

Review 2

Title: New Trends in Russian Political Mentality: Putin 3.0. By Elena Shestopal (2015). 414 p. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. ISBN-10: 149851474X

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The book “New Trends in Russian Political Mentality: Putin 3.0.” by Elena Shestopal allows readers to study modern Russian politics as an object of citizens’ perception and to immerse themselves in modern psychological patterns of Russians’ thinking. There are many articles and books that explore the Russian political process. However, only few of them can demonstrate its unique features and differences both on the psychological and socio-political levels. Elena Shestopal and her colleagues have done an excellent job here. Combining a deep theoretical study and various methods of analysis, the authors have presented an interpretation of key political trends in Russia which will interest all researchers studying people’s perceptions of politics, as well as those who study civil society in authoritarian states. These topics have already been studied by Shestopal earlier (Shestopal, 2012; Shestopal, 2015b). However, “... Putin 3.0” reveals a study of the patterns of how Russians perceive political reality and various political actors in more complete form.

The first section of the book substantiates the relevance of the studied topic of political perception and describes the research methods. Taking the qualitative methodology as a basis, Shestopal and co-authors, though, combine qualitative and quantitative methods, which allows them to scale the results of the analysis and extrapolate the findings. Also, in the first section, the authors present the interpretational model of analysis they developed. The following parts of the work are devoted to the study of how Russians’ perception of the political reality as a whole determines their view of specific actors such as political parties, public politicians, and even the state. While studying people’s perception of authorities, the authors do not forget to compare the respondents’ answers with their socio-demographic and psychological characteristics. This allows us to trace the patterns of perception caused by the heterogeneity of society. For example, we learn that in Russia “women’s evaluation of political changes is based mainly on emotions” (Shestopal, 2015a, p. 132), “the older generation finds [the liberal] ideology the least attractive”, while youth does the opposite (Shestopal, 2015a, p. 142), and citizens living in Moscow and Krasnodar “are the most active politically” (Shestopal, 2015a, p. 150).

In Part 3 authors study the perception of political institutions such as state, parliament and political parties. The authors propose an interesting approach by looking into not only people’s perception of real modern institutions but also into their vision of ideal institutions and their functioning. This allows to demonstrate a gap between the two in the

minds of Russians. While the majority was able to describe their vision of ideal institutions, people perceived their *current* functioning with distrust and with the dominance of negative emotions. Discrepancy between the expectations and the real state of affairs lead to the development of frustration in society – that is, to the situation of inconsistency of desires with existing opportunities. According to the studies Davies and Gurr, frustration processes and feelings of dissatisfaction lead to the emergence of revolutionary collective action and protests in society (Davies, 1962; Gurr, 1971). So, in the context of Russia, we should pay attention to the mass rallies of 2011-2013 that became the largest in 20 years. Those protests were also discussed in the book Shestopal, and from the point of view of political psychology, the frustration could be the cause of their occurrence. Therefore, further study of the gap between the perception of current and ideal institutions by Russians is particularly relevant for the political science.

Finally, in Part 4 of the book, the perception of Russian political leaders is examined. In the course of the book, the authors demonstrated that political power in the perception of Russians is very personalized: for example, people associate parties with their charismatic leaders, and the state – with its leaders (President and Prime minister). At the same time, leaders themselves are perceived by Russians not only as representatives of institutions or movements but, above all, as individuals, which is why citizens assess not only their effectiveness but also their personal qualities, appearance, attitudes, etc. Thus, the study of the perception of leaders has become one of the most significant parts of the book. The authors explored the dynamics of perception of Vladimir Putin's image as a leader, as well as images of executive leaders Dmitry Medvedev and Vyacheslav Volodin, a few regional leaders, and representatives of Russian Parliament. Furthermore, this work covers not only the incumbent leaders, but also the image of opposition candidates (Navalny, Prokhorov, Khodorkovsky, and Kudrin), which is especially relevant in the context of the all-Russian opposition protests of 2011-2013. The fourth part of the book shows that the perception of public political leaders in Russia is a very subjective thing. As the overwhelming majority of Russians do not know the details about the functions and tasks of politicians, people perceive and evaluate them based on the "prestige" of their status, the frequency of mentions in connection with known political processes, etc. However, the level of recognition of politicians has no direct connection with the support of their actions. The latter varies depending on the political views of the respondents themselves.

Another important conclusion that we can learn after reading this book is an understanding of how strongly the political process in Russia is determined not only by the cultural features of modern Russia but also by the historical path-dependence on the political culture of the USSR. Similar findings are observed in other works on political decision-making by citizens of the Russian Federation. For example, the researcher Danielle Lussier described that it was the patterns of people's perception of political participation, preserved by Russians from Soviet times, which led to an authoritarian pullback of the state in the 90s (Lussier, 2011).

The topic of the political image formation seems to be among the most significant for modern political psychology. It is especially relevant for the studies of authoritarian countries, where the access to media, which in many respects shape the image of politicians, may be limited to opposition candidates. Citizens' perception of political processes is one of the most interesting and at the same time the most challenging topics for academic in-

quiry. Due to its complexity, this topic requires researchers to deeply immerse in the studied environment and to combine different methods of data collection and analysis. Such a study was presented by E. Shestopal along with her colleagues. This book is worth reading for all people interested in the study of authoritarian regimes' citizens' psychology, and in particular for researchers studying political behavior of residents of post-Soviet countries. In addition, this work will be useful to everyone interested in a combination of different methodologies in order to use data from different sources and conduct research from a historical perspective. Concerning the strengths of the book, it is definitely worth highlighting the detailed presentation of statistics and the illustrations. A comprehensive approach to studying the perception of politics by Russians and the structural presentation of the information provided by the authors allow recommending this book both to experienced researchers and to students of related specialties.

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