a constitution, but that hardly makes it a “constitutional monarchy” (p. 175) with limits to executive power. It is not clear why Qatar would have ranked worse in the Gender Inequality Index (GII) “if Qatari women were heavily employed in blue collar and low-paid employment sectors” (p. 182). After all, an important factor improving a country’s GII score is women’s active participation in the labor force. Homosexuality is not treated as “an illness that can be cured” (p. 138) in Iran: same-sex sexual activity is punishable by death according to Iranian law. If “Iran’s population is projected to grow to close to 100 million by the year 2050” from its 2014 population of 77 million (pp. 152 and 202), how can it also be expected to experience a significant population decline of 41% between 2010 and 2040 (p. 152)? An Ayatollah is not expected to attain the title of Grand Ayatollahs who achieve the highest level of religious authority in Shiite Islam.

The year 2050 (p. 152)?! An Ayatollah is not expected to attain the title of Grand Ayatollahs who achieve the highest level of religious authority in Shiite Islam.

Overall, Demography and Democracy provides some useful information about various aspects of demographic changes and patterns of development in the contemporary Middle East.

Readers looking for an insightful analysis of political dynamics shaping these changes and patterns, however, are likely to be disappointed.


— Joel M. Ostrow, Benedictine University

Russia’s politics are once again interesting to the West. Its leader, Vladimir V. Putin, is a dictator nearing his twentieth year in power, and Brian Taylor has crafted easily the strongest, most comprehensive analysis of his rule by spelling out “the code of Putinism.” Many scholars have published analyses of Russia’s political system of late, and most have finally dispensed with any notion of Russia being a democracy, accepting that it has returned to authoritarian rule (a reality I argued with Georgiy A. Satarov and Irina M. Khakamada in The Consolidation of Dictatorship in Russia, 2006). Taylor’s book offers a convincing description of the parameters of Putin’s rule and how it shapes Russia’s internal politics, economic performance, and foreign policy; it is a must read for anyone interested in how Russia is ruled or, as Taylor offers in a quip, how it has been “misruled” for the past two decades (p. 131).

Any review of this book must start with the title. There is no “operational code” here, but the use of the word “code” does hearken back to Cold War era terminology. I opened the book wary of the term “code”: Why not just “Putinism” or “Putin’s Rule?” In the end, I found the term useful, if not necessary. Taylor invokes it as “more and less than an ideology ... not just ideas ... [but] not a coherent and encompassing system of thought” (p. 10). He outlines the “habits, emotions, and ideas” that make Putinism what it is.

These elements are admittedly difficult to categorize in practice. Taylor accurately “decodes” Putinism in the first chapter, describing the “habits” (control, order, loyalty, hypermasculinity), “ideas” (statism, conservatism), and “emotions” (respect, resentment, fear) that, as any observer of Putin’s rule would acknowledge, describe its central tenets (pp. 12–35, 40). In subsequent chapters, he details how Putin and his “Clans and Networks” (Chapter 3) use these elements to emasculate political institutions with a combination of “Leashes and Clubs” (Chapter 2), to direct and control the economy through the use of “Lawyers, Guns and Oil” (Chapter 4), and to provoke and destabilize adversaries abroad by “Punching above Its Weight” (Chapter 6).

What makes Taylor’s the best book on Putin, however, is his measured, dispassionate execution: he paints a devastating picture. Although his language is engaging, his approach is methodical and comprehensive, with meticulous attention to detail. At the same time, this dispassion may frustrate some. In the short section on the media (pp. 63–65), for example, why does he not present the data on the dozens of investigative journalists murdered as a result of this “code,” including the infamous murder of Anna Politkovskaya? Putin has made the job of journalist in Russia among the most dangerous in the world, using “clubs” and “guns” based on his rationalization of maintaining “order” and strengthening the state. Putin’s violent suppression of the press is integral to his attack on information and truth and to his recentralization of power, yet receives scant attention. Similar frustration might arise regarding the plight of opposition politics and attacks against opposition politicians. What of the murders of leaders such as Boris Nemtsov, who receives two brief mentions almost as aside (p. 105 and 155), or Sergei Yushenkov, among the many who have paid the ultimate price for their critical and outspoken political views, as well as the countless others silenced? Yet, these attacks are instrumental to Putin’s destruction of “open politics.”

There are other details, too, that some may quibble with. Taylor spends some time arguing the weakness of Russia’s institutions, detailing how Putin has emasculated the formal institutions in favor of his informal networks and rules that centralize his power vertically. Yet he fumbles when it comes to the relationship between Russia’s superpresidential constitution, institutions, and Putinism (pp. 51–52). The constitution created the institutional environment in which the personal predilections of the individual who happens to be president—indeed, the habits, ideas, and emotions of that individual—determine the nature of politics in the country. The performance of Russia’s institutions depends on the
individual at the top; this was as true under Yeltsin as it is under Putin. That, by definition, is dictatorship. The institutions, formal and informal, in place since the early 1990s created this system, and behaviors under those institutions set the precedents that enabled Putinism to emerge. As such, Taylor’s conclusion that Russia today is a case study in an established democracy reverting to authoritarianism is indefensible. At best, democratization in Russia was never more than a half-hearted venture.

Still, these concerns in the context of the overall contribution are truly at the level of details. The brilliance of this book is that all of these concerns in the moment dissolve away on a complete read. In his dispassionate, meticulous style, Taylor conveys the “predatory” style of rule (p. 129), that Putin’s insistence on “order” and the “primacy of the state” in fact means that “all key decisions [are] taken by Putin” (p. 133), and that he has created and presides over “a regime of repression” (p. 68). There is no question by the end of the book: Putin is an often violent, brutal dictator, ruling with the help of a closed circle pledged to and controlled by him that runs its brand of crony capitalism and profits off their fiefdoms, so long as its members serve the interests of that boss at all times and carry out his orders when issued.

Perhaps most interesting is the combative chapter detailing how the enforcement of this code so disadvantages Russia. By every measure, Russia underperforms and does so because of Putinism. Russia’s political and economic weakness and its shaky position internationally are all “a direct consequence” of this system (p. 132). Taylor deploys various economic and institutional measures to demonstrate Russia’s grim performance. Depending on the measure, Russia’s current comparators are Uganda, the Philippines, or Bolivia, clearly not the states Putin would consider peers or to which Russia historically compares itself (pp. 157–63). Putinism clearly is not good for Russia. How, then, has Putinism survived? Many predicted it would crumble with a drop in oil prices or that Putin’s rule would not be sustainable (for example, Lilia Shevtsova, Russia—Lost in Transition, 2007). Taylor’s explication of Putin’s code offers a cogent, convincing explanation for how Putin has maintained control in the face of international economic sanctions on top of the decline in oil and gas revenues.

In the end, this is a book about an individual dictator’s style, not a style of dictatorship. The Code of Putinism might offer very general organizing concepts to probe the rule of dictators such as Sisi in Egypt, Erdogan in Turkey, or Duterte in the Philippines. But the contours of each would be entirely different from Putinism and from each other. This is not a work of comparative theory, and indeed political science theory remains lacking in its treatment of dictatorship. Similarly, the book does not devote much attention to the rise of Putinism. Other works, including mine, offer extensive analysis of that question.

Instead Taylor presents a snapshot or description of how Russia is ruled today. That snapshot is the clearest we have, and its description is the most comprehensive and persuasive. This is the best book on Putinism to date.

— Julia Gray, University of Pennsylvania

In the midst of a severe crisis provoked by separatist regions and Russian aggression, the president of Ukraine found time in 2015 to declare his allegiance to pro-market reforms, invoking the tenets of Thatcher and Reagan. In 2009, Georgia’s president exalted the ideas of Hayek, Friedman, and Rothbard while presenting his Act of Economic Freedom to parliament. After 50 years under socialism, leaders and ruling parties in Eastern Europe not only advocated for neoliberal policies but also acted on them. And many governments seem to have gone much farther than necessary, enacting extravagantly neoliberal policies that are rarely encountered even among Western members of the European Union. Why?

In their fine new book, Hilary Appel and Mitchell A. Orenstein highlight a central puzzle. Economic policy reforms are meant to be bitter pills—good for a country in the long term, but tough for voters in the short term. Given that reforms exact pain on voting publics, most governments do their best to avoid them. So why did all the postcommunist countries spend the better part of two decades rushing to adopt pro-market policies, going to occasionally exorbitant lengths to do so? Furthermore, governments are typically understood to have a short window of opportunity to enact open-market reforms, and yet Eastern European governments on both the left and the right spent the better part of 20 years in pursuit of economic liberalization. Now that we know that those countries have ended up in very different places on the political and economic spectrum, this question becomes even more puzzling.

Appel and Orenstein argue that investor perception helped drive those countries’ long stints with pro-market reforms. The fall of communism opened up what looked like vast possibilities for Western countries with capital surpluses to take advantage of the relatively cheap, high-skilled workforces in Eastern Europe. To that end, the authors say, postcommunist governments hastened to enact the gamut of market-friendly policies—at times even showy and untested ones, such as flat taxes, levels of central bank independence well above the norm, and exotic privatization schemes—in hopes of standing out.