

# 5

## *Putin I, 2000–2008*

Vladimir Putin's elevation to the post of acting president virtually ensured his victory in the approaching general election. The mobilization of Boris Yeltsin's "family," including the oligarchs and other special interests that sought continuity, placed considerable resources at his disposal. The advantages of incumbency were many: access to the media, the ability to use the resources of the government to entice voters to his side, and the preeminence of the presidency placed Putin at the head of the pack. The financial support of the oligarchs, who had bankrolled Yeltsin's 1996 victory, carried considerable weight, as did the vast media resources they controlled. It also was important that the presidential aspirations of Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov and former prime minister Yevgeny Primakov had been dealt a serious blow through the forced merger of their parties and the emergence of a new party of power, Unity, which rapidly endorsed Putin's candidacy.

To his credit, Putin quickly rose to the occasion and stepped forward as a viable and dynamic candidate. He was a far cry from the debilitated and withdrawn Yeltsin. Like any good campaigner, he found the issues that produced support and made them his own. These included a renewed war in Chechnya and a series of never completely explained bombings of civilian targets in Moscow and elsewhere. Putin visibly took charge of policy toward the rebellious enclave and personal responsibility for the outcome. It played well to the voters.<sup>1</sup>

The voters had begun to warm to Putin even before Yeltsin's resignation. As prime minister, he clearly was on the list of possible candidates. During the last months of Yeltsin's rule, Putin rose dramatically in the polls. In August 1999, he was favored by a scant 2 percent of the voters. By the end

of September, support had risen to 15 percent; by the end of October, to 25 percent; and by late November, to over 40 percent.<sup>2</sup>

## The 2000 Presidential Election

Although Putin was clearly in the lead going into the presidential election, he still had notable opposition. Luzhkov and Primakov could have mounted strong candidacies, but both pulled out of the race rather than challenge the clear backing of the Kremlin and the advantages of incumbency. This left the usual suspects, who did their best in a familiar and predictable campaign. Gennedy Zyuganov was back as the candidate of the Communist Party, which was losing some of its support to Putin on both economic and internal security issues. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy also was in the running for the Liberal Democrats. Grigory Yavlinsky again stood for Yabloko. Aman Tuleev, the leftist governor of the Kemerovo region who had stepped aside for Zyuganov in the previous election, now stood his ground, saying that he would throw his support to Zyuganov in the second round. In all, eleven candidates were on the ballot.

Putin's campaign was run by his friend and close associate from St. Petersburg, Dmitry Medvedev, who had also entered the world of democratic politics at the time Sobchak controlled the city. The campaign stressed several themes, including a return to a strong state capable of governing the nation; a sense of order and discipline within society; rapid, although undefined, advancement of a market economy; suppression of separatist movements in the provinces; and restoration of the power and glory of Russia in the international arena. Everything that had been abandoned, or lost, or merely slipped away in the Gorbachev and Yeltsin years would be brought back. All it required was strong leadership.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 5.1** 2000 Russian Presidential Election

| <i>Candidate</i>      | <i>Party</i>             | <i>Votes</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Vladimir Putin        | Independent              | 39,740,467   | 53.4              |
| Gennady Zyuganov      | Communist Party          | 21,928,468   | 29.5              |
| Grigory Yavlinsky     | Yabloko                  | 4,351,450    | 5.9               |
| Aman Tuleev           | Independent              | 2,217,364    | 3.0               |
| Vladimir Zhirinovskiy | Liberal Democratic Party | 2,026,509    | 2.7               |

SOURCE: D. Nohlen and P. Stover. (2010). *Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook*. Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos.

On March 26, 2000, the Russian people voted to choose their second president. Putin won in the first round, with 53.4 percent of the vote (Table 5.1). No runoff would be needed as in Yeltsin's 1996 victory, and therefore, no compromises would have to be made, at least at this point. Zyuganov came in second with 29.5 percent of the vote, slightly below the 32.5 percent he won in the first round of the 1996 balloting. Yavlinsky got 5.9 percent, a point and a half below his 1996 support. Tuleev got 3.0 percent and no opportunity to play kingmaker in a second round. Zhirinovskiy had a really bad day, dropping to 2.7 percent, well below his 5.8 level of support four years earlier. "None of the above" got just under 2 percent.<sup>4</sup>

### **Vladimir Putin: From Spy Novels to the Kremlin**

Who was this person that Russia had chosen as its second president? He was born in Leningrad on October 7, 1952, to modest beginnings, even for the Soviet Union at the time. His father was a conscript in the navy, where he served in the submarine fleet, and his mother was a factory worker. Good proletarian credentials, but hardly an auspicious starting point. The family's only real political connection, of a sort, was that his paternal grandfather was an occasional cook for both Lenin and Stalin. In school, he was uncharacteristically slow to join the communist youth organization. He did, however, develop an early interest in the martial arts, especially *sambo*, a Russian variation of judo. He became infatuated with spy novels and movies, an interest that would shape his later life.

He graduated from Leningrad State University in 1975 with a degree in international law. While there, he joined the Communist Party and studied under Anatoly Sobchak, an association that would later change his life. He joined the KGB upon graduation, undoubtedly benefiting from the agency's decision to broaden recruitment to diversify its ranks. He served first in Leningrad in various capacities that monitored foreigners. From 1985 to 1990, he was posted to Dresden, East Germany; it was hardly a choice assignment, since the agency sent its best prospects to enemy states, not allies. He returned to the Soviet Union and was assigned to the International Department of Leningrad State University. More important, he reconnected with his former teacher, Sobchak. Seeing the handwriting on the wall, Putin resigned from the KGB shortly after the coup attempt in 1991 to try his hand in the new world of democratic politics.<sup>5</sup>

## VLADIMIR PUTIN

- Born October 7, 1952, in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), Russia.
- Studied law at Leningrad State University from 1970 to 1975; joined the Communist Party while at university; studied under Anatoly Sobchak, who taught business law.
- Joined the KGB in 1975 upon graduation; initially assigned to minor posts in Leningrad, then transferred to Dresden, East Germany, from 1985 to 1990, where he worked undercover to recruit agents.
- Recalled to Leningrad in 1991, where he worked in the KGB office at Leningrad State University.
- Resigned from the Communist Party in August 1991 in protest to the attempted coup against Gorbachev.
- In May 1990, was appointed advisor on international relations to Anatoly Sobchak, the city's first democratically elected mayor; advanced to higher posts within the city and became active in Our Home Is Russia, a pro-Yeltsin political party.
- Transferred to Moscow in June 1996, to become deputy head of the Presidential Property Management Office under Yeltsin.
- In March 1997, appointed deputy chief of the presidential staff.
- In July 1989, appointed head of the Federal Security Service, the internal affairs wing of the former KGB.
- In August 1999, appointed as one of three first deputy prime ministers and then advanced to acting prime minister; named as Yeltsin's chosen successor.
- Named acting president upon Yeltsin's resignation on December 31, 1999; won election to the post on March, 26, 2000, with 53.4 percent of the vote on the first round.
- During first presidential term, gradually weakened the power of the oligarchs and the Yeltsin "family," the remaining supporters of the first president.
- On March 14, 2004, reelected to a second term with 71.9 percent of the vote.
- Increasingly emerged as the broker among a growing number of factions in the government.
- Barred from a third consecutive term, Putin and prime minister Medvedev switched places for the 2008 presidential race; Medvedev is elected president on March 2, 2008, with 70.3 percent of the vote and named Putin as prime minister, beginning a four-year "tandem."
- During the run-up to the 2012 presidential election, Medvedev and Putin announced their intention to switch posts once again.
- Putin won election to a third term on March 4, 2012, with 63.6 percent of the vote; named Medvedev as prime minister; deepened presidential control over the government, the media, civil society, and opposition groups; began a more assertive foreign policy, including annexation of the Crimea.

Sobchak emerged as the leader of democratic forces in Leningrad. As the newly elected mayor, he appointed Putin as his advisor on international affairs. Until 1997, Putin served in a number of other posts in city government, some dealing with the sensitive and profitable question of property transfers in the emerging capitalist economy. Sobchak lost his bid for reelection in 1996 and soon fled the country with Putin's help in the face of corruption charges. In June 1996, Putin was summoned to Moscow to become deputy chief of the Presidential Property Management Department. Yeltsin soon advanced him to the posts of deputy chief of the presidential staff and director of the Presidential Property Management Department; the first brought him closer to the man who would eventually designate him as his successor, and the second deepened his connections with the murky world of property distribution to Yeltsin's chosen allies. He was soon named first deputy chief of the presidential staff. In 1998, he became director of the Federal Security Service, the new designation for the domestic affairs wing of his old home, the KGB. In August 1999, Yeltsin named him as one of three first deputy prime ministers. That same day, upon the dismissal of prime minister Sergei Stepashin, Putin was advanced to the post of acting prime minister and eventually designated as Yeltsin's chosen successor.

## The Putin Formula

As he came to office, Putin faced a complex legacy from his newly acquired patron. In many ways, Yeltsin had finished the Gorbachev revolution. The Soviet Union was gone, and a Russian Federation had emerged. Yeltsin's 1993 coup against the remnants of the soviet institutional order had completed the process and created a new presidency and legislature, but they were still mired deeply in the problems and mindsets of the old order. His episodic involvement in public affairs, in part because of illness and in part because of willful inattention to the details of using power left many problems unsolved. The economic transition was stalled in mid-course, and considerable economic and political power had fallen to the first generation of oligarchs, who had underwritten Yeltsin's successful political comeback in the 1996 election and now supported Putin's candidacy. A number of factions had gelled into place in the Kremlin and in the broader context of regional politics, including Yeltsin's family, led by his daughter, Tatiana, and powerful oligarchs such as Boris Berezovsky as well as a number of hangers-on and hopeful future claimants to power.

From Putin's perspective, this questionable legacy created daunting tasks. The first dealt with a political question: How could he take command

in what was still a volatile political system and protect his flanks against present or potential opponents? It was common knowledge that Yeltsin had a number of names on his list of potential successors, and Putin's was not the first. His selection might be interpreted as confirmation of his weakness in one sense; he would remain pliable to Yeltsin's continuing influence, especially in protecting the president and his entourage against potential indictment for economic or political crimes, and he would be heavily dependent on the family as a counterweight against other factions within the Kremlin. At the least, he could be seen as everyone else's second or third choice, and probably the least threatening to those who wished little change to come from the succession. Moreover, he had no power base at his disposal at the time of his appointment. Though a member of the *siloviki* because of his earlier career in the KGB, he was hardly its chief spokesman within the Kremlin hierarchy. Eventually the *Pitery*—St. Petersburg-based officials usually with an earlier career connection to Putin—would rise to greater (although probably overestimated) significance, but they were not viewed as a major faction at the beginning of Putin's first term in office.<sup>6</sup>

In seeking consolidation, Putin chose at first to rely on the ever-diminishing strength of the Yeltsin family and gradually to shift to the role of broker among the other contending factions (discussed at length later in this chapter). Although he was eventually able to place an increasing number of his personal allies or people with whom he shared past career links into positions of power, it is inaccurate to argue that he set out to create a Putin faction per se. In a milieu in which increasingly numerous and powerful factions compete for dominance, real power and indispensability lie not in heading the largest faction (which is changing constantly) but in being the one person to whom they turn to mediate their differences. Putin's real political skill became his ability to finesse this sort of floating balance, never letting any one faction rise to disproportional power.<sup>7</sup>

Less directly, Putin also moved to consolidate another aspect of his presidential power through the creation of United Russia, the party of power (but again, not in the usual parliamentary sense of "in power") that dominated his first two terms in office and the four-year Medvedev interregnum. Far more durable than its brief-lived earlier counterparts, United Russia was meant to serve as a link between the presidency and what might be called the periphery. As with Washington, D.C.'s Beltway, a distinction is commonly made between what occurs inside or outside Moscow's Garden Ring. Putin's ability to manipulate the various factions empowered him to control most of what happened inside the Garden

Ring, but what happened outside was a different matter in two ways. First, during the Yeltsin period, regional leaders had created virtual fiefdoms. One of United Russia's first accomplishments was to bring the provinces into line just as the Yeltsin succession was beginning, and Putin used it to strengthen his hand once in office.

Second, the vast majority of the voters who select a president or the legislature lie outside the Garden Ring. Despite earlier efforts, Yeltsin had never been able to create a presidential party that had any sticking power. In truth, he offered at best only token support for such efforts; he regarded the presidency as "above politics," at least in the narrow partisan sense, setting a precedent that both Putin and Medvedev would follow in the narrowest legal sense. But in reality, Putin devoted considerable attention to building a party that would turn out the vote and impose a greater degree of control over political life in the provinces. A certain degree of reciprocity was inevitable. In return for accepting the party line and national candidates chosen in Moscow, regional party elites would receive support from the center; close association, it was hoped, with popular presidential candidates with long coattails; and a degree of autonomy to do what they wanted at home, unless over-the-top local corruption and malfeasance made it impossible to ignore their transgressions.<sup>8</sup>

That brings us to a fundamental feature of the Putin and Medvedev years that is essential to understanding how Russian politics works. In any complex political system, there are always many games in progress. The Western term for this is "nested games." Like a three-ring circus, each "game" offers the viewer a different act, each seemingly localized to one of the rings, but in reality somehow related to and sequenced within the larger picture taking place under a single tent. Something, or someone, connects these competing realities and orchestrates them toward a common end.<sup>9</sup>

In the Russian context, the first "game" is common to all presidential systems—the rivalry between the presidential apparatus and the permanent government housed in the vast bureaucratic leviathan of the state. Each has a different sense of mission and purpose, responds to a different constituency, has a different sense of life trajectory (a single presidential administration versus the continuing mission of a ministry or agency), and competes for the never adequate resources of the state.

The second "game" revolves around the factions that represent various institutional, economic, or geographic interests or a particular cohort experience (the *siloviki* or *Pitery*, for example) or a particular political orientation (the statist or the liberals). At their most effective, they play a closed

game among players already familiar with the rules and costs of engagement, eventually hammering out a compromise among themselves or turning to an acceptable even-handed broker to facilitate agreement and lower the costs of the game to all players. The problem in post-communist Russia is that it has taken a long time for the game of factions to fall into place and for the terms of engagement to be clearly defined and accepted.

The third “game” is the most recent to emerge. It lies in the still-incomplete task of connecting what Richard Sakwa calls the two realms of Russian politics, one inside the Garden Ring, where the playing field and the rules are increasingly well defined for presidents, bureaucrats, and factions, and one outside the Garden Ring, involving the linkage between the byzantine realm of Kremlin politics and the broader role of parties and public opinion.<sup>10</sup> In well-functioning democracies, that connection is provided by two elements: the personalized, idiosyncratic, and charismatic connection between national candidates and the public and/or the role of organized political parties. The personalized dimension has always been there from the beginning and is perhaps even more important today because of the all-pervasive communications grid that can bring everything to everyone in a matter of seconds. A cult of the personality has never depended on rapid communication, but it surely is facilitated by it.

In most established democracies, that connection is supplemented by the more prosaic role of political parties, performing both mobilization and communications tasks, and playing an important role in brokering agreement within parties or among factions that accept internal compromise as the price of victory and meaningful participation. But in the Russian context, that is a poorly established link between the insiders and the outsiders. As long as they can cobble together a working majority within the legislature, national leaders are tempted to regard the mundane world of grassroots action as a secondary priority, except in the run-up to national elections, when the time-honored practice of “storming” occurs—intense last-minute round-the-clock activity, a term taken from the common practice of soviet-era factories to slack off until just before the production deadlines of the current economic plan. For their part, the factions have little motivation to colonize political parties; from their perspective, the lower the involvement of the public and the legislature, the greater the potential for the factions to exert influence.

As noted earlier, Putin needed both to consolidate and to validate his victory. Validation in this context means to develop his own agenda and plan for the future. In many ways, Yeltsin had an easier time in validating



his rule; the mere survival of democratic institutions was enough. But in Putin's case, more was required. The new leader needed a new platform, much as in the soviet era each new leader offered a revised version of the ever-present "plan" to establish his own identity and confirm the wisdom of his selection to rule. For Putin, that meant synthesizing elements from several different aspects of his earlier experiences.

The earliest of those experiences came, of course, from his years of service in the KGB. He was drawn to the agency because of a youthful fascination with espionage. Had the soviet regime not self-destructed, he was probably headed for a successful career in the KGB's middle to upper echelons, but nothing beyond. That said, what would he have taken away from the experience? Like most *chekisti*, he shared in their paternalistic sense of responsibility for the fate of the nation and the sense that they were the last bastion standing between Mother Russia and its enemies. Their role as "the sword and the shield" of the nation was an important part of their corporate identity. Putin probably also took away a strong sense of self-discipline and pragmatic professionalism. In his years as KGB director, Yuri Andropov, who himself briefly ruled the nation after Brezhnev's death, had extensively transformed the agency, broadening its recruitment to diversify the staff and turning it into a highly professional intelligence service with a strong sense of tell-it-as-it-is pragmatism.<sup>11</sup>

Putin's second formative experience came as a consequence of his association with Sobchak, first at Leningrad State University and then more significantly in the early democratic reforms in their native city of Leningrad. There is every reason to believe that Putin's conversion to the still imprecisely defined idea of Russian democracy was genuine. The two men were very close, and the early democratic reforms brought hope to pragmatists like Sobchak and Putin that they might awaken the nation from its stagnation. But there also was a dark side to democracy, as both men would soon learn. Sobchak's career as the first democratically elected mayor of Leningrad was soon compromised by unfounded charges of corruption, and Putin assumed great personal risk to have him spirited out of the country into safe haven.

Soon after Sobchak's demise, Putin moved to Moscow and eventually into the Yeltsin entourage, although he never was a full-fledged member of the family. Not surprisingly, the transfer would offer a new formative experience. Now close to the real center of power, he saw the increasing weakness of the Yeltsin presidency and the growing power of Kremlin factions. Ultimately anointed as the heir apparent and thrust into office by

Yeltsin's end-of-millennium resignation, Putin was now called upon to reconcile all of the elements of his past into a comprehensive political identity, a persona that would define him and his tenure in office.

Every long-serving leader develops what might be called a "political formula" that defines both the formal and informal rules of the game of politics during his or her tenure. Janus like, it looks in two directions. Gazing inward, it defines the world of elite politics; who gets to play, what are the rules of the game, and what is the role of the mutually acknowledged leader? Gazing outward, it defines the relationship with the rest of society; how is that relationship institutionalized, how much power is really exercised by the public as opposed to the political elite, and how is the stability of that relationship maintained? In the Brezhnev era, the answer to the first set of questions was corporatism; a closed but internally pluralistic elite collectively exercising power under the guidance (but not control) of a conciliatory general secretary. The answer to the second set of questions was welfare state authoritarianism; a closed and selectively repressive regime bought public support through relatively egalitarian programs and by assuring its politically powerless citizens of an increasing standard of living and pride in the accomplishments of a global superpower.

Viewed from this perspective, what is Putin's political formula? Like any leader's agenda, it is a moving target. Certain core elements can be identified as running consistently throughout his first two terms, surviving in slightly different form through the Medvedev interregnum, and reemerging in altered form in the third (and maybe fourth) term. Yet the core remains, as described in the sections that follow.

**A commitment to a distinctly Russian form of democracy.** All powerful nations have claimed such exceptionalism at some point in their history. In the Russian case, these claims fill the pages of the nation's history: Moscow as the Third Rome; for the Slavophiles of the nineteenth century, Russia's mission to show the world an alternative to industrialization and secularization; and for the communists, the Soviet Union's mission to implement and share with the world a Leninist form of domestic and eventually world revolution. In its present incarnation, such exceptionalism initially took the form of *sovereign democracy*, an imprecisely defined and controversial doctrine that is meant to set post-communist democracy apart from its counterparts elsewhere. In many ways, sovereign democracy is little more than a buzzword. From the start, its meaning has purposely been vague, and

little scholarly discussion has taken place to resolve its place in the pantheon of types of democracy or to note its precise implications. Some, including Medvedev, have even questioned the need for its existence,<sup>12</sup> and Putin has backed away from the term, without openly disavowing it, since his reelection to a third term in 2012.

At its core, sovereign democracy asserts the right of the state to block external attempts to influence the evolution of an indigenous form of democratic rule. Thus, sovereign democracy is not only “different,” it is also fragile and the target of well-meaning or less-well-intentioned efforts to shape the future of Russian politics. “Hands off” is both an extension of the notion of sovereignty itself and a useful slogan denoting the willingness of domestic elites to stand up to foreign intervention.

**A commitment to the creation of a powerful state, encapsulated in the concept of the “vertical of power” or other formulations that stress hierarchy.** Consistent with the Russian concept of the state from tsarist rule onward, the idea of a centralized, powerful, and proactive state is central to the concept of post-communist democracy. A strong state is not seen as antithetical to democratic rule; quite the opposite, a strong state, itself democratically elected, is a necessary prerequisite, at least in theory, to the preservation and functioning of democracy.<sup>13</sup>

Putin’s insistence on restoring the “vertical,” as everyone called it, was a response to the nature of democratic rule at the end of the Yeltsin era. Putin’s response was both traditionally grounded and politically prudent. Treading lightly at first because of the power of the holdover Yeltsin family, the oligarchs, the factions, and the regional barons, he gradually moved to reinforce the role of the central government and to bring those who opposed him into balance, if not under complete control.

**A structuring of political competition both among the increasingly contentious factions within the Garden Ring and in the larger arena of electoral politics.** “Structuring,” of course, is the key word and has many different meanings. Any viable democracy must find a balance between “contestation,” as the theorists usually call it, and structured governance. Finding that balance is never easy, even under the best of circumstances. Putin took the oath of office as president not quite eight years after his fellow Russians were shooting in the streets over just that question. Although no one expected a replay of 1993, none of the political questions that had brought them to that conflict had been resolved. The role

of the president and his relationship with the legislature and other important power centers like the oligarchs and regional leaders were still largely undefined.

Putin's initiatives took two forms. The first was directed at political forces within the Garden Ring. These included the president's family, which combined Yeltsin's daughter and other close associates, including a number of oligarchs like Berezovsky; other oligarchs less personally involved with Yeltsin but supportive of his administration; and various factions like the *siloviki*, the statist, and the economic reformers. The details of their struggles are described later in this chapter, but the essential strategy was simple and direct: Neutralize the most threatening elements (the family and its entourage, and then the first generation of oligarchs) and orchestrate and balance the influence of the others, leaving Putin as the arbiter of intralite conflict.

The second initiative sought to restructure the mechanisms of open political competition, including both political parties and the media. The expansion of United Russia—which first appeared late in the Yeltsin years as just another party *of*, but not *in*, power—was to be the lynchpin of bringing order to the cacophony of Russian politics. During the first Putin term, it expanded into an effective network at both the national and regional levels, growing in part because of the recentralization of central power through the vertical and in part because Putin's growing popularity created a coattails-and-bandwagon effect. This centrist and highly personalized extension of Putin's power was frequently supplemented by other officially sponsored parties slightly to the right or the left designed to siphon off support from the few remaining independent parties such as the Communist Party or the Liberal Democratic Party. Smaller parties were simply harassed into submission as the requirements for nominating candidates or getting seats in the legislature were altered to raise the bar ever higher.

The once-lively media also was brought under control. In most cases, control was imposed as Putin-friendly oligarchs or megacorporations like Gazprom, the nation's largest gas producer, bought up newspapers or television stations and maneuvered critical editors and journalists out of the mainstream. In other cases, the response was more draconian; overly aggressive reporters would be beaten into submission or, as in the case of Galina Starovoitova, murdered, most likely as an example to others.<sup>14</sup>

**A loosely defined commitment to economic reform.** Putin's economic agenda was rooted in the political and economic realities of the day. In the

short run, democratization had not been kind to the standard of living of the average Russian. Industrial output tumbled, and workers once assured of jobs for life soon found themselves out of work. Government cutbacks destroyed the safety net of health and retirement programs, and rapid inflation shrank what little had been put aside by private citizens. In sharp and visible contrast, a small minority prospered. They came from many sources. Most were former managers who had gotten rich buying up undervalued assets while others leveraged early successes in the private sector into vast diversified holdings. But they all had two things in common: They were grim reminders to the average citizen of the growing income gap in Russian society and confirmation of the government's failure or unwillingness to deal with corruption.

Putin's full economic agenda is discussed later in this chapter, but it is sufficient for now to observe that it focused on three elements, all closely tied to his understanding of what it meant to transform and modernize the post-soviet economy. First, the role of the state was to be increased, especially in key areas such as energy and raw material production. Second, the oligarchs were to be brought under control, usually through government-sponsored "adjustments" to the size and power of their empires, still leaving them with vast holdings, and sometimes through the blunt force of government intervention or prosecution. Once again offering a deal that was discussed briefly late in the Yeltsin era but never put in place, Putin assured the oligarchs that their vast fortunes would be largely secure and immune from adjustments to the sweetheart deals they negotiated in the 1990s, provided that they withdrew from political life. Most gladly accepted the arrangement, while others, like the soon-to-be-imprisoned Mikhail Khodorkovsky, learned the hard way that the carrot was accompanied by a stick.<sup>15</sup> Third, consistent with eventual Russian membership in the World Trade Organization and Putin's efforts to make it a part of the growing global economy, greater attention was to be given to technological modernization and the diversification of an economy centered on energy and raw materials, although the political weight of the energy sector and the importance of its profits made it difficult to wean the nation away from such exports.

**A commitment to restoring a global role for Russia.** Empires die hard, especially in the memories of their once-proud citizens. The breakup of the Soviet Union left Russia as a shadow of its former self. Putin set out to change that. Motivated both by his KGB-rooted sense of stewardship over

the fate of Mother Russia and by the realization that a healthy dose of Russian pride would strengthen him at the polls, he launched a charm offensive to convince the world that the uncertainties of the Yeltsin years had ended. He professed a commitment to the integration of Russia into the global economy and the World Trade Organization and, after September 11, 2001, to the global struggle against terrorism, as he now defined Russian actions in Chechnya. At first the charm offensive worked well, convincing Western leaders like U.S. president George W. Bush that they had found, as British prime minister Margaret Thatcher had said of Mikhail Gorbachev a decade earlier, someone with whom they could work. The luster soon faded as Russia and the West found themselves at odds over issues such as the enlargement of NATO, U.S. plans to create a missile defense system in Eastern Europe, the spread of the European Union, growing Western criticism of the treatment of journalists and other critics of the regime in Russia, and the impact of military engagements in places like Georgia and Chechnya.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Putin Presidency Emerges from Yeltsin's Shadow**

Yeltsin was a hard act to follow. Putin was initially surrounded by the holdovers from the Yeltsin era and moved cautiously to advance his own agenda. He named Mikhail Kasyanov as his first prime minister. Close to the Yeltsin family, Kasyanov held the post for three years before Putin was able to push him aside. Early attempts to name his own choices to top posts were thwarted. He was never fully accepted by the Moscow elite, especially the powerful Yuri Luzhkov, who became the mayor of the city during Yeltsin's tenure and survived until near the end of the Medvedev presidency.<sup>17</sup>

Putin's first task was to free himself from the control of the family and those oligarchs closest to it. The family's hold remained strong even after Yeltsin's resignation. Putin gradually distanced himself from Yeltsin's inner circle, at first pushing aside lesser members and finally, in February 2004, sacking Kasyanov. He replaced them with his own appointees or drew some of the second-tier players—like Vladislav Surkov, who would become his key political strategist—into his own growing entourage.<sup>18</sup>

In many ways, moving against the oligarchs was an easier task. Many, including Berezovsky, had come under investigation during Yeltsin's second term. Pressure against him intensified after Putin's inauguration, and in

2001 he fled to self-imposed exile in London, turning his energies toward overthrowing the Putin regime. In July 2000, just six months into his first term and not yet completely free of the pressure exercised by the family, Putin met with a large number of the oligarchs and offered them a clear choice. Their wealth would be secure, and they would be free from any investigation of how they acquired it if, and only if, they stayed out of politics. Putin's presidency, Putin's rules. Most got the message.

But not all. Or at least that is the way the story of the prosecution of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, one of Russia's richest oligarchs, would be spun by the Putin administration, which moved against him in 2003. Khodorkovsky was in many ways typical of the first generation of oligarchs. He began his entrepreneurial career as an official of the Komsomol, or Communist Youth League, in the early days of perestroika. Like many budding capitalists, he used the connections he made there to build an economic empire that began modestly with a private café and expanded to include banking and import–export interests. The crown jewel was Yukos, an oil company acquired at a bargain price when state-held resources were privatized. It specialized in developing vast Siberian reserves and rapidly rose to become one of largest corporations in Russia.

Unlike most of the other oligarchs, Khodorkovsky began to cross the line that Putin had drawn in the sand. He was often publicly critical of Putin, sometimes directly to his face in meetings between the president and business leaders. Although he professed no personal political ambitions, he endorsed and funded a number of programs that ran counter to Putin's agenda of the vertical and sovereign democracy.

In October 2003, Khodorkovsky was arrested and charged with fraud and tax evasion. His trial was a throwback to the worst of the communist era, when party officials dictated to the prosecutors and the courts who should be indicted and convicted. Yukos was broken up, sold off to a largely fictional holding company, and Khodorkovsky was stripped of most of his other assets. The show trial, offered up for public consumption as a lesson to the other oligarchs, concluded in 2005, resulting in a nine-year incarceration in Siberia. As the sentence neared its end during the Medvedev years, Khodorkovsky was again indicted on largely trumped-up charges. Conviction again was certain, and his prison term was extended until 2017.

With the family and the oligarchs in retreat, Putin now faced a new political reality. Political life within the Garden Ring was still dominated by a series of factions, each deeply rooted in some aspect of the government bureaucracy, a particular sector of the economy, a geographic region, or

some general policy orientation. Now the strategy was to learn to play each against the other to maintain balance.

The cast of characters was large, as described in the sections that follow.

**The *siloviki*.** The term *siloviki* is based on the Russian word for “force.” In institutional terms, it includes an exceptionally broad assortment of agencies, all sharing a common perception of their special role in defending the nation but also internally divided by their own unique missions and bureaucratic rivalries. Included are the KGB and its post-communist incarnations in the Federal Security Service and the Federal Intelligence Service, the former focusing on internal affairs and the latter on foreign intelligence; elements of the Ministry of Internal Affairs that deal with the national police force; the Federal Narcotics Service; elements of the military dealing with intelligence and internal security issues; the newly created Investigative Committee, which deals with corruption and politically sensitive issues; and the recently created National Guard, under the command of a close Putin associate. Their shared concerns with the power of the state and the preservation of social order predispose them to support many elements of Putin’s agenda, including the vertical and the notion of sovereign democracy, but their institutional diversity commits them to vastly different priorities in the constant intra-bureaucratic struggle over jurisdictional and budgetary issues. Although they share a common point of view with Putin on many issues, the president was clearly never regarded as the leader of a unified *siloviki* faction.

Although the *siloviki* may have become more important during Putin’s first and second terms, there is considerable dispute over the scope of that expansion. Estimates range from a threefold to a sevenfold increase in their numbers, with considerably higher representation in key government ministries, the seven federal regional administrations, and Putin’s personal kitchen cabinet, which met weekly.<sup>19</sup>

**The democratic statist.** The democratic statist focus primarily on domestic political issues. Their primary concern is the creation of a stable political system, formally democratic in nature but operating within the parameters of the doctrine of sovereign democracy. As Richard Sakwa puts it, they were “democratic but not liberal.”<sup>20</sup> In many ways, Putin’s initial views on state building are closest to the democratic statist, although he is careful to maintain a sense of formal neutrality in order to balance factional interests. For him, under the circumstances he inherited from Yeltsin—a divided and



combative Duma and a seemingly strong but largely untested presidency—the first order of business was to strengthen his office. Most of his actions, at least in the first term, were directed at increasing the power of the presidency vis-à-vis the legislature and regional leaders, creating a supportive party in United Russia, and finding ways to outflank his opponents, such as through the use of presidential decrees.

The democratic statisticians quickly emerged as the technicians of political power. Much like the political consultants, spin masters, and professional campaign managers that dominate democratic politics in other nations, they stood just a step behind the leader, crafting strategies and issues that would lead to victory. Most prominent among them during the Putin era was Surkov, the reputed guiding spirit behind the president's consolidation of power.

Another major concern among the democratic statisticians was the creation of a controlled civil society. Although nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are acknowledged as playing an important role in a pluralistic and democratically governed society, the democratic statisticians argue that they too must operate within parameters set by the state. Accordingly, the more than half a million such organizations functioning in Russia must be registered and file regular financial reports, and those with foreign connections are subjected to intensified scrutiny.

Guiding an active political debate, another major concern of the statisticians, was further institutionalized by the creation of two quasi-state bodies, the State Council and the Public Chamber. The State Council was created in September 2000 and included all of the still popularly elected governors of the regions that made up the Russian Federation.<sup>21</sup> On paper it looked good; the president himself chaired the body, and the creation of a smaller seven-member rotating presidium made it seem possible that the otherwise large and unwieldy body might be taken seriously. In reality, it came to nothing, except as good public relations to argue that the Putin presidency was reaching out to a broader audience outside the Garden Ring.

The creation of the Public Chamber in 2005 was yet another mechanism to organize political discourse. Numbering 126 members, it supposedly represents a microcosm of Russian society. The president names one third of the members from among prominent citizens, usually a hodgepodge of academics, business people, athletes, lawyers, public intellectuals, and the like. An additional third are named as representatives of national public NGOs, and the final third are chosen by regional and interregional NGOs. Despite its wide-ranging mandate, there is little evidence that the Chamber has played an important role.<sup>22</sup>

**Economic reformers and technocrats.** The economic reformers have emerged as a counterweight to the *siloviki* and the democratic statist through their insistence on the continuation of economic reforms and integration into the global economy. Most prominent among them during Putin's first two terms was Alexei Kudrin, the finance minister who is credited with maintaining stability after the 2008 global stock market debacle. But even he was not immune to the vagaries of factional and personal rivalries; he was dismissed by Medvedev in 2011 after a public dispute over Kudrin's refusal to serve under Medvedev as prime minister in a future administration.

**Business interests.** It is hardly surprising that business interests have become major players in the world of Russian politics. The story of the relationship between Russian big business and the government goes far beyond the role of the oligarchs, whichever generation is under the microscope. Although the oligarchs grab the headlines, the other story is frequently ignored.

As Richard Sakwa points out, there are really two different groups of corporate actors. The first is composed of the remnants of the old soviet-era megacorporations in which the state still holds a controlling, although not necessarily exclusive, interest.<sup>23</sup> Most are the well-known giants such as Gazprom, Russian Railways, Rosoboronoexport (Russian Arms Export), Rosneft (Russian Oil), and others mostly in the energy, raw material, or transportation sectors. Between two worlds, these giants must respond both to the market (domestic and international) and to government influence, if not direct control.

The second group consists of large corporations that increasingly have gone global. Frequently associated with the second- or third-generation oligarchs, they lack direct state involvement in the day-to-day management of their affairs, although on occasion the Kremlin will intervene to keep the overall picture in balance. There is little doubt that these seemingly independent corporations receive favorable treatment and de facto government assistance in building larger market share in an increasingly global economy.

In broader perspective, Putin also attempted to orchestrate the broader lobbying environment for the business community as a whole. Shortly after assuming office, he let it be known that an already existing body, the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, should become the major mechanism of communication between the business community and his regime; virtually all industries were instructed to join and channel

all proposals, suggestions, and complaints through that body, but only after having worked out a common group position. Soon thereafter, he designated two other groups, *Delovaya Rossiya* and United Entrepreneurs' Organizations of Russia, to reach out to medium and small business interests. Yevgeny Primakov, a former foreign minister and prime minister who briefly considered a run for the presidency against Putin, was selected to head the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Despite the formalization of channels, most effective lobbying still occurred through the time-honored face-to-face ties that linked political and economic leaders, confirming the Russian proverb that it is better to have a hundred friends than a hundred rubles.<sup>24</sup>

**Regional power centers.** The de facto decentralization of power in the 1990s led to the emergence of a host of regional barons not only in the provinces but also in key cities like Moscow. For them, local autonomy and a weak central government were the keys to keeping tight control over local government and enriching themselves through exploiting local resources and homegrown corruption. The creation of seemingly untouchable fiefdoms was especially blatant in the Caucasus, although certainly not limited to this region. While the seven federal districts with their Moscow-appointed leaders could do little to bring the barons into line, the shift to the central appointment of regional governors in 2005 began to erode their power. Still, it sometimes took exceptional efforts to push aside the last of the provincial strongmen.

The Moscow and St. Petersburg fiefdoms were a different story, primarily because each played a double game. They sought not only to maintain an independent political base within each of these cities, complete with the sort of patronage and widespread corruption needed to maintain control, but also to colonize and win influence within the central government. During the Yeltsin years, Moscow had the upper hand. Its powerful local boss, Yuri Luzhkov, was initially close to Yeltsin, although not a part of the official family. A rift eventually developed when Luzhkov entertained presidential ambitions in his own right. St. Petersburg's turn came second, coincident with the rise of Putin and the *Pitery*, a faction loosely defined by its members' close association with Putin's earlier career in that city rather than by any institutional or policy-related ties. Putin's choice to lead the city after his departure was Valentina Matvienko, who unified the city's machine under her control and remained in charge until the Medvedev era, when she was transferred to Moscow. As noted many times over, Putin's

reliance on his early associates brought future influence for the *Pitery* over national affairs and undoubtedly worked to the benefit of the city itself.

## **Outside the Garden Ring: “Managing” the New Democracy**

As noted, Putin set out to put the two worlds of Russian politics in order and somehow to connect them. Following the Gaullist approach in France, he sought to develop a mass-based political party to mobilize support and to connect the center with the provinces. The president never was truly dependent on United Russia for election, and it did not control the selection of prime minister. The party’s popularity peaked after the 2007 legislative elections, which gave it 64.3 percent of the vote and a potential constitution-changing majority in the Duma. It fell to 49.3 percent after the 2011 Duma vote, although it cobbled together a working majority with the support of other parties. Even in decline, United Russia remains the largest party in the legislature.

United Russia’s most important impact came in two ways. First, it became Putin’s link to the general population beyond the Garden Ring. Even in a world of television and social networks, it played an important role, sustaining a sense of connection and commitment, even as Putin himself maintained a posture of neutrality and distance, as had Yeltsin. It gave Putin a label that could be translated into political action at all levels: If you like Putin, and most Russians did, then vote for the United Russia candidate. It was that simple, and out in the provinces, simple was good.

Second, it changed the focus of Russian politics. In the 1990s, political life had been about defending the democratic revolution against the possible return of communism (or, less likely, a form of right-wing authoritarianism). Now the goal changed, redefining the battle lines. The intertwined ideas of stability and economic improvement took hold. Simple ideas with deep resonance in an exhausted and impoverished nation, they offered hope. Yet “stability” did not necessarily mean more or better democracy, and “economic improvement” did not necessarily mean structural reform or more equitable income distribution. They just meant that, for a while, things would seem to get better. But for a while, that would be enough. . . .

## The Presidency and the Legislature: The 2003 Duma Elections

Even though Putin's overall strategy was clear, its implementation in the real world was mired in the vagaries of elite and electoral politics. The 2003 Duma elections provided the first opportunity to test the strategy outside the Garden Ring. Eighteen political parties and five blocs took part in the December balloting. Overall turnout was comparatively low, at just under 55 percent. Seemingly confirming the wisdom of Putin's strategy, United Russia was the big winner, getting 37.6 percent of the party-list vote (Table 5.2). That gave it 120 seats from the party list, and an additional 103 from the single-member districts, for a total of 223 seat—just three short of a controlling majority in the Duma. Sixty independents soon joined the party, giving it a controlling edge.<sup>25</sup>

Other parties fared far less well. The Communists pulled in 12.6 percent of the party-list vote, for forty seats, with another twelve seats selected in the districts. The Liberal Democrats continued their decline; with 11.5 percent of the party-list votes, they got thirty-six seats, with no additional seats from district balloting. A new party, Rodina (Motherland), got 9.0 percent of the party-list vote, for twenty-nine seats, with another eight seats coming from the districts. No other party crossed the 5-percent threshold for party-list seats. Yabloko pulled only 4.3 percent but did get four seats from the districts. The Union of Right Forces got 4.0 percent in the party-list voting but picked up three seats from the districts. The Agrarian Party, still allied with the Communists, got 3.6 percent of the party-list votes and two seats in district voting. All the other parties, sixteen of them, collectively got twenty-three seats in district voting, and independents captured sixty-seven district seats. "None of the above" did exceptionally well this time, with 4.7 percent, nearly raising the sticky question of what to do if it had crossed the 5-percent eligibility requirement. In three districts, the "noners" actually won, forcing another round of voting.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, inside the Garden Ring, Putin's consolidation continued. Now far less hemmed in by the surviving elements of the Yeltsin family, he was finally able to sack Kasyanov as prime minister in February 2004, appointing Mikhail Fradkov to replace him. A surprising choice to many, Fradkov was a highly regarded economist with long experience in foreign economic relations. Perhaps more important, he was not closely identified with any of the major Kremlin factions. His appointment permitted Putin

**Table 5.2** 2003 Russian Legislative Election

| <i>Party</i>          | <i>Proportional Representation</i>                  | <i>Single-Member-District Voting</i>               | <i>Total Seats</i> |
|-----------------------|---|--|--------------------|
| United Russia         | Votes: 22,776,294<br>Percentage: 37.6<br>Seats: 120 | Votes: 14,123,625<br>Percentage: 24<br>Seats: 103  | 223                |
| Communist Party       | Votes: 7,647,820<br>Percentage: 12.6<br>Seats: 40   | Votes: 6,577,598<br>Percentage: 11.2<br>Seats: 12  | 52                 |
| Zhirinovskiy Bloc     | Votes: 6,944,322<br>Percentage: 11.5<br>Seats: 36   | Votes: 1,860,905<br>Percentage: 3.2<br>Seats: 0    | 36                 |
| Rodina                | Votes: 5,470,429<br>Percentage: 9.0<br>Seats: 29    | Votes: 1,719,147<br>Percentage: 2.9<br>Seats: 8    | 37                 |
| Yabloko               | Votes: 2,610,087<br>Percentage: 4.3<br>Seats: 0     | Votes: 1,580,629<br>Percentage: 2.7<br>Seats: 4    | 4                  |
| Union of Right Forces | Votes: 2,408,535<br>Percentage: 4.0<br>Seats: 0     | Votes: 1,764,290<br>Percentage: 3.0<br>Seats: 3    | 3                  |
| Agrarian Party        | Votes: 2,205,850<br>Percentage: 3.6<br>Seats: 0     | Votes: 1,104,974<br>Percentage: 1.9<br>Seats: 2    | 2                  |
| People's Party        | Votes: 714,705<br>Percentage: 1.2<br>Seats: 0       | Votes: 2,677,889<br>Percentage: 4.5<br>Seats: 17   | 17                 |
| Independents          |   | Votes: 15,843,626<br>Percentage: 26.9<br>Seats: 67 | 67                 |

SOURCE: D. Nohlen and P. Stöver. (2010). *Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook*. Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos.

to maintain the balance among the factions and escape the difficult choice of seeming to favor one over another.

## Judicial Reform

Significant reform in the judicial system occurred during Putin's first two terms in office. Much of it was motivated by a desire to further

professionalize the courts and other aspects of the legal system. Putin had been trained as a lawyer, and he understood the importance of law—and particularly legal reform—as both a symbol of social change and a mechanism of social transformation.

Putin also knew Russian history well enough to understand that law could be used as a mechanism of social transformation as well as control. The reassertion of a strong transformational role for the courts was an important aspect of Putin's vertical of power. There would be both a positive side and a dark side to these changes. On the positive side, ten new legal codes were written in areas dealing with the creation of a market economy, property and land ownership, taxes, labor, and criminal procedure. The latter reduced the once-dominant role of the procuracy, created the option for jury trials (little used), and strengthened the rights of defendants, although the return of politically motivated trials compromised these rights in a small number of high-profile cases. Set against these changes, of course, was the momentum of the vast weight of those elements of the legal profession that remained in place. Changing the laws was one thing; changing how the system worked was quite another.<sup>27</sup>

But there was a dark side, too. More aggressive prosecution of economic crimes became an important political weapon. Threats of prosecution for economic crimes also became a frequent tool to rein in regional leaders who had built their own corrupt bailiwicks in the Yeltsin years. The first to fall was Yevgeny Nazdratenko, governor of the Primorsky Krai region in the Pacific Northeast, who was afforded a soft landing in an appointed position in the area once he agreed to step down in the face of potential prosecution. Others, like Moscow's mayor Luzhkov, whose wife had become Russia's wealthiest woman largely as a result of real estate transactions in the city and elsewhere, survived until the Medvedev years.<sup>28</sup>

## The 2004 Presidential Election

The 2004 presidential election was a cakewalk for Putin, who was returned to office with 71.9 percent of the vote.<sup>29</sup> In what will probably be remembered as the high point of his career, Putin won with the open support of United Russia, whose spreading organization was beginning to make a difference. But more broadly, he also won widespread grassroots support that had rallied to his call for economic and social stability and national pride. His dismissal of Kasyanov before the election seemingly cleared the

**Table 5.3** 2004 Russian Presidential Election

| <i>Candidate</i>   | <i>Party</i>             | <i>Votes</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Vladimir Putin     | Independent              | 49,558,328   | 71.9              |
| Nikolai Kharitonov | Communist Party          | 9,514,554    | 13.8              |
| Sergei Glazyev     | Independent              | 2,850,610    | 4.1               |
| Irina Khakamada    | Independent              | 2,672,189    | 3.9               |
| Oleg Malyshkin     | Liberal Democratic Party | 1,405,326    | 2.0               |
| Sergei Mironov     | Russian Party of Life    | 524,332      | 0.8               |

SOURCE: D. Nohlen and P. Stover. (2010). *Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook*. Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos.

deck of the last vestige of the Yeltsin era, and the appointment of a technocrat like Fradkov suggested that the political strife of the past had been replaced by the calmer “management of things,” as soviet leaders used to say to reassure the masses. In truth, factional conflict still raged just below the surface and would rear its head in the run-up to the 2008 election, which faced the more difficult question of choosing a successor to Putin at a time of economic uncertainty.

Putin’s opponents in 2004 seemed to do everything wrong. Some tried to organize a boycott of the election itself, since a turnout of less than 50 percent would have invalidated the result. Their resolve soon weakened, and the coalition disintegrated amid acrimonious charges of betrayal of the common cause. Grigory Yavlinsky, who had once been the standard-bearer of the dwindling liberal opposition, refused to run. The perennial Communist candidate, Zyuganov, also refused to take the field; the Communist Party was led into battle by the little-known Nikolai Kharitonov, himself not even a member of the party but of its junior partner, the Agrarian Party. He got just 13.8 percent of the vote. Zhirinovskiy also chose not to run on the Liberal Democratic ticket, designating his personal bodyguard, a boxer named Oleg Malyshkin, to stand in for him, for an embarrassing 2.0 percent of the vote. Sergei Glazyev, who along with Dmitry Rogozin, led Rodina (Motherland) in the recent Duma race, broke from the party and ran as an independent, for 4.1 percent of the vote. Irina Khakamada, cut off from her previous association with the Union of Right Forces, ran an independent wild card candidacy, winning 3.9 percent. And Sergei Mironov, speaker of the Federation Council, the upper house of the legislature and past Putin loyalist, got less than 1 percent running on the



Russian Party of Life ticket. In its last hurrah (the category would be removed before the next election), “none of the above” got 3.5 percent.

## The Rules and the Game Change

In 2004 and 2005, a number of important changes were made in the electoral system. Although complicated, they all pointed in the same direction—toward diminishing the potential role of small parties and further consolidating the institutionalized hold of what was clearly then the dominant party, United Russia. Introduced in the wake of a deadly terrorist seizure of a school in Beslan, they were ostensibly justified as anti-terrorist measures designed to strengthen the unity of the nation, although few believed such a transparent explanation.<sup>30</sup>

Balloting for the 450-member Duma was changed to provide for the election of all members from party lists. Gone was the 225 member bloc of seats elected in single-member districts, which had provided a second opportunity for small parties or locally popular independent candidates to gain a seat. Two lists of potential delegates appeared on each ballot. The first consisted of the party’s nationally prominent candidates for the Duma itself, now limited to three names. The second list contained the prioritized names of delegates seeking to represent the party at the regional level in at least 100 regions. The creation of such elaborate lists was virtually impossible for the smaller parties, leaving only United Russia (the largest party by far), the Communists, and the Liberal Democrats positioned to dominate the ballots.

The threshold point for entry into the Duma was raised to 7 percent, two points higher than before. In the past, some smaller parties formed blocs to pool their votes to jump the hurdle. Now that avenue was closed. A complicated set of new rules also affected the 7-percent barrier. Since 60 percent of the ballots cast in any election had to be represented in the Duma, parties that initially fell below the 7-percent cutoff might still receive seats until the 60-percent requirement had been satisfied. The new rules also generously required that at least two parties had to be represented in the Duma, no matter the voting results.

The bar was raised in other ways as well. Requirements to get candidates on the ballot were increased. More signatures in more districts were now required, and challenges by the less-than-neutral election board were now more frequent and effective. The 50-percent turnout

requirement to validate national elections was dropped, ending the use of boycotts as opposition tools. And “none of the above” disappeared from future ballots.

In a further effort to control the regions, the popular election of governors ended. In 2004, the procedure was changed to permit the president to nominate the governor, who must be confirmed by the regional legislature. But if that body rejects the nominee three times, the president may dissolve the local assembly and force a new election, while simultaneously appointing an acting governor who may rule for six months. In light of the political risks to local lawmakers associated with such a confrontation and United Russia’s ability to capture control at the regional level, presidential “nominees” were virtual shoe-ins, at least for a while.

The potential for using public referenda as a mechanism of grassroots rebellion against the government also was restricted. Initially understood as possible presidential leverage against a recalcitrant legislature (the way de Gaulle successfully employed it), such referenda originally could also be initiated by public action. While technically still possible under the tightened restrictions approved in 2004, such action was now far more difficult.<sup>31</sup>

## The Run-Up to the 2008 Presidential Election

Political rivalries inside the Garden Ring ramped up during Putin’s second term, especially in the run-up to the 2008 presidential elections, which would pick his successor or find some ploy to keep him in office despite the constitutional provision that a president could serve only two consecutive terms. Putin periodically shuffled the lineup of the government and the presidential staff to maintain a balance among the factions, thus preserving his ability to maneuver. In November 2005, the pro-Putin defense minister, Sergei Ivanov, was also named a first deputy prime minister. The head of the presidential administration, Dmitry Medvedev, also was advanced to first deputy prime minister. A close associate from St. Petersburg, Medvedev was also placed in charge of a number of high-priority national projects, giving him a new level of public visibility. Both were regarded as viable choices to follow in Putin’s footsteps, and it is hardly surprising that the president chose to play them off against each other.

The game was soon joined by others. The *siloviki* were still important players, their cause forcefully pressed by Igor Sechin, who had worked with

Putin since his days in the mayor's office in St. Petersburg. But he personally was not regarded as presidential material, and the *siloviki* lacked any serious candidate for the top office. Although he had extensive KGB experience, Ivanov was too close to Putin to be accepted unquestioningly by the *siloviki* as a reliable kindred spirit. In the aftermath of the Khodorkovsky affair, the remaining oligarchs wisely kept their heads down, while the more traditional business and entrepreneurial lobbies sided cautiously with Medvedev, who reached out to such modernizing forces. The military was virtually cut out of the game; Ivanov, the defense minister and strong contender for the presidency, was never regarded by the uniformed military as a strong advocate of their cause. His eventual successor, Anatoly Serdyukov, was a civilian who had made a fortune in the furniture industry and eventually served as head of the Federal Tax Service, preparing him for his mandate to crack down on corruption within the military. Greater influence seemingly accrued to the democratic statist, largely because they still most closely represented Putin's views about the need for order and stability and the necessity to gracefully manage the 2008 transition from Putin to his anointed successor.

In mid-September 2007, Putin further complicated the waiting game. Previous experience, limited though it was, suggested that the president would remove Fradkov as prime minister some time prior to the election and that his choice to replace him would be the de facto designated successor. Remove Fradkov he did, but instead of choosing between the supposed front-runners, Ivanov and Medvedev, Putin selected a wildcard: Viktor Zubkov, head of the Federal Financial Intelligence Agency. Zubkov seemingly had no close ties to the contending factions, although he originally hailed from Leningrad. He also had no background in the intelligence community, presumably distancing him from the *siloviki*. His appointment prompted widespread speculation. Had Putin copied Yeltsin in naming an unexpected successor, a dark horse whom he would quickly advance to the front of the pack?<sup>32</sup>

Putin was now confronted with the need to assert control over the succession. With no clearly acknowledged front-runner, the field was open to several strategies. Since no single faction seemed likely to capture control of the succession, an alternative strategy would be to preserve the balance by amending the constitution to permit Putin to run for a third consecutive term. United Russia's control of the legislature made this legally possible. Alternatively, Putin could choose a nominal successor, who would quickly step down from the presidency, permitting Putin to

run for the office since the constitution banned three *consecutive* terms in office. Although perfectly legal even under the existing constitution, it still carried political risks. Or he could select a full-term successor and attempt to exercise continuing influence from behind the scenes, perhaps as prime minister with enhanced powers. That option would demand two things, a compliant successor, himself free of close ties to any of the major factions, and the continuing ability to balance the competing factions as prime minister.

In one sense, Putin was fortunate. It proved relatively easy to get control of the factions; the *siloviki* were internally divided over questions of policy and personal rivalries, and other factions could be brought into line through a series of new appointments or criminal investigations into their alleged corruption. Putin also advanced a new group, the *financisti* as a counterweight to more conventional groups. Best understood as financial managers rather than conventional oligarchs or business interests, they exercised increasing influence and were visibly represented at the top by the new prime minister, Zubkov.

## The 2007 Duma Elections

The 2007 Duma was the first to be chosen under the new election law, the cumulative impact of which was, if you accepted the most generous interpretation, to bring order to the party structure. If you accepted the generally held and far less generous point of view, it was to stack the deck in favor of United Russia. In fact, it did both. Under new registration requirements, now only fifteen parties qualified to post candidates, fewer than half the number in the 2003 election. The other changes—party-list voting for all seats, the 7-percent rule for entry into the Duma, the end of a “none of the above” option, and others, all discussed earlier—now focused the game on a handful of larger parties in which United Russia was best positioned to win.<sup>33</sup>

In a surprise move, Putin agreed to place his name at the head of United Russia's list of candidates. He still insisted that he would not formally join United Russia, prompting the party congress to pass a new rule permitting the ticket to be headed by a nonmember. The move was probably intended to head off factional divisions within the party, in which regional and policy differences, as well as differences over the selection of Putin's successor, had begun to take their toll. Putin also implied that he might serve as prime minister under his not-yet-named successor if the

party won a clear victory and the new president were someone with whom he could work, a disingenuous comment from the man who would ultimately name his own successor.

A new party, Just Russia, took the field. Formed in 2006 to fill a center-left niche, it was intended to bleed off support from the communists and liberals such as Yabloko. Led by Sergei Mironov, it soon sought to acquire a separate political identity of its own, not atypical of past Kremlin-created parties with delusions of grandeur. The Communist Party, with Zyuganov once again in the lead, ran virtually the same campaign it had in the past, calling for the renationalization of key industries and efforts to rebuild as much of the former Soviet Union as possible. The Liberal Democratic Party offered its usual assortment of oppositional and nationalistic slogans, and Zhirinovskiy did not disappoint as the party's most visible representative. The Union of Right Forces, a center-right grouping of serious reformers who had been friendly to Putin's economic agenda, also fielded candidates, and Yabloko continued its liberal criticism of the regime.

Russians went to the polls on December 2, 2007, not yet knowing whom Putin would name as his successor. The results surprised no one. United Russia won 64.3 percent of the vote, giving it 315 seats in the new Duma and increasing the margin by which he held an unchallengeable constitution-changing majority. The Communists got 11.6 percent, for fifty-seven seats; continuing its decline, it fell from 12.6 percent of the party-list vote in 2003. The Liberal Democratic Party came in with 8.1 percent, dropping from 11.5 percent of the party-list vote in 2003. That was enough to win forty seats. Just Russia was the last party to rise above the 7-percent cutoff point; with 7.7 percent, it got thirty-eight seats. Yabloko got 1.6 percent of the vote, and no seats, and the Union of Right Forces got just under 1 percent.

**Table 5.4** 2007 Russian Legislative Election

| <i>Party</i>             | <i>Vote</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Seats</i> |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------|
| United Russia            | 44,714,241  | 64.3              | 315          |
| Communist Party          | 8,046,886   | 11.6              | 57           |
| Liberal Democratic Party | 5,660,823   | 8.1               | 40           |
| Just Russia              | 5,383,639   | 7.7               | 38           |

SOURCE: D. Nohlen and P. Stover. (2010). *Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook*. Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos.

Even as United Russia celebrated its victory and prepared for the upcoming presidential race, several bothersome realities did not bode well for the future. The level of support for United Russia fell far below that of its primary candidate and spiritual leader, President Putin himself. In the 2004 presidential election, Putin pulled in 71.9 percent of the vote, and his popularity ratings just before the 2007 balloting put him at around 80 percent, yet the party itself got just over 64 percent. Clearly the Putin magic was not completely transferable. United Russia also did poorest in the nation's two major cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, where it pulled only 54 percent and 50.3 percent of the vote, respectively, a harbinger of things to come.

### Putin's Economic Reforms

Putin's first two terms in office were marked by improvement in the economy. In many ways, it was a fortunate coincidence for the man to whom the luckless Yeltsin had entrusted the future of the nation. In all fairness, some of the credit legitimately belonged to the new president. His strengthening of the state and the imposition of the vertical brought order to the disarray of the Yeltsin era. Whatever their negative political consequences, these actions provided a more stable foundation for an economic recovery. Putin also attempted to bring the oligarchs into line, or at least to limit their direct influence over political life. To the average Russian, he was a strong leader who knew the value of *poryadok*—order and discipline—qualities deemed essential to putting the country back to work.

The numbers looked good, especially if one ignored the underlying political and social realities. During Putin's first two terms, from 2000 to 2008, gross domestic product increased by 70 percent, industrial output by 75 percent, and investment (both foreign and domestic) by 125 percent. In 2007, the gross domestic output reached the 1990 level, signaling at least a formal return to the nation's benchmark level at the end of the communist era. Over the same period, real income more than doubled, while poverty was cut in half. Average income increased from 2,200 rubles (US\$90) to 12,500 rubles (\$500) per month, while the average pension climbed from 823 rubles (\$90) to 3,500 rubles (\$140) per month. Both rose more rapidly than inflation over the same period. In broader terms, the middle class grew sevenfold, from 8 million to 55 million. The number of people living below the official poverty line dropped from 30 percent in 2000 to 14 percent in

2008. In 2004, a Stabilization Fund was created largely from revenues from the oil industry to cope with emergencies. Within two years, the fund had accumulated sufficient resources to pay off Russia's sovereign debt. In 2008, it was split into the Reserve Fund, to be used to shield the nation from global financial shocks, and the National Welfare Fund, designated for pension reform and other social services.

Problems still remained. The first wave of privatization had shifted much of the nation's manufacturing and the service sector into private hands, but many state-owned or state-controlled large corporations remained, especially in critical sectors such as energy or raw materials production. An oft-promised second wave of privatization was delayed repeatedly, more for political than economic reasons. Little was done to diversify the nation's economic profile to move it away from continuing dominance on extractive and export-oriented industries. Although lip service was rendered to the importance of technological innovation, the development of a stronger domestic market, and the creation of an entrepreneur-driven development model to move the economy to the next stage, little was done to put these notions into action.

Putin's first two terms also brought significant changes in the identity and role of the oligarchs who had emerged during the Yeltsin years. As noted earlier, Putin promised that the oligarchs would remain free to pursue their own economic interests (subject to occasional "adjustment" of their holdings to somewhat level the playing field, and a willingness to tolerate the emergence of a new generation of oligarchs waiting in the wings), if they were willing to remain politically neutral. For most of them, the deal was a good bargain. A few who resisted or who had already fallen under attack before the 2000 presidential election were still at risk. Boris Berezovsky, still close to the Yeltsin family, decamped to London to avoid prosecution on charges of tax evasion, and Vladimir Gusinsky, whose interests had suffered during the 1998 economic crisis, soon followed into self-imposed exile.

A new generation of oligarchs began to emerge during the Putin years. Some were linked with the president, either through service in Leningrad/St. Petersburg or through KGB ties. Now numbered among the oligarchs were newcomers like Mikhail Fridman, Alexander Smolensky, Vladimir Lisin, Alexei Mordashov, Mikhail Prokhorov, Vladimir Potanin, Alisher Usmanov, Oleg Deripaska, Vagit Alekperov, Viktor Vekselberg, German Khan, and others. Most built economic empires rooted in raw materials extraction, media and banking interests, and manufacturing, all

with increasing attention to investments abroad as well as at home, but none overtly overplayed his hand either in seeking to acquire dominance over the others or in overtly challenging the increasing centralization of state power over the economy.<sup>34</sup>

## Foreign Policy

Putin's first two terms in office were marked by a more assertive role for Russia in the international community. He sought recognition for Russia as a major actor, if not a superpower, on the world stage, to oppose real and perceived efforts on the part of the United States and NATO to encroach on Russia's traditional diplomatic and security interests, and to reassert Moscow's interests in Eastern Europe and the independent states created by the breakup of the Soviet Union. Such efforts enjoyed mixed success at best. Russia's new activism prompted increased Western efforts to shore up its defenses against growing Russian assertiveness, and efforts to increase and institutionalize Russian influence over the former union republics produced a backlash against a de facto resurrection of the post-communist Russian sphere of influence. Whatever else may be said of Russia's more activist role in the world, it certainly reminded the world that Russia was still a nation that could not be ignored.

Escaping from a massive national inferiority complex was no small part of Putin's foreign policy agenda. In the 1990s, it was jokingly said that Russia was ruled from Spasso House, the official residency of the U.S. ambassador. Although that was far from the truth, even as a joke it understandably offended many Russians, who were constantly reminded that Western scholars like Michael McFaul (himself a future ambassador to Russia) would refer to their democratic revolution as "unfinished" or that Western economists and businesspeople were publicly critical of the slow progress toward creating a market economy. Seldom content to tolerate Western criticism or to accept other nations' blueprints for economic and political change, Russians across the political spectrum longed for the world to accept their version of national exceptionalism.

Not surprisingly, relations with the United States became an important testing ground for Russia's more assertive stance. Although Moscow and Washington would occasionally seek common ground, especially in areas such as resistance to terrorism, Putin was increasingly critical of American initiatives abroad. When President George W. Bush withdrew the United States



from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty to pursue American deployment of a missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic, Moscow was quick to charge that the system was really aimed at Russian interests in the region and to threaten “countermeasures” such as the deployment of Russian missiles. In 2007, Russia resumed long-distance patrol flights of strategic bombers that had been suspended in 1992; largely a symbolic move, it nonetheless was interpreted in the West as an effort to remind the world of Moscow’s capabilities.

Moscow and Washington also traded increasingly barbed criticism of each other’s policies. The Russian government openly opposed the American-led invasion of Iraq, noting the absence of United Nations authorization and questioning the existence of weapons of mass destruction. Moscow also bridled under an increasing barrage of criticisms from the West of its treatment of the media and critics of the regime. For its part, Washington was quick to condemn Moscow’s efforts to influence the Ukrainian presidential election in 2004–2005, which eventually led to the selection of the strongly anti-Russian Viktor Yushchenko, whose rise to power had been billed as the “orange revolution” and a grassroots victory over the communist old guard. Similar concerns motivated Moscow’s opposition to developments in Georgia, where Putin openly opposed the election of a pro-Western government under the control of Mikheil Saakashvili. Already troublesome disputes over the status of two small non-Georgian enclaves escalated quickly during Putin’s second term and led to a brief but nasty war in the first months of Medvedev’s presidency. Events in Ukraine and Georgia fueled Moscow’s growing suspicion that such revolutions might occur elsewhere within what it still regarded as a Russian sphere of influence and that the West, and especially the Americans, had a hand in encouraging the creation of anti-Russian regimes in the region.

Relations with NATO soured quickly over the expansion of the alliance. An initial basis for consultation had been established in 1997 and strengthened, at least on paper, through the creation of the NATO-Russia Council in May 2002. Like the earlier body, it provided for mutual consultation in the hope of developing a consensus among its members over NATO’s role in the post-cold war world. The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland joined NATO in 1999, followed by Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia in 2004. Continued suspicion about U.S. efforts to deploy a missile defense system in the Czech Republic and Poland, the establishment of U.S. and NATO bases in central Asia for

operations in Afghanistan, and the creation of temporary NATO bases in Bulgaria and Romania stoked fears in Moscow that the West was once again contemplating encirclement of Russia. In 2007, Putin responded by suspending Russian adherence to the provisions of the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty until all NATO members, old and new, confirmed their willingness to subscribe to its provisions. For its part, Moscow failed to implement an earlier commitment to withdraw Russian troops from Moldova, where they were stationed in support of a breakaway enclave of ethnic Russians who constituted themselves as the Trans-Dniester Republic.

The expansion of the European Union into Eastern Europe and the former union republics of the Soviet Union also caused problems. The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia joined in 2004, followed three years later by Bulgaria and Romania. Others would follow during Medvedev's term as president, and later when Putin returned to office in 2012. Moscow's economic ties to the European Union became increasingly complex. Russia supplies the European Union with more than one quarter of its total gas and oil; such dependency had been expected to increase over the next 20 years, giving Moscow added leverage. Russia has become the European Union's third-largest trading partner, behind the United States and China. At the same time, Russia is increasingly dependent on the European Union as a trading partner and as a source of three quarters of its foreign direct investment.

Moscow increasingly has attempted to institutionalize its influence over the post-soviet republics. It continued to view the Commonwealth of Independent States, formed at the time of the breakup of the Soviet Union, as an instrument of Russian foreign policy rather than as a partnership of equals. Fearing Western encroachment, Moscow strengthened its influence on the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which includes Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Uzbekistan; Georgia, which had joined in 1994, withdrew five years later. Russia also strengthened its ties to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which included most of the same nations that had joined the CSTO as well as China.<sup>35</sup>

## The Second Chechen War

Although the second Chechen war began in the waning months of Yeltsin's second term, it would be left to Putin, as the nation's new acting prime

minister and future president, to shape its outcome. A formal cease-fire had been in place for several years, but periodic flare-ups, some beyond the borders of Chechnya itself, reminded everyone that a second round of fighting was likely. In late August 1999, the Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade, one of an increasing number of self-styled and poorly coordinated rebel groups springing up all over the Caucasus, invaded neighboring Dagestan. On October 1, Yeltsin ordered Russian troops back into Chechnya, ending the de facto independence of the region that had been tolerated grudgingly since 1996.

The new conflict was different in two important ways. First, the Chechen forces fighting against Moscow increasingly were joined by Islamic militants from elsewhere. The attack in Dagestan that launched the second war was undertaken by forces combining Chechen, Dagestani, Arab, and other international mujahideen and Wahhabi fighters. Second, the conflict was brought to the Russian heartland outside the Caucasus by an increasing number of terrorist attacks. In September 1999, apartment bombings occurred in Moscow and other Russian cities. Chechen terrorists were blamed for the attacks, although a number of skeptics alleged that they were false-flag operations undertaken by Russian authorities themselves to stoke public anger. Moscow responded with increasingly brutal tactics in Chechnya aimed at both military and civilian targets. The winter siege of Grozny virtually destroyed the already-damaged city. Once the city was taken by Russian forces in the early spring of 2000, equally brutal fighting shifted to the mountains, a terrain more suited to the guerrilla tactics of the rebels.

In May 2000, direct Russian rule was established in Chechnya. A month later, Putin appointed Akhmad Kadyrov as head of an interim pro-Russian government. Guerrilla fighting continued, however, and Kadyrov was killed in a 2004 bombing. He was replaced by his son, Ramzan Kadyrov, who ruled as the de facto leader of the nation until officially confirmed as the president, with Putin's blessing. While his elevation brought a measure of peace to this war-torn nation, terrorist acts continued both in the Russian heartland and across the Caucasus.

## The 2008 Presidential Election

On the eve of the 2008 presidential race, there was no doubting Putin's continuing popularity. Polls showed an approval rating over 70 percent, with

42 percent of the public supporting a third term.<sup>36</sup> Within the Garden Ring, the factions remained divided, with the *siloviki* inclined toward Zubkov (who himself had no direct connections with the group), and the democratic statist favoring Ivanov. Zubkov's announcement that he would consider running for the presidency briefly prompted speculation that Putin might resign prematurely, advancing him to acting president before the next general election. It would have been a replay of Yeltsin's resignation, but instead of leaving the political stage, Putin would continue to manage affairs from the background.

On December 10, Putin ended the suspense. He announced that Medvedev was his intended successor. United Russia, of which Medvedev was not formally a member, also endorsed him, as did Just Russia, the Agrarian Party, and Civic Force, the other very junior partners in the de facto governing coalition. The next day, Medvedev dropped the other shoe. To no one's surprise, he announced his intention to name Putin as his prime minister, and Putin formally accepted the arrangement a week later at the United Russia convention. The "tandem," as it would later be called, was now in place.<sup>37</sup> Putin had maintained control without formally amending the constitution.

In an effort to reassure the factions within the Garden Ring, Medvedev also pledged to keep in place "the team created by the incumbent president." While he was not the first choice of any of the major factions, Medvedev was an acceptable second choice, with no close associations with the powers that be except Putin himself. Although inclined toward the democratic statist and the reformers, he maintained his own identity. Possessing no independent power base, Medvedev was not viewed as a threat to anyone. With him in the presidency, and Putin as prime minister, there was a good chance that the balance of forces within the Garden Ring could be maintained.

With the outcome all but decided long before the election, other candidates considered their options. Zyuganov stepped forward once again to run as the leader of the Communist Party, reversing his decision in the 2004 election to stand aside. Always hopeful, Zhirinovskiy tried again as leader of the Liberal Democrats. Andrei Bogdanov of the Democratic Russia party joined the field as a dark horse. Boris Nemtsov ran briefly as a candidate of the Union of Right Forces, eventually withdrawing in favor of Mikhail Kasyanov of the People's Democratic Union, whose candidacy was rejected by the election commission.

**Table 5.5** 2008 Russian Presidential Election

| <i>Candidate</i>      | <i>Party</i>             | <i>Vote</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Dmitry Medvedev       | United Russia            | 52,530,712  | 71.2              |
| Gennady Zyuganov      | Communist Party          | 12,243,550  | 18.0              |
| Vladimir Zhirinovskiy | Liberal Democratic Party | 6,988,510   | 9.5               |
| Andrei Bogdanov       | Democratic Party         | 968,344     | 1.3               |

SOURCE: D. Nohlen and P. Stöver. (2010). *Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook*. Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos.

On March 2, 2008, Russia voted, confirming that Putin's popularity could easily be transferred to his anointed successor (Table 5.5). Medvedev won with 71.2 percent of the vote, respectfully just below Putin's 71.9 percent in 2004. The vast majority of Putin's supporters had shifted easily to the less-well-known Medvedev, who had never served above the rank of first deputy prime minister. Medvedev carried Moscow with just over 71 percent, and scored one point higher in his native St. Petersburg. Nationally, Zyuganov got 18 percent, followed by Zhirinovskiy with 9.5 percent. Bogdanov got 1.3 percent.

The "tandem" was about to begin.

## Putin as an Authoritarian Modernizer

Any assessment of Vladimir Putin as an authoritarian modernizer is admittedly premature, even within the context of a narrative at the end of his second term in 2008. In 2012, he was once again easily elected president for a six-year term, and under a revised constitution, he is eligible for a second six-year term after the 2018 election. That would put him in office until 2024. A tentative assessment, however, presents a mixed picture. Few would dispute the presence of a trend toward increasing authoritarianism, clearly at the expense of the intent if not the form of democratic rule. Russians still go to the polls in national and local elections, some genuinely to support and others to vote against Putin and the system he created. And few would argue against the admission that the deck is increasingly stacked against opposition forces. The advantages of incumbency, control over the media, the support of almost all of the new generation of oligarchs, and control over a system of patronage at all levels, plus the undisputed presence of

the usual assortment of dirty tricks and bogus vote counts—all testify to the increasingly authoritarian nature of Putin's Russia.

Little in that assessment challenges Putin's categorization as an authoritarian modernizer. More often than not, history shows us that authoritarian modernizers—even those who at first attempt to create their own version of democracy—become more authoritarian over time. The rationalizations may vary: Authoritarian rule is needed to complete the transformation of society, the revolution faces enemies at home or abroad, or, more typically, the public is willing to tolerate increasing authoritarian rule for the sake of social order and greater prosperity. But the result usually is the same: institutionalization of an authoritarian system that combines elements of old patterns of behavior and some, but not all, of the initial hopes and promises of those who tried to break with that past to create a new and better society. At least by 2008, that combination had taken the form of increasing manipulation of how Russian democracy works rather than an outright suppression of the essential institutional features of the 1993 constitution. Some observers would argue that the distinction is meaningless, and their case gains credibility as the tandem and Putin's third term play out in future chapters. But in 2008, when a critical turning point had been reached, Putin turned away from the opportunity to amend the constitution to grant himself a third successive term, just as Yeltsin at a similar turning point in 1996 chose not to postpone the presidential election. In both cases, those actions confirmed the reality that a new and updated version of a "modern" Russia required the preservation of pro forma but clearly flawed democratic institutions, creating what contemporary theorists have termed "electoral authoritarianism." As the literature on this hybrid form argues, even the seemingly most controlled and manipulated examples of electoral authoritarianism can, under certain circumstances, rise up against their creators.<sup>38</sup>

An assessment of Putin as a modernizer is more ambiguous. Certainly he initially accepted the criticisms of the old soviet order that labeled it economically backward, isolated, and increasingly out of step with the modern world. And he accepted the broad outlines of Gorbachev's and Yeltsin's reform agendas, which included some form of democratization, economic and social reform, and increasing integration into the global community. But even these benchmarks were qualified. Post-communist democracy always fell short of Western notions of liberal democracy, as witnessed by the limits to popular rule inherent in Gorbachev's Congress of People's Deputies and Yeltsin's willingness to disband the Russian legislature in 1993. Economic and social reform

played out against the backdrop of the efforts of the former party elite to retain control of the new levers of power and the empire building of the oligarchs. Any definition of the new Russia's place in the post-cold war international community was always tainted by the memory of the old Russia's power and assertiveness. The point is that there was never any clear definition about what "modern" should mean, except at the level of platitudes and generalities. When it came to the details, Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and now Putin made it up as they played the game.

In Putin's first two terms, his policies and personal style of leadership had much in common with the *modus operandi* of authoritarian modernizers. He restored a strong Russian state, reversing the flow of power from the center to the regions. More broadly, he restored a distinct sense of Russian identity to replace the patina of the "new soviet man." He positioned the presidency at the center of a complex network of political and economic relationships that increased its power and control. He used both the presidency and the state apparatus as transformational mechanisms to staunch the drift and malaise of the Yeltsin years and to win acceptance, however temporary, for his version of strong central leadership. He posited an idiosyncratic and distinctly Russian path to economic and political reform, borrowing from but selectively reinterpreting the experiences of other economically advanced democracies, whose tutelage he rejected. In the notions of sovereign democracy and the vertical, he reinterpreted the role of the state in the crafting of a new political and social order, drawing from and updating traditional themes such as Russian exceptionalism, hierarchy and subordination, and the guiding role of the state in ways that, at least for a while, seemed new and modern. He presided over the creation a presidential party that began to tie the pieces together and bridge the gap between those within and those beyond the Garden Ring. And he built a cult of the personality, in part the normal projection of any successful politician in a democracy and in part a growing manifestation of his own sense of destiny and the sycophantic behavior of his followers and acolytes.

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