet collapse, Russia experienced what amounts to the biggest peacetime decline in history. Literally overnight, the Russian population witnessed their country lose not only its superpower status and control of vast amounts of its territory, but endured a socio-economic decline twice as intense as the Great Depression of the 1930s. The scope of this cataclysm was so immense that it is best captured not by economic measures but population decline – of about three quarters of a million people per year throughout the 1990s (Balzer 2002).

The reaction of the Russian public has been likened to a post-traumatic stress disorder (Guillory 2014). After a brief outpouring of enthusiasm about liberalization in the late 1980s, the bulk of the Russian population adopted exceptionally gloomy and anxious outlooks. Fearing for their own and Russia’s survival, people completely reversed their views about Russia should be governed. I show this in Figure 5 below. Right before the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, a solid plurality of 45 percent of Russians held the liberal view that executive power should never be put in the hands of one person. On the other hand, a quarter of the population insisted their country always needs to be run by a strong-armed leader, and another 15 percent believed that the current situation warrants one. This shows, once again, that the Russian population did not harbor any innate or habituated pro-authoritarian tendencies at the end of the Cold War, despite spending the previous 71 years under communist dictatorship. Quite the opposite, they seem to have demonstrated a budding enthusiasm for Russia’s liberalization.

But then came the catastrophe. The Soviet collapse in 1991 was followed by “shock therapy” market reforms, the rise of crony capitalism, economic collapse, and a political and constitutional crisis that culminated with the shelling of Parliament in October 1993 (these events are represented by the gray vertical lines in Figure 5). By 1995, the Russian economy dwindled to half its size from before the Soviet collapse. To top things off, the disastrous first invasion of Chechnya made it seem that like Russia would itself soon disintegrate in a bloody civil war. These experiences sharply reversed popular sentiments about the type of leadership most appropriate for Russia. If liberal outlooks were dominant in 1989, a solid majority of 60 percent supported a temporary or permanent strong-armed rule by 1995. Only 28 percent rejected calls for concentration of power. Thus, much before the rise of Putinist propaganda and media control, extreme hardship compelled most Russians to think that only a (bare-chested) strongman on horseback can rescue Russia.
Rising against this backdrop, Vladimir Putin became wildly popular as he fit the image of the tough leader that Russia needed. This appeal, paradoxically, allowed him to be liked even without doing much to resolve Russia’s underlying problems. Instead, Putin’s popularity has been predominantly based on hope and fear: a pattern I illustrate in Figure 6 below. Asked why people trust Putin, only about 15-30 percent of Russians in the 2001-2015 period said this is because he adequately tackles the country’s problems. A combined total of between 65 and 80 percent believed that people have faith in Putin either because they hope he will deal with Russia’s problems in the future, or because they see no other reliable alternative – a sentiment reflecting fears the country will slip back to the chaos of the 1990s if Putin is replaced. The great majority of Russians, in other
words, thought their compatriots embraced Putin not for what he achieved, but for what they thought he prevents, and for what they hoped he might eventually deliver.

And in responding the question “why people trust Vladimir Putin” in Figure 6, Russians did not simply rationalize the behavior of their compatriots, with whom they did not necessarily agree. Instead, they seemed to project their own reasons for supporting Putin. We see evidence of this if we examine only the responses of Russians who themselves had positive appraisals of Putin. Looking at the 2000-2013 period (for which data for cross-tabulations is available), an average of
only about 27 percent of Levada Center survey respondents who approved of Vladimir Putin’s performance said he was trusted because he successfully tackled Russia’s problems. In turn, 41 percent on average said that people trusted him because they hoped he will do so in the future, and 29 percent of those approving his performance said Putin is trusted because people see no better alternatives. In other words, 70 percent of Russians who approved Putin’s performance, said that he is trusted because of the hope he inspired or the lack of better alternatives.

This logic of delayed and suspended accountability raises a crucial question: did it allow Putin to maintain support among dissatisfied citizens, who might have voted him out of office in different circumstances? To examine this, I estimate multinomial logit models of responses to the question why people trust Putin using data from the 15 available Levada Center surveys that contain it. These models account for the effects of the respondent characteristics like age, gender, social class, education and size of the settlement where respondents live, as well as two key politically-relevant outlooks – beliefs that things in Russia are going in the right direction, and the respondents’ party sympathies.

In Figure 7 below, I depict the estimated effects of these variables on the odds of a response other than the baseline category “people trust Putin because they believe he successfully and adequately tackles Russia’s problems.” The left panel in the graph covers all 15 surveys that contain this question in the 2001-2014 period, and the one to the right includes estimates using surveys only for 2001-2007, which also contain data on the respondents’ party sympathies. The top part of each of these panels displays the estimated odds of choosing the “people trust Putin because they hope he will tackle Russia’s problems in the future” response as opposed to the baseline category. The bottom part shows the relative odds of choosing the “people trust Putin because they see no one else they can depend on” response. The odds are shown with 95 percent confidence intervals derived from robust standard errors. Point estimates above 1 suggest that increases in the given variable correlate with an increase in the odds of the choice in question relative to the baseline category. The opposite is true for odds ratios estimates below 1.

If people’s hopes about Putin’s leadership and their perceived lack of better alternatives did indeed help him maintain the support of dissatisfied Russians, beliefs that things in Russia are going in a bad direction should significantly increase the odds of choosing these reasons for why people trust Putin. In other words, respondents with negative assessments of the general circumstances in
Russia should be more likely to rationalize trust in Putin in terms of future hopes and lack of alternatives, even as they find his actual achievements lacking.

The estimates shown in Figure 7 strongly support these claims. The perception that things in Russia are going in a bad direction is the strongest predictor of responses that Putin is trusted due to hopes or lack of alternatives, rather than actual achievements. This effect holds both for the model covering the entire 2001-2014 period in the left panel of Figure 7 and in the model for 2001-2007 in the right panel, which includes controls for party sympathies. Indeed, it is striking that negative assessments of Russia’s direction have an effect just as great as sympathies for the major oppositional parties. Thus, according to the estimates in the right panel of Table 7, bad evaluations of Russia’s general direction increase the odds that respondents will ascribe Putin’s popularity to hope or lack of alternatives by more than 1.5 and 2.5 times, respectively – just as much as the difference between sympathizing the main opposition parties instead of the pro-regime ones. This
suggests indicate that hope in Putin’s leadership and the perceived lack of alternatives – sentiments stemming from the trauma of Russia’s post-Communist crisis – allowed Putin not only to maintain the support of Russia’s generally dissatisfied majority, but to also of citizens with pro-oppositional outlooks. And as I show in Figure A.1 in the Appendix, negative appraisals of Russia’s general direction are the best predictor of beliefs that Putin is trusted because of hope and fear even among respondents who approve Putin’s performance in office, though the effect is somewhat smaller.\textsuperscript{8} Once again, this indicates that the estimates in Figure 7 largely reflect people’s own reasons for trusting Putin, which they have “projected” onto other Russians.

The behavior of the other variables with significant effects in the models displayed in Figures 7 and Figure A.1 in the Appendix is in line with these conclusions. In particular, low social class significantly increases the odds that a respondent would say that people trust Putin because of hope and lack of other choices, rather than because of his actual achievements. The same is true for respondents with higher education – particularly college-educated individuals – and for middle aged individuals. I depict the latter effect, captured by the significant squared age term, in Figure A.2 in the Appendix. These graphs suggest that the probability of responding that people trust Putin because of his achievements declines by up to one third for respondents around the age of 50, when all other variables are held at their means. The likelihood of the “hope” and particularly the “no alternative” responses for this age group increase correspondingly.

Taken together, these results indicate that the poorer, the more highly educated and middle-aged Russians, the dissatisfied with Russia’s direction, and the sympathizers of opposition parties, were significantly more likely to justify trust in Putin in terms of hope and lack of alternatives rather than his actual performance. For this diverse group, jointly making up to two thirds of Putin’s support, hope and fear of alternatives were the psychological mechanisms that enabled what Rose, Mishler, and Munro (2004) called the “resigned acceptance” of Putinist autocracy. When the system performed well, they supported its leader. When the system performed badly, they were still willing to support Putin, however reluctantly, as the recent trauma of Russia’s post-Communist decline has taught them there is little else to hope for and much to fear from change. The bulk of Putin’s support, in other words, was not driven by a “what have you done for me lately?” economic voting logic, as in stable democracies. Instead, it became captive to a “would all hope be lost and would things become worse without Putin?” outlook.
This rationale helps clarify why one of the most prominent explanations of Putin’s popularity – that it was driven by Russia’s economic performance under his reign (see e.g. Treisman (2011)) – has produced inconsistent results (Treisman 2014). Putin’s approval ratings and popular perceptions of the economy, as I illustrate in Figure 8, appeared to closely aligned throughout the 2000-2009 period. These nine years of continuous growth yielded the greatest economic success of Putin’s rule: restoring Russia’s real per capita GDP to the level of 1989, just before the Soviet collapse. As aggregate economic assessments shifted from very bad to almost neutral, Putin’s approval ratings soared by another 15-20 percentage points from his starting point – about the same amount as perceptions that people trust Putin because of his achievements in resolving Russia’s problems, depicted in Figure 6. Thus, the economic improvements throughout the 2000s may have justified support for Putin among Russians who endorsed him for his performance. But at best, they contributed about 20 percent to his overall ratings. The remaining at least 60 percent of Putin’s approval were not directly affected by evaluations of his actual performance, economic and otherwise. They were sustained by hope that Vladimir Putin’s leadership will bring future improvements, and fears that replacing him could have the same effect as letting the Soviet Union collapse.
Putin could attract such broad popular support on hope and fear alone because people believed he was uniquely qualified to complete a crucial, but essentially narrow and transient mission: reversing Russia’s decline. This is why Putin’s popularity began to slip, ironically, right after people’s perceptions of the Russian economy peaked. This process, as we can see in Figure 8, began after the Russia’s spillover recession from the global economic crisis in 2009. At first, Putin’s ratings stayed relatively flat even as economic assessments recovered from this crisis. Then, in early 2011, his approval took a sharp, 15-20 percentage points plunge, foreshadowing the unprecedented wave of anti-regime protests in 2011-2013.

This highlights a key lesson for the nature of “strongman” authoritarian “popularity.” Putin’s popular support declined after 2011 because the mission he was endorsed to perform – reversing
Russia’s post-Soviet decline – was essentially completed. As the economy gradually returned to pre-transition levels, people’s priorities began to shift from basic survival and consumption to resolving Russia’ structural problems in areas like healthcare, education, rule of law and control of corruption (Belanovsky and Dmitriev 2013). These are issues that an unaccountable authoritarian system, designed to guarantee stability could not address. To compensate, Putin initially championed the ostensibly reformist technocrat lawyer Dmitry Medvedev as his successor at the presidency, while he took the backseat as prime minister. But it quickly became apparent that this transition was a sham. Frustration seeped in and approval ratings began to drop among those who supported Putin for his performance and desired change. Then, to add insult to injury, Putin announced in September 2011 that he would return to the presidency in the next year, ending hopes of meaningful change in the foreseeable future. The wave of protests, dominated by the reform-minded, middle-class, highly educated urbanites, erupted soon after.

“Making Russia Great Again” to Survive Politically: The Path to the Ukraine War

Leaders live and die by the public images they project: once they are identified with a particular role, it tends to become anchored in the collective consciousness of the nation. Thus, when circumstances change, people can turn their backs to even highly revered leaders who do not seem to be cut for the times. Winston Churchill’s landslide electoral defeat in 1945 – just as he had heroically steered Britain throughout its greatest ordeal in history – is a case in point.

Vladimir Putin faced a similar prospect in 2013, but in the much higher-stakes political environment in Russia. A decade before, by crushing Chechen rebels and unfettered oligarchs, he assumed the mantle of the competent strongman that Russia craved for. But as the country stabilized from the post-Soviet crisis, the image of a bare-chested, take-charge tough guy president, toiling to “raise Russia from its knees” was becoming stale. Worse still, people began to realize that the particular brand of authoritarianism that he created – the security services-dominated crony capitalist system, designed to maximize loyalty and control – stood in the way of Russia’s further progress.
The only reason Putin approval did not plunge below 60 percent in the face of the 2011-2013 protest wave was because a third of the population still hoped that he can refashion himself into Russia’s modernizer, and another third still feared that without him, the country would slip back into chaos. For the time being, only the performance-motivated trust in Putin declined, as we can see in Figure 6. But on the long run, hope and fear are perishable commodities. They need to be occasionally refreshed by tangible achievements and credible threats.

And Putin’s regime provided exactly the opposite signals. The shock of the 2009 recession, which despite the Kremlin’s assurances to the contrary hit Russia particularly hard, shattered the regime’s image as an indispensable guarantor of stability (see e.g. Chaisty and Whitefield (2012)). And as result of Russia’s increasingly apparent economic stagnation and corrupt political system, hope was starting to wear thin. By 2013, about 60 percent of respondents to Levada Center surveys said they fully or mostly agreed that people have grown tired of waiting for Vladimir Putin to produce positive changes in their lives.11 Worse still, there were early signals that such sentiments and feelings of discontent were spreading beyond the more sophisticated urbanite population, which formed the core of the 2011-2012 protest wave, to Russia’s more conservative, blue-collar majority living in the provinces (Dmitriev and Treisman 2012).

With his brand in terminal decline, Putin saw little choice but to resort to radical measures. To stay in power, he had to refocus popular attention back to issues that favored him: battling Russia’s “threats” and ensuring its stability. Staged against this backdrop, the interventions in Ukraine and beyond were part of a last-ditch effort to salvage the authoritarian regime sustained by Putin’s popularity. By placing the country on a war footing, Putin effectively changed the terms of reference Russians used to evaluate the performance of their leadership. If attempts to modernize Russia exposed the weaknesses of his regime and were gradually turning Putin into a villain, the campaigns in Ukraine and Syria resurrected his strongman savior image.

They also reshuffled the perspectives and priorities of ordinary Russians in ways favorable for the Kremlin. In Russia’s public consciousness, these foreign interventions essentially reset the clock back to the period before 1989. This was a time when Russians were poor, but lived in a superpower that provided stability and a sense of pride. And for most Russian citizens, giving up this status in the 1990s resulted in far greater hardship and humiliation than anything they had to endure under the Soviet dictatorship. To put it differently, for ordinary people in Russia who lived through the 1990s, great power nationalism and Soviet nostalgia is not just an attractive myth, but
also had tangible economic repercussions. The last time that Russians traded their guns for more butter, they pretty soon lost all the butter too.

This is why the ability to restore Russia’s great power status had always been a key criterion Russian voters used to evaluate their potential leaders. As I show in Table 1 below, the main expectation Russian voters had from Presidential candidates was to “make Russia a great, respected power again.” Over 50 percent of respondents consistently chose this option in each election year since 1996, when Putin was still a mere bureaucrat far from the Kremlin’s levers of power. This was 10-20 percent more than the share of voters that demanded a fair distribution of incomes or compensation for their losses during Russia’s catastrophic post-Communist transformation – issues one might expect that the degraded and impoverished Russians would hold closer to heart. Again, this was not because Russian citizens were willing to sacrifice their wellbeing for Russia’s country’s greatness; They emphasized restoring Russia’s great power status because they believed this was the best way to ensure their well-being, and to guarantee order and stability in the country.

Table 1: What do You Expect Most of All from a President Who You Are Prepared to Vote for? (respondents can choose multiple answers)

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<tr>
<td>Make Russia a great, respected power again</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>57</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strengthen law and order</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>51</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strengthen role of the state in the economy</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fair distribution of incomes for ordinary people</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continue reforms, but with more social protection</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Give ordinary people the means the lost during reform</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finish the war in Chechnya</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keep Russia on the path of reform</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Set the course for reunification with the former Soviet republics</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continue rapprochement with the West</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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Source: Levada Center Surveys
Tapping into these sentiments, Russia’s interventions in Ukraine and Syria resurrected both the greatest hope and the deepest fear of post-Soviet Russia. The hope was that having decisively pushed back against the West for the first time since 1989, Russia would finally be able to reclaim its lost stature and opportunity to pursue its own path to development. And the fear was that now, when Russia was “on its feet” again, its citizens would risk reliving the Soviet collapse and making their lives much worse if they embraced another liberalization and rejected the Putinist authoritarian system that guaranteed a semblance of order at home and “made Russia great” abroad.

This diversionary conflict strategy has been paying off handsomely for the Kremlin in the past few years. After the Crimea annexation, Putin instantaneously reclaimed his status as the indispensable leader, “raising Russia from its knees.” His popularity bounced back to around 85 percent in early 2014 and hovered around this level ever since, in spite of sanctions and Russia’s greatest decline in living standards since the 1990s. Even Putin’s performance-based evaluations soared upwards: the share of Russians who believed their leader is trusted due to his achievements rose from 15 percent in mid-2012 to a record high of almost 40 percent at the end of 2014, according to Figure 6. Performance-motivated support for Putin was reset from “it’s the economy stupid!” to “it’s the stability stupid!”

Crucially, Russia’s newly assertive posture appears to have restored Putin’s staying power in politics. As I illustrate in Figure 9, 41 percent of Russians in early 2013 said that they would like to see Vladimir Putin replaced by someone who would pursue different solutions to Russia’s problems in the next elections, while a combined 40 percent wished to see another Putin presidency, or his replacement by someone who would continue his policies. The writing on the wall was clear: Putin’s brand of an indispensable strongman was in terminal decline. After the annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine, these sentiments completely reversed. By June 2015, a full 66 percent wanted Putin himself to stay in power, while only 15 percent thought that he should be replaced by a president that will follow a different course. The crusade to make Russia a great power again clearly gave Putin’s regime a new lease on life. But how long can this last? And how will it shape Kremlin’s behavior?
The Strategy of the Cornered Rat

Regimes that stake their legitimacy on a quest of tackling foreign threats and safeguarding stability at home, as Samuel Huntington (1991) once pointed out, become redundant both if they succeed or if they fail in their mission. To survive, they must juggle two incompatible goals: they must sustain, or even manufacture, the crises and threats that justify their rule, while also appearing to be successful in addressing them. The proverbial dragon-slaying knight in a shining armor is the undisputed hero of the realm only as long as there are dragons to slay, and he appears to be good at
Having fully committed to this role with the Ukraine intervention, Vladimir Putin has three crucial imperatives for sustaining his popular support. First, he cannot afford to suffer a humiliating defeat, or a bloody quagmire while pursuing a crusade to reassert Russia’s great power status. Second, he cannot compromise and bargain away the gains of this struggle (like Crimea and other Russian-controlled parts of Ukraine), or allow further infringements into Russia’s “sphere of influence” (think potential “color” revolutions in other countries in the former Soviet Union), without losing credibility. Finally, and most importantly, he cannot afford peace for long. Too much time off the struggle for Russia’s rightful place in the world will divert public attention from an area where Putin is perceived to be at his best (foreign affairs) back to festering domestic issues (like the fixing the economy, or tackling corruption and inequality), where he is bound to be seen as a failure.

The clearest indication that Putin’s renewed popular support is highly dependent on the existence of a “clear and present danger” to Russia is provided by the shifts in popular attitudes toward strong-armed rule in the wake of the Crimea annexation. As we can see from Figure 5, between March 2013 and March 2014, the share of respondents who believed that “there are times (such as now), when it is necessary to concentrate all power in the same hands” sharply increased, from 31 to 46 percent of the total. The Ukraine war made this group of “contingent authoritarians” dominant for the first time since 1989 – garnering 15 percentage points more than the unreserved authoritarian outlook (“Russia always needs strong-hand rule”) and 30 points more than the liberal view (“power should never be concentrated in the hands of a single person”).

Most important of all, the rise of Russia’s “contingent authoritarians” has accounted for the bulk of Putin’s post-Crimea popularity boost. Of Putin’s 17 percent rise in popular approval in this period, 14 percent (or more than four fifths) came from the swelling ranks of Russians who believed their country needs a “strong hand” now, but not always. This attitude shift in the wake of the Ukraine conflict not only helped Putin restore his popularity, but also seemed to demobilize the protest sentiments that threatened his rule. As I show in Figure A.3 and Table A.2 in the Appendix, in March 2017, the respondents who provisionally supported strong-armed rule instead of the unconditional authoritarian view “our people always need a strong hand” tended to be residents of Moscow, of middle and upper class backgrounds, and dissatisfied with the general direction of Russia: the basic profile of the participants in protest movement of 2011-2012. The Ukraine conflict clearly rallied these people behind the regime. But if they were to someday become convinced that
the dangers Russia faces no longer require a heavy-handed leadership, they could withdraw their support for Putin’s rule, sending his approval ratings tumbling down and raising the specter of renewed anti-regime protests. Thus, to maintain the loyalty this new majority of contingent authoritarians, Vladimir Putin’s regime will need to supply a steady stream of conflicts that will give them a credible enough reason to feel threatened.

Unless he is effectively challenged by the West, Putin can sustain this sort of diversionary conflict legitimation for a long time, despite Russia’s severe and oft cited limitations and weaknesses. First, to keep the fear of foreign enemies and instability at home alive – as well as the appearance of “great power” status and sphere of influence in the former Soviet space – Putin does not need to occupy and control Russia’s neighbors and other countries; he only needs to create enclaves and frozen conflicts that will destabilize them. Russia did this effectively when it was far weaker in 1990s. Second, Putin’s direct opponents in this campaign will be the dysfunctional and fragile former Soviet states, highly exposed to Russia’s leverage. Finally, to maintain the appearance of challenging the Western supremacy globally, Putin can resort to methods ranging from boastful intransigence at the UN to cyberattacks, airspace intrusions, provocative wargames and acting as a spoiler in critical regions like the Middle East. These are essentially “trolling” tactics, designed to frustrate the West and delight Russians without much risk of open confrontation (Kornbluth 2015). Russia is quite capable of sustaining such activities for a long time.

Of course, this strategy carries a risk of unwanted escalations and failures that could damage rather than boost the regime’s legitimacy. But Russia’s strongman authoritarianism cannot back down and survive politically. The best known story from Vladimir Putin’s childhood is about a rat he chased into a corner; left with no choices, the rat jumped out at the startled young Putin, escaping in the process (Putin et al. 2000). Now, by staking his regime’s credibility in the quest to restore Russia’s fading glory and greatness, Putin has turned it into a cornered rat. It can only survive by startling the West, its neighbors and the Russian population with aggressive audacity.

Sanctions and the economic woes they induce will not easily undermine the ability of Russia’s autocracy to sustain itself in this fashion. Putin’s predecessor Boris Yeltsin provides the clearest example of just how much economic ruin a Russian president can preside over and still stay in power. After leading Russia through the greatest peacetime economic decline in history, the frail and incoherent Yeltsin still managed to secure another term with only 30 percent approval rating in 1996. And Yeltsin never effectively diverted attention away from economics by pursuing an
aggressive confrontational policy beyond Russia’s borders, as Putin did. Authoritarian regimes far less capable than Putin’s Russia have sustained their rule by pursuing devastating conflicts, demobilizing domestic opposition through fear-mongering and nationalist-patriotic rhetoric, despite crippling economic circumstances, sanctions and external pressure. The case in point is Serbia’s Slobodan Milosevic, who unlike Putin, ruled a small country with limited resources and no nuclear weapons, devastated by sanctions and surrounded by US friends and allies. Despite all this, Milosevic managed to cling to power for over a decade, with ruinous consequences for his country and the Balkans (Gagnon 2004).

In the ultimate analysis, a social and economic collapse in Russia never produced a democracy (Ioffe 2014). A sanctions-induced economic meltdown could lead not just to Putin’s downfall, but also to chaos and another, possibly even nastier, autocracy. This leads us to one final point. The West has largely assumed that it only has a “Putin problem,” not a “Russia problem” when confronting Kremlin’s perilous use of aggression abroad to sustain domestic support. But this is a dangerous assumption to make. The (dirty) truth about the image of the super-popular savior strongman, battling Russia’s foreign and domestic detractors, is that can be assumed by other ambitious politicians and bureaucrats waiting in the shadows. Putin himself is the ultimate proof: all it took to cast a complete – and initially awkward and reluctant – outsider into this role in 1999 was a deftly synchronized power transition and a small victorious war.

Putinism, to put things differently, is not a supply-side problem, but a demand-side problem. As long as the specter of festering conflicts, humiliating economic cataclysms, or another collapse haunts the Russian population, majorities will be compelled to willingly – if reluctantly – support strong-armed rule as the least bad remedy. And because of this broad appeal, Putinism will also be embraced by Russia’s kleptocratic, unaccountable and widely despised political, bureaucratic and business elites, who, as I have argued earlier, need a popular authoritarian patron to protect their ill-gotten wealth and power from expropriation. So, if Putin is gone one day, Russia’s elites and society might again feel compelled again support someone just like him. As Putin’s own former spin doctor Gleb Pavlovsky put it: “It’s impossible to say when this system will fall, but when it falls, it will fall in one day. And the one to replace it will be a copy of this one (Ioffe 2014; Pavlovsky 2016).”
Conclusion

This chapter examines the sources of Vladimir Putin’s popularity in Russia – one of the most fundamental and distinctive features of his reign since 2000. Contrary to some existing preconceptions, the chapter argues that Russians have not supported their leader because they were bribed, brainwashed, and coerced into submission, or because they were somehow culturally predisposed to favor strong-armed, authoritarian rule. Instead, I show that Russian citizens endorsed Putin’s strong-armed electoral authoritarian regime because they perceived it as the least bad alternative, capable of stabilizing their country after the cataclysmic post-Soviet decline. Hoping that Putin’s stern leadership will eventually restore order and prosperity in Russia, and fearing that replacing it will bring back the chaos of the 1990s, ordinary Russians have also been remarkably willing to tolerate Putinist autocracy, despite its poor record of achievement.

These sentiments allowed Putin to retain the bulk of his support in the wake of the protest wave against his rule in 2011-2012. But his legitimacy based on hope and fear was quickly becoming exhausted in this new context. As Russia recovered from its post-Communist decline, it became increasingly harder to hold its population captive to the belief that an authoritarian overlord is needed to prevent further instability. And more and more Russians realized that Putin’s corrupt authoritarian regime stood in the way of future progress. Faced with terminal decline, Putin’s strongman authoritarian regime had no other way to resuscitate its legitimacy except to push Russia toward another existential struggle by staging the interventions in Ukraine and Syria. Tapping in the deepest traumas from the defeat in the Cold War and the subsequent Soviet collapse, these conflicts stifled appetites for liberalization and gave Putin a new lease on life. However, as popular opinion trends suggest, this newfound legitimacy is dangerously dependent on the regime’s ability to supply a constant stream of threats, conflicts, and victories to justify Putin’s heavy-handed rule. Lacking other sources of legitimacy and facing bleak economic prospects, Vladimir Putin has few other choices but to pursue this high-cost and high-risk diversionary conflict strategy to survive politically.

The ability of Putin’s regime to maintain power in this fashion will have key implications not just for Russia and the regions most affected by it, but also for other major autocracies. As a prototype of a robust post-Cold war authoritarian system, Putinist Russia and its future course will profoundly influence the behavior of non-democratic regimes across the world. In particular, the ability of Putin’s regime to sustain its domestic legitimacy through diversionary conflicts could
inspire other autocracies to pursue similar tactics when facing domestic challenges. The Russian experience, in this sense, could provide important lessons for the Chinese regime. Should China’s economy stall, undermining the performance-based domestic legitimacy of its authoritarian system (see e.g. Wright (2010)), the Chinese leadership might also feel compelled to prop itself up by pursuing confrontations abroad and pumping nationalism and fear-mongering at home. The fate of Putin’s diversionary authoritarian legitimation is bound to have a crucial demonstration effect from this perspective. If the objectively weaker Russian regime could get away with a territorial grab like Crimea, the intervention in Syria, or the hacking of U.S. and European elections, why shouldn’t China be able to perform analogous stunts in its “sphere of influence” in Asia?
NOTES

1 The author would like to thank the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University for their generous support that has made the research for this chapter possible, as well as John Dunlop, Valerie Bunce, Michael McFaul, and Paul Gregory and the participants at the “Citizens and the State in Authoritarian Regimes: Comparing Mass Politics and Policy in China and Russia” workshop at the University of Notre Dame on March 10-11, 2017, for their helpful comments to previous versions of this chapter.


3 This data is from the Russia Electoral Study in 2012 (see Colton et al. (2014))

4 The data in Figure 4 is drawn from the New Russia Barometer surveys (Rose 2010) carried out by the Levada Center for the 2000-2009 period.

5 As Kotkin (2016) illustrates: “With the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, Moscow lost some two million square miles of sovereign territory—more than the equivalent of the entire European Union (1.7 million square miles) or India (1.3 million). Russia forfeited the share of Germany it had conquered in World War II and its other satellites in Eastern Europe—all of which are now inside the Western military alliance…”

6 In all models, I also include a squared term for age to capture the non-linear effect of this variable. For social class, I use low, middle and upper class dummies (the low class dummy is left out from the models to serve as a reference category), derived from respondents’ self-reported ability to purchase various goods. The party affiliation variable I use for the analysis does not record sympathies for specific parties, but for the most relevant party groups in Russia – the “communists,” “democrats,” “patriots” (denoting nationalists), and “party of power” (i.e. incumbent). I leave out the dummy for “party of power” sympathizers in all models, so the effects of the other party affiliation dummies should be interpreted in relation to this category.

7 Table A.1 in the Appendix provides the full results from pooled multinomial logit models using all 15 Levada center surveys that contain the question about why people trust Putin. The pooled model contains survey fixed effects to account for potential differences across the surveys that contain this question, and also employ robust standard errors. As an additional robustness check, I also estimate these models separately for each survey, to check whether the size and direction of these variables’ effects differ over time. The results from this analysis (available on demand) are virtually identical to the ones presented in the paper.

8 In particular, the results in the right panel of Figure A.1 suggest that the belief that Russia is headed in the wrong direction increases odds of responding that people support Putin because of a lack of better alternatives instead of his ability to tackle Russia’s problems by 1.9 times among respondents who approved Putin’s performance and by 3.4 times among all respondents. This discrepancy reduces considerably in the right panel of Figure A.1, which includes controls for party sympathies.

9 We can see the performance-related nature of the decline in Putin’s popular support by comparing Figures 6 and 8. The size and timing of the 15 percent drop in Putin’s approval between early 2011 and early 2012
closely corresponds to the decline in the share of respondents who believed that people trust Putin because of his performance.

10 For the profile of the participants in the 2011-2012 protest movements see the results of protest participant surveys conducted by the Levada Center (see Levada Center (2011, 2012a, 2012b)).

11 Calculated using Levada Center surveys downloaded from the Joint Economic and Social Data Archive at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow (http://sophist.hse.ru).

12 In this sense, opinion research has consistently shown that the economic consequences of the Soviet collapse were among the key drivers of Russian nostalgia for the former empire. Thus, the top response Russian citizens have consistently given as to why they regret the collapse of the USSR was the “the destruction of the common economic system,” with “loss of a sense of belonging to a great power” as a close second (see Levada Center (2016b)). Also, nostalgia for the USSR was considerably more pronounced among poorer Russian citizens, who suffered the most in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse. Thus, 77 percent of the poor respondents to Levada Center surveys in 2014 declared they regret the collapse of the USSR – almost 20 and 35 percent more than middle class and upper class respondents (see Levada Center (2014)).

13 Quite the contrary, issues like price increases, poverty, unemployment and inequality consistently topped the list of concerns of Russian citizens in Levada surveys, far ahead of foreign policy and security concerns (see e.g. Levada Center (2016a)).

14 This shift in Russian attitudes about the propriety of heavy-handed rule actually began during the 2011-2012 protest wave, when the share of unconditional supporters of authoritarianism (“Our people always need a strong hand”) began to decline. At the same time, the regime’s efforts to portray the protests as an externally concocted threat to Russia’s stability has created a general sense of crisis which has induced more Russians to think the country needs emergency management for now. However, while negative propaganda against activists and protest actions like the “Pussy riot” case slowed down the spread of anti-regime sentiments (Smyth and Soboleva 2014), these campaigns could not serve as a credible existential threat to rally the majority of increasingly skeptical citizens behind the regime, even conditionally. Only the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, and the ongoing confrontation with the West provided a tangible enough threat to justify the regime’s claims that strong-armed rule is necessary for the time being (on this mechanism of authoritarian support, see also Slater (2010)).
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Ioffe, Julia. 2014. “Vladimir Putin Might Fall. We Should Consider What Happens Next.” *New Republic*.


APPENDIX

Figure A.1: Odds of Choosing a Response Other than "People Trust Putin Because He Adequately Tackles the Problems of Russia" (Respondents that Approve Putin's Performance vs. All Respondents)

2001-2014

2001-2007

Note: odds ratios with 95% confidence intervals
Table A.1: Multinomial Logit Estimates of Responses About Why People Trust Putin (“People Trust Putin Because He Adequately Tackles Russia’s Problems” Response as Base Category)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hope he will tackle in the future</td>
<td>No alternative</td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>Hope he will tackle in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (std.)</td>
<td>0.05 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.19 (0.05)**</td>
<td>0.17 (0.09)*</td>
<td>-0.02 (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age squared (std.)</td>
<td>-0.52 (0.08)**</td>
<td>-0.67 (0.09)**</td>
<td>-0.15 (0.16)</td>
<td>-0.49 (0.12)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.03 (0.04)</td>
<td>0.15 (0.04)**</td>
<td>0.38 (0.08)**</td>
<td>0.03 (0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education: high school</td>
<td>0.18 (0.06)**</td>
<td>0.20 (0.07)**</td>
<td>-0.10 (0.12)</td>
<td>0.18 (0.08)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education: college</td>
<td>0.16 (0.08)*</td>
<td>0.36 (0.08)**</td>
<td>0.07 (0.14)</td>
<td>0.30 (0.11)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larger settlement (std.)</td>
<td>-0.08 (0.04)*</td>
<td>0.11 (0.04)*</td>
<td>-0.02 (0.08)</td>
<td>-0.17 (0.06)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower class</td>
<td>0.32 (0.07)**</td>
<td>0.40 (0.07)**</td>
<td>0.45 (0.13)**</td>
<td>0.29 (0.10)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>0.17 (0.06)**</td>
<td>0.23 (0.06)**</td>
<td>0.14 (0.12)</td>
<td>0.12 (0.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Russia bad</td>
<td>0.67 (0.05)**</td>
<td>1.21 (0.05)**</td>
<td>1.34 (0.08)**</td>
<td>0.55 (0.07)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist sympathizer</td>
<td>0.65 (0.12)**</td>
<td>0.89 (0.12)**</td>
<td>2.42 (0.34)**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat sympathizer</td>
<td>0.27 (0.10)**</td>
<td>0.34 (0.11)**</td>
<td>0.64 (0.41)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalist sympathizer</td>
<td>0.56 (0.18)**</td>
<td>0.98 (0.18)**</td>
<td>2.16 (0.43)**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathizer of other centrist party</td>
<td>0.09 (0.27)</td>
<td>0.49 (0.27)*</td>
<td>1.30 (0.70)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathizer of other party</td>
<td>0.20 (0.24)</td>
<td>0.88 (0.23)**</td>
<td>0.16 (1.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No party sympathy</td>
<td>0.56 (0.08)**</td>
<td>0.92 (0.09)**</td>
<td>1.78 (0.33)**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.41 (0.12)**</td>
<td>-1.10 (0.13)**</td>
<td>-3.13 (0.27)**</td>
<td>-0.79 (0.15)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey fixed effects</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>16306</td>
<td></td>
<td>7965</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td>-19212.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>-9030.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Logit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$
Figure A.2: Predicted Probability of Choosing a Response to the "Why People Trust Putin" Question, by Age

People trust Putin because he adequately tackles Russia's problems

People trust Putin because they hope he will tackle Russia's problems in the future

People trust Putin because they don't see who else they can rely upon

Note: estimates with 95% confidence intervals; variables apart from age held at means
Figure A.3: Odds of Choosing a Response Other than "Our People Always Need a Strong Hand" (March 2014)

There are situations, such as now, when power should be concentrated in the same hands.

Power Should Never Be Concentrated in the Hands of One Person

Note: odds ratios with 95% confidence intervals
Table A.2: Multinomial Logit Estimates of Responses to the Question: “Are there, in Your Opinion, Such Situations in Our Nation When "the People Need a Strong and Imperious Leader, a ‘Strong Hand?’” (“Our people always need a strong hand” Response as Base Category)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“There are situations (such as now), when you have to concentrate all power in the same hands”</th>
<th>“In no case it should be allowed that all power is put into the hands of one person”</th>
<th>“Hard to say”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (std.)</td>
<td>0.01 (0.21)</td>
<td>-0.00 (0.28)</td>
<td>-0.87 (0.39)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age squared (std.)</td>
<td>0.14 (0.43)</td>
<td>-0.15 (0.53)</td>
<td>-0.14 (0.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.00 (0.20)</td>
<td>0.04 (0.26)</td>
<td>-0.45 (0.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education: high school</td>
<td>0.01 (0.46)</td>
<td>-0.42 (0.58)</td>
<td>-0.49 (0.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education: college</td>
<td>-0.15 (0.51)</td>
<td>-0.56 (0.63)</td>
<td>-0.47 (0.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>0.68 (0.31)*</td>
<td>0.40 (0.41)</td>
<td>1.31 (0.63)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper class</td>
<td>0.98 (0.35)**</td>
<td>0.94 (0.45)*</td>
<td>1.78 (0.70)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moscow resident</td>
<td>1.05 (0.51)*</td>
<td>1.45 (0.58)*</td>
<td>-0.83 (1.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larger settlement (std.)</td>
<td>-0.03 (0.25)</td>
<td>0.15 (0.31)</td>
<td>-0.58 (0.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Russia bad</td>
<td>0.54 (0.27)*</td>
<td>0.78 (0.31)*</td>
<td>0.30 (0.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.48 (0.55)</td>
<td>-1.12 (0.57)*</td>
<td>-2.29 (0.87)**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>791</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td>-911.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Logit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses

* p < 0.10,  " p < 0.05,  ** p < 0.01