Vladimir Putin as a political leader

Challenges to an AD-informed analysis of political culture

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Presentation for ESRAD

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Vladimir Putin as a political leader
Challenges to an AD-informed analysis of political culture
developmental complexity in discourse and action

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by:

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Background

• Russia 25 years after the end of the Soviet Union
• Systemic transition(s): where is Russia heading?
• How can Vladimir Putin’s leadership be made sense of based on AD theories?

2 aspects:
• Political development perspective: gap between formal institutions and political/legal/economic cultures
  “Unless the institution is preserved by people at the appropriate stage, the institution will regress to less developed forms.”
  (Stephen Chilton: Defining Political Development, 1988, p. 43)
• Political leadership perspective → Ego development
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Leadership tasks:

- “interpret problems,
- prescribe ends and means to solve them,
- propagate personal visions as solutions / responses to problems,
- to mobilize followers to implement those solutions or responses”

(Heifetz, 1994; Tucker, 1995, quoted after Masciulli/Molchanov/Knight, 2009, p. 7)
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Typical leadership questions
• Who are we (“Russians”), as a country/nation/society?
• Who are we different from and how?
• What is Russia/should Russia be?
• How should we relate to which neighboring countries and why so?
• What is the meaning of Russia’s historical experience in the 20th century?
• What are the lessons to be learned from those experiences?
• What is good governance? What is a good leader?
• What kind of politics/leadership does Russia need? Etc.
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The end of the Soviet Union – “greatest tragedy of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century”
From humiliation towards new greatness

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Methodological problems:
• No personal access to the leader \(\rightarrow\) standard testing methods not an option
\(\rightarrow\)No statements about the leader’s personal development
\(\rightarrow\)Data/sources: published materials (newspaper articles, interviews, scientific literature, biographies
\(\rightarrow\)Analysis on the level of public discourse, without inferences on personal development
• Does leader always say/do what he “really” thinks or rather what he think his audience wants to hear/see?
• What is the character of the context that makes a particular leader successful?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Self Development</th>
<th>Subjective Self-Understanding</th>
<th>General leadership style</th>
<th>Leadership Strengths</th>
<th>Leadership Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Impulsive</td>
<td>“I” am my impulses (like a very young child) and unable to take the perspective of others</td>
<td>No leadership possible</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Leaders not found at this level of development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Egocentric</td>
<td>“I” am my needs and desires -able to manage my impulses and to take the perspective of others, but motivated solely by my own needs and desires</td>
<td>Strong, “great men”, leader-centered. His/her wishes are orders; heroic leadership</td>
<td>Aggressive, “can do” personality</td>
<td>Destructive to teamwork and initiative (“my way or the highway”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Interpersonal</td>
<td>“I” am defined by my relationships and social roles – what is “right” is defined by rules, regulations and proper authority (chain of command)</td>
<td>“Good boss” who cares and is in charge, paternalistic leadership, governed by relations of loyalty versus authority</td>
<td>Strong team player and supporter of organizational vision</td>
<td>Independent thinking, mediating competing relationship demands, e.g., boss, family, subordinates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Autonomous (Kegan: institutional self; Loevinger: experts/ achievers)</td>
<td>“I” create my own identity, inclusive of but not defined by my roles, relationships and the expectations of others</td>
<td>Transactional leadership, inviting followers to give their best, incentives versus good performance</td>
<td>Better able to take independent action and mediate competing relationship demands, e.g., boss, subordinates</td>
<td>Rigid self-identity that is associated with current success and threatened by fundamental change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Integral (Kegan: interindividual self, Loevinger: strategist)</td>
<td>“I” am a continually evolving person who is aware of development in myself and others; “I” have a flexible sense of identity that embraces complexity and paradox on a personal level (not just intellectually) but nevertheless has clear values and boundaries</td>
<td>Transformative leadership, shared/distributed leadership, inviting followers (team members) to follow their purpose and make a meaningful contribution to the overall success of the whole</td>
<td>More adaptive to fundamental change without threat to personal identity; better able to support the self-development of others, and understand oneself in a multi-paradigmatic way</td>
<td>Flexible self-identity may be confusing or threatening to subordinates; might push others to grow before they are ready</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Leadership Maturity Framework (Susanne Cook-Greuter et al.) (see handout)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of self development</th>
<th>Subjective self-understanding, key motivations</th>
<th>General leadership style (stage descriptions taken from Cook-Greuter, LMF)</th>
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</table>
| # 2                       | “I” am my needs and desires, able to manage my impulses, motivated solely by my own needs and desires | • Strong, “great men” (in a simplistic, macho kind of sense), leader-centered.  
• His wishes are orders (“I am the boss”); heroic leadership.  
• Aggressive, “can do” personality and behavior (“my way or the highway”).  
• Destructive to teamwork and initiative.  
• Examples: dictators in totalitarian systems, warlords, mafia bosses. |
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Research strategy:

• Data analysis:
  • political action and decisions from 15 years in office
  • public statements in speeches, interviews and other published ego-documents
  • biographical accounts
• typical patterns of reasoning and argumentation
• Structural complexity of statements and meaning-making
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**Results:**

- Center of gravity: **self-protective action logics**
- Range of action logics from #2 (impulsive/egocentric) to # 3/4 (expert) (refers to public leadership & discourse, NOT personality!)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LMF level</th>
<th># 2 Impulsive, egocentric</th>
<th># 2/3 Self-protective, opportunistic</th>
<th># 3 Inter-personal</th>
<th># 3/4 Expert, conscientious</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage in the data</td>
<td>24 %</td>
<td>46 %</td>
<td>25 %</td>
<td>5 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Results:

• General leadership profile (motivation & drivers of thinking and action)
• Case study on domestic politics (“vertical of power”, media politics, war against terror)
• Case study on foreign politics
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Results (1): General leadership profile

- a competitive win-lose logic as used in sports, or warfare: politics is a battle: I win – you lose, or vice versa → there can only be one winner
- the perception of other political players as opponents
- the idea that Russia is threatened (from within + outside) and has to defend itself
- actively using opponents’ strengths and weaknesses for attaining own goals
- one has to control oneself and to mask one’s goals in order to achieve them while expecting the opponent to do the same, i.e.
- there is always a hidden agenda and that therefore, other players generally cannot be trusted: politics as warfare
## Leadership Maturity Framework (Susanne Cook-Greuter et al.)

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| # 2/3                     | Essentially fragile, insecure self, thus constantly testing limits; no insight into themselves or others, but sense of who they can/ cannot manipulate; life is a war of wills, aggression hides own vulnerability | • Are **distrustful of others** and assume that others do not trust them.  
• Believe that success depends on **cleverness** and good or bad luck.  
• Regard whatever they can get away with as ‘legal’ and permissible.  
• **Manipulate and deceive** others to achieve their ends.  
• Always find **blame outside of themselves**, negatively stereotype others.  
• Experience **feedback as an attack** and go on the offensive.  
• Punish others according to ‘an **eye for an eye**’.  
• Experience rules as a loss of freedom.  
• Act quickly and without deliberation.  
• Have **short time horizons**, and are not guided by precedent.  
• Focus on concrete tasks, rather than ideas, plans or principles. |
| # 2/3 Self-protective, opportunistic | 46 % in the data |  |
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Results (2): Foreign Policy

• Main driver: longing for being respected as a major international player, ideally on the same level as the US

• Most at home in self-protective/opportunistic action logics, due to socialization, previous career, and (?) traumatic experiences

• seeks good interpersonal relations with respected others (heads of state), partly as a way to receive the desired respect

• is willing to contribute his share (by keeping promises, being loyal to political “friends”, conforming to certain standards, or by engaging in pragmatic solutions), as long as he trusts that no-one will cheat him
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Results (2):

• If he does not get the desired respect, he might try to force others into respect and cooperation – without understanding counterproductive impacts.

• Apparently cannot understand/accomodate the reasoning behind mainstream western policy-making on the basis of his mental model. Limited perspective taking is unable “to see connections between his own repressions at home and the hostile reactions abroad” (Roxburgh, 2012, p. ix).

• Putin’s notion of patriotism: the country is as strong as the fear it generates in others (Gessen, 2012, p. 50)
How to deal with Putin as a political leader?

The West has reacted by:

• accepting Putin’s call for “friendship” (Gerhard Schröder, Silvio Berlusconi etc.)

• trying to account for Russia’s sensitivities, offering compensatory measures (establishing the “privileged partnership”, in return for NATO enlargement)

• ignoring the differences between each other’s reasoning or pretending not to see them, expecting Putin to behave “like themselves” (most of the EU, except eastern countries, before the Ukraine crisis)

• trying to avoid an open confrontation, by fear of uncontrolled escalations, sensing that one doesn’t fully understand Putin

• refusing to inquire into the deeper roots of mutual misunderstandings, by fear of “spoiling good relationships”, or to lose one’s operating mental model
How to deal with Putin as a political leader?

AD informed social science can help leaders to be more effective by

• showing the “bigger picture”
• making sense of self-protective leadership
• suggesting adequate responses and ways for a more successful cooperation

• **Major need** of self-protective leadership: to receive respect and positive feedback, to stabilize its weak and fragile identity and self concept.
• **Development goal**: conformist (diplomat) action logic – not pluralist “western” behavior.
How to deal with Putin as a political leader?

*The West could/should:*

• stop ignoring and start understanding the differences
• make expectations crystal clear – and insist on them being met in return for respect as a major political player
• combine these expectations with persistent “friendly pressure”, i.e.
• give maximum respect where respect is due, but
• consequently sanction any “trespassing” of boundaries immediately
• Take potential threats seriously, but not always literally. Acknowledge the need behind them without giving up legitimate expectations and principles
• Explain much more explicitly how western reactions are linked to Putin’s behavior and that he himself is (co-) responsible for both.
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Thank you!