Post-Populism

Transitions from Populist to Personalist Authoritarian Rule

Evren Balta (Özyeğin University), Alexander Baturo (Dublin City University),
and Paul D. Kenny (Australian Catholic University)

Paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association,
Los Angeles, 31 August – 3 September, 2023.

Abstract

Populism is a political strategy in which political leaders directly mobilize support through mass communication, typically posing as the voice of "the people's will" in opposition to an entrenched political establishment. Although a growing body of research shows that populists draw on their mass support to weaken judicial autonomy, override legislative restraints, erode press freedom, and broadly inhibit opposition mobilisation, less attention has been given to what follows this populist turn. Specifically, as populist leaders experience a decline in their popularity, under what circumstances are they capable of leveraging their erstwhile mass support into power over the long-term? In contrast to other studies that put the durability of formal and informal democratic institutions to the fore, and unlike most current research on populism, we propose to explain the personalization of power under populist leadership by examining how such leaders, once in power, manage other elites; that is, we place the degree, timing, and nature of elite cohort replacement at the center of our argument. Drawing on detailed studies of Vladimir Putin in Russia and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, we show that populist leaders vary in how thoroughly and quickly they can accomplish this transformation.

Introduction

The last decade has brought with it growing pessimism over the resilience of democracy worldwide (Applebaum, 2020; Haggard & Kaufman, 2021; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Mounk, 2018). Although there have been previous eras of democratic backsliding (Bermeo, 2003), the current moment is said to be distinctive in that the main threat to democracy comes not from the armed forces, but from a subset of elected executives commonly termed *populists* (Diamond, 2021; Norris & Inglehart, 2018). Although a growing body of research shows that populists draw on their mass support to weaken judicial autonomy, override legislative restraints, erode press freedom, and broadly inhibit opposition mobilisation (Houle & Kenny, 2018; Juon & Bochsler, 2020; Paul D Kenny, 2020; Kyle & Mounk, 2018; Norris & Inglehart, 2018; Weyland, 2020), less attention has been paid to what follows this populist turn, or to what we call *post-populism*. In most cases, there is either a reversion to other forms of political linkage, such as clientelism, or the development of a serial populism, with one populist leader following another (De la Torre, 2018; Paul D. Kenny, 2017). In a few cases, however, populists have been able to convert their erstwhile mass support into full blown personalist authoritarian rule over the long-term (Kyle & Mounk, 2018; Ruth-Lovell, Lührmann, & Grahn, 2019; Weyland, 2023).

In this paper, we develop a theoretical framework for the transition from populist to personalist authoritarian rule. In contrast to other studies on democratic backsliding that put the durability of formal state institutions to the fore (Coppedge, 2017; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018), and unlike most current research on populism, which focuses on the illiberal ideological aims of populist rule (Müller, 2016; Pirro & Stanley, 2022), we propose to explain the transition from populist to personalist authoritarian rule by examining how populist leaders, once in power, manage other elites. That is, we place the degree, timing, and nature of elite cohort replacement at the heart of our argument.

Drawing on detailed studies of two leaders who have made the transition from populist to personalist authoritarian rule, Vladimir Putin in Russia and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, we examine the mechanism of elite management as a dynamic process. Critically, as personalistic or charismatic political outsider who cultivate mass support directly rather than through a dense political party organization, populists tend to begin their rule with relatively contingent and narrow elite backing. While it might be theoretically desirable to

impose a rapid turnover of the incumbent elite on coming to power, this strategy is rarely feasible. Any large-scale coordinated attack on the elite would likely provoke immediate resistance (Svolik, 2012). Thus, populists like Putin and Erdoğan have to rely initially on the acquiescence, if not support, of a range of established political, technocratic, security, and business elites. The transition from populist to personalist authoritarian rule depends on populists using their mass personal appeal to replace their erstwhile elite collaborators with unequivocal loyalists. Only populist leaders who can remove these elite constraints are then able to erode the broader institutional constraints of their authority in the wake of a significant drop in their mass support – in effect, to become personalist dictators.

Populism and Democratic Backsliding

Populism, as is well known, is a contested concept (Moffitt, 2020), but whether it is conceived of in ideational or operational terms, its essential characteristic that of a mass popular movement set in opposition to a political establishment that mediates between people and state (Canovan, 1981; Paul D Kenny, 2023; Laclau, 1977; Mudde, 2004; Roberts, 1995; Urbinati, 2015). Populism is often theorized to have a deeply ambiguous relationship with democracy (Canovan, 1999; Kaltwasser, 2012). On the one hand, populist movements necessarily depend on mass mobilization, usually of groups of people who are neglected or excluded by the political mainstream. Argentina's Juan Perón famously relied on the support of the *descamisados* – literally, the shirtless – poor urban migrants of Buenos Aires, who were ignored by the conservative establishment. In this sense, populism has a democratizing quality. On the other hand, however, even if populists mostly gain and retain power through elections that are relatively free and fair, many populists have also tended to erode judicial autonomy, suppress press freedom, and otherwise aggrandise the executive branch of government once in power (Houle & Kenny, 2018; Juon & Bochsler, 2020; Paul D Kenny, 2020; Kyle & Mounk, 2018; Norris & Inglehart, 2018). To list only some the best-known examples of recent years, Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, Turkey's Erdoğan, Russia's Putin, and Hungary's Viktor Orbán all came to power through relatively free and fair elections, but then deeply undermined their nation's democratic institutions once ensconced in office.

Much scholarship attributes this ambiguous quality of populism to an ideology that values democracy but eschews liberalism or pluralism (Galston, 2018; Pappas, 2019). That is, populists are committed to the notion that the people must rule, and hence to mass

participation in politics, but they do not share democrats' usual commitment to liberal institutions that preserve the rights of minorities. As Fareed Zakaria (1997) put it in a seminal *Foreign Affairs* article, "Today the two strands of liberal democracy, interwoven in the Western political fabric, are coming apart in the rest of the world. Democracy is flourishing; constitutional liberalism is not." Or to use the words of Hungarian Prime Minister, Victor Orbán, "We needed to state that a democracy is not necessarily liberal. Just because something is not liberal, it still can be a democracy." Taking the likes of Orbán at face value, the contemporary literature on populism and democratic backsliding often assumes that populists have an a priori preference for illiberalism if not authoritarianism (Müller, 2016). However, bundling populism with illiberalism or authoritarianism defines away an interesting research problem. If populists are undemocratic by definition, any analysis of the downstream "effects" of populist rule is redundant.

We instead locate populism's authoritarian tendency, not in a set of beliefs, but in the structural imperatives facing populist leaders. Populists, like political leaders in general, first aim to win and keep power. Rather than seeing populists as rigid ideologues, we view them as pragmatic and adaptable. What makes populists distinctive is not their beliefs but the *unmediated* way in which they mobilize political support (Mouzelis, 1985; Shils, 1956; Urbinati, 2015). Populists seek to directly mobilize support through mass communication rather than through a political party (P. Kenny, 2021; Weyland, 2017). Often as outsiders to the establishment, though not necessarily political novices, populists typically pose as opponents to an entrenched political elite that mediates and obstructs the relationship between the people and the government.

Populists thrive where they can mobilize voters who have been heretofore excluded by the political establishment or who, for a variety of reasons, have become estranged from well-established political parties. Very often, populists are popular precisely because they are seen to be opposing an entrenched and corrupt political establishment. If this means some erosion of the usual liberties of judges, parliamentarians, or well-connected businessmen, when populists come to power, this is a price that large parts of the voting public are often willing to pay. However, this does not mean that populist supporters want dictatorship per se (Bartels, 2023).

Populists, as much of the literature acknowledges, typically come to power through democratic means. That is, they win relatively free and fair elections, whether as candidates for presidential office or as the leaders of highly personalistic parties in parliamentary systems. While there is some evidence of an association between authoritarianism and support for the far right (Donovan, 2019, 2020; Norris & Inglehart, 2018), there is little proof of one between authoritarianism and populist support per se (Bartels, 2023; Schäfer, 2022). This means that actions such as the overt suspension of elections, changes to term limits, or the blatant repression of the opposition send strong signals to voters that the leader is going to be more difficult to remove in the future. All else equal, such actions would be likely to lower a populist's level of support, with only hardcore loyalists remaining. As long as a populist remains popular, and hence confident of winning any future electoral contests or legislative battles, the overt transition to authoritarian rule poses an unnecessary cost. In abrogating democracy altogether under such circumstances, populists would needlessly risk the political costs of meddling with institutions that have heretofore served them well. Thus, contrary to much of the recent literature on populism and democratic backsliding (Norris & Inglehart, 2018), we posit that popular populists thus pose little risk to democracy as such. The danger to democracy comes not when populist support is at its highest, but when it is in decline. The dog backed into a corner is the one most likely to bite. As populist leaders experience a decline in their popularity, under what circumstances are they capable of leveraging their erstwhile mass support into power over the long-term?

Post-Populism: A Theoretical Framework

As charismatic leaders, populists have a mass base of support that is personally attached to them rather than to a party organization or brand as such. Thus, unlike the leaders of more conventional programmatic parties, who are constrained by party rules, or the leaders of patronage-based parties who depend on the support of factional leaders, populists face much fewer informal party-based constraints on their authority (Paul D Kenny, 2020). Populists can use the leverage of their personal mass popularity to erode the formal limits on executive authority with only limited resistance from within their own power base. Clearly, however, not all populists become personalist dictators.

The transition to personalist authoritarian rule poses a threat not just to the general populace, but to the elite. Even if the political organizations utilized by populists to win

power tend to be relatively fluid and leader-centric, populists in power cannot do without elite support. Indeed, as relative outsiders with less developed political organizations, to initially govern populists may be more dependent on the established political, technocratic, security, and business elite than other political leaders. Populists' ability to transition to personalist authoritarian rule is conditional on their dominance vis-à-vis a multi-faceted elite that extends across government and the private sector.

We thus explain the personalization of power under populist leadership by examining how such leaders, once in power, manage other elites; that is, we place the degree, timing, and nature of elite cohort replacement at the center of our argument. We conceive of the elite in relatively broad terms. It goes beyond the small group of political players around the chief executive, which we might call the inner circle, to include individuals in important positions across government and the private sector. The numerical size of this elite will vary across countries and time periods, but as a reasonable approximation, we can think of it as comprising the occupants of the 100-250 leading positions in the public and private sector. We categorize this elite into four main groups:

The first set of elites are national or sub-national political leaders who bring their own supporters into the populist ruling coalition. Even though the ideal type of charismatic leader is one who is uniquely tied to supporters in a direct way, many populists must also incorporate de facto coalition partners either the form of internal party elites with their regional or functional factions or external political, religious, or civil society partners with their own organizations. This is often necessitated because of the populists typically gain power in the first instance with pluralities rather than majorities. Unattached or disaffected voters can make up a large part of the electorate, but in most well-established democracies, they rarely come to a winning majority. Populists therefore have to strike deals with factional, regional, or urban leaders. In Italy, the charismatic Silvio Berlusconi first became prime minster in 1994 with his party having won just over a fifth of the vote thanks to the backing of an array of nationalist political parties. His dependence on these partners was made clear when the leader of the Lega Nord, Umberto Bossi, withdrew his support for Berlusconi after just seven months, bringing down the government. Adolf Hitler, as is well-known, was appointed German Chancellor in 1933 at the behest of conservative political elites like Alfred Hugenberg and Franz von Papen who believed they could exploit Hitler's mass appeal while

still keeping him under control (Hett, 2018). Indeed, there were just two Nazis in Hitler's first cabinet. In contrast to Berlusconi, however, Hitler was able to replace his erstwhile political allies before they replaced him.

The second set of elites are technocrats who are required for their ability to manage government. Fulfilling the vast array of duties of a modern government requires competence in the areas of the economy, industry, defence, health, education, and diplomacy among others. As political outsiders, populists typically lack a support base with such experience in government. Donald Trump, for instance, had a limited network of allies who could function in key economic and diplomatic roles, leaving him to appoint individuals over whom he had limited control. Trump was constantly frustrated by what he often termed the "deep state," or the large network of senior functionaries tasked with executing government policies. Early appointees such as Rex Tillerson at the State Department and Gary Cohn as Director of the National Economic Council were unreliable allies, prompting their quick replacement (Baker & Glasser, 2022). In cases where the senior members of the administration are career civil servants rather than appointees, the process of elite replacement is likely to be more contentious.

Third are elites with control over the instruments of coercion, namely the military and to a lesser extent the police or secret services (Weyland 2023). Again, as outsiders, populists often initially lack support from among this group of elites. Given the centrality of the military and other armed services to imposing and maintaining authoritarian rule, no transition from populism to personalist dictatorship is possible without substantial control over this group of elites. Although the Nazi Party had a formidable paramilitary organization in the form of the SA when it came to power, as a mere corporal, its leader Hitler was treated with distain by the military establishment. Hitler had such limited control over the military in his first year in office that the possibility that President Paul von Hindenburg and Defence Minister General Werner von Blomberg would use the military to declare an end to the "Hitler experiment" was very real until at least the purging of the SA in the night of the Long Knives (June 30, 1944) (Tooze, 2006, p. 67). Even Venezuelan former lieutenant colonel, Hugo Chávez, had the support of only a middle tier of the military leadership on coming to power in 1998; in 2002, senior members of the military briefly overthrew him in an abortive coup d'état. Vladimir Putin, as we will see, had the support of much of the Russian Federal

Security Service (FSB) (the former KGB) on coming to power, but he had much less sway over Russia's still huge military establishment.

Fourth are elites in the private sector. Populists face both threats and opportunities from the private sector elite, whether they are independently wealthy citizens or the leading executives of private corporations. Here we are less concerned with any broader conflicts over economic policy, such redistribution, between populists and the economic elite (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Albertus & Menaldo, 2018). Irrespective of these issues, wealthy elites and corporations play a key role in funding political movements and election campaigns. Populists vary in their dependence on the economic elite in coming to power. Some populists such as Berlusconi and Thailand's Thaksin Shinawatra, are independently wealthy, so much so that they have been able to mount political campaigns without the backing of the financial elite. Other populists, however, need wealthy donors. In the German case, although Hitler was never the tool of the capitalist elite as his Communist adversaries imagined, he did have his supporters among the industrial elite, most notably Fritz Thyssen, who bankrolled the Nazi Party. Most German industrial leaders made their peace with Hitler and there were few politically motivated nationalizations of private firms, Junkers' aviation firm being a notable exception.

In short, although populists' charismatic source of authority makes it possible for them to erode some of the liberal institutional rules that preserve political competition in a way that regular party leaders cannot, populists are also constrained by a broad elite that occupies positions across government and the private sector. Before populists can arrogate the democracy altogether, they must reduce the ability of the elite to check them. Only those populist leaders who have removed these elite constraints are able to erode the broader institutional constraints of their authority in the wake of a significant drop in their mass support – in effect, to become personalist dictators. To do this, we argue that populists exploit their powers of appointment to gradually promote their supporting elite coalition. Whether populists make this step is a function of both tactics and context.

Putin and Post-Populism in Russia

The process of autocratization in Russia under Vladimir Putin is well documented Gill (2015); (Hale, 2014, pp. 267-291; Levitsky & Way, 2010, pp. 186-201). In Russia, over the

first two decades that Putin held power, no "discrete" autocratization event occurred, such as dismissal of parliament, a para-constitutional convention, enactment of enabling laws, common during executive takeovers (Baturo & Tolstrup, 2023). Yet over this period, there was a slow and steady consolidation of power by the Kremlin that that most analysts believe Putin's regime qualifies as a personal dictatorship (Baturo & Elkink, 2016). As we discuss below, the pace of autocratization accelerated during and following Putin's return to the presidential office in 2012, but the process had been ongoing since Putin's first term.[1] The 2020 constitutional referendum that allowed Putin to circumvent term limits provides was an indicator of the conclusion, rather than the beginning, of Russia's authoritarian transition. Indeed, the institutional "hardware" for successful personalisation was arguably largely already in place as early as 1993 when Yeltsin abrogated the existing constitution, dissolved the legislature, and suspended the constitutional court (Parrish, 1998, p. 63). Although the resulting 1993 constitution made an authoritarian turn possible, it was Putin rather than Yeltsin who realised its potential.

This section illustrates how Putin's authoritarianism was made possible by his careful and strategic management of the ruling elite. The elite that brought Putin to power in 2000 was gradually eased out in favor of one more dependent on Putin's patronage, which limited the subsequent resistance to Putin's authoritarian turn in the face of his declining approval ratings in the 2010s. It was during his third presidential term, beginning in 2012, that Putin's personalization of power became ineluctable. By this time, the oligarchs who had brought Putin to power could now be taken on directly. The case of Sergei Pugachev is exemplary. As Catherine Belton (2020, p. 2) writes, while Pugachev was one of the oligarchs instrumental in bringing Putin to power, fifteen years later, "the Kremlin machine he'd once been part of had turned against him." Pugachav was "the first of the inner circle to fall" (Belton, 2020, p. 3).

It is debatable whether Vladimir Putin can be categorized as a populist proper at the time of his election into office. Certainly, his elevation to the Prime Ministership in late 1999

[1] The influential Polity V project categorises Putin's regime as democracy as late as 2007, from when the latter becomes, and remains, partly democratic. As late as 2010, the country report argued that ``there is no reason to think that Putin will seek to eliminate Russia's fragile democratic institutions in the near future.'' See http://www.systemicpeace.org/p4creports.html. The Freedom House categorises it as non-democratic as early as 2004, but ignores further deterioration until 2014.

was made possible only by the actions of incumbent President Boris Yeltsin and his ruling coterie. From this base, however, Putin quickly established his personal leadership. By late 1999, with Yeltsin's popularity in the single digits, court-cases pending, no political party, and a presidential election looming, the ruling Family was faced with the challenge of how to secure its legacy, and perhaps even its freedom. Yeltsin resigned the presidency with three months of his term to go to give acting presidential authority to Putin. The regime aligned media, controlled by oligarchs like Boris Berezovsky, rapidly constructed a strong leadership persona for Putin. Putin fit the role, cracking down hard on the insurgency in Chechnya and taking a hardline response to terrorist attacks in Moscow. Despite his camera shyness, Putin had a swagger; he spoke directly, often crudely, vowing that if government forces caught the terrorists "in the shithouse, we'll wipe them out in the shithouse" (Short, 2022, p. 282) His popularity shot up from just 2 percent in August to 15 percent in October and 40 percent in December (Short, 2022, p. 285). Putin won the relatively free and fair elections in March 2000 with over 53 percent of the vote. In power, he continued to display many populist elements including direct popular appeals that bypassed the channels of a political party, advocating on behalf of the losers of transition of the 1990s against the so-called oligarchs, promising to re-build national prestige at the international stage (Tsygankov, 2015).

Initially, however, Putin was constrained by a body of elites over whom he had little direct influence. In the first place, as Yeltin's designated successor, Putin was initially beholden to the elites who had financed and conducted his election campaign. Most notable of these oligarchic backers was Boris Berezovsky, who boosted Putin through his control over Russia's main television station, ORT. Moreover, when on 9 August 1999 President Yeltsin appointed Putin as his prime-minister and then designated as his successor, Putin had limited experience in government with the result that he had a relatively short bench of personal acquaintances qualified for the highest offices to draw from. Thus, initially Putin had no choice but to rely on individuals who had made careers during 1990s under Yeltsin, including most cabinet ministers and the two most influential politicians, Prime-Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, and the chief of staff of the presidential administration, Alexandr Voloshin. In the cabinet that formed following Putin's election for the presidency in May 2000, out of 29 ministers only three, Ilya Klebanov, Alexey Kudrin and Herman Gref, had prior ties to Putin (Zygar, 2016). That is, the ruling coalition that formed under Yeltsin in the 1990s continued without much disruption into early 2000s (Novokmet, Piketty, & Zucman,

2018; Shevtsova, 2007, pp. 36-40). There were, of course, exceptions. Very quickly, Putin moved against Vladimir Gusinsky, the wealthy owner of the television station, NTV, who had backed Putin's opponent, Evgeny Primakov, for president in 2000. Similarly, Berezovsky, even though he had been instrumental in Putin's rise to power, was quickly eased out. Some of Berezovsky's assets were seized, but it wasn't until the takeover of Mikhail Khodorkovsky's Yukos in 2003 that Putin moved aggressively against elites in the private sector.

Where Putin had power of appointment, however, he had no qualms against using his, albeit relatively small, contact book that included his friends, associates, colleagues and subordinates—his "software"—in making strategic appointments and promotions. Primarily, he was known to draw from several groups: classmates from the Leningrad State University's law school such as Viktor Cherkesov, KGB colleagues such as Sergei Ivanov, former subordinates in the Saint-Petersburg mayor's office from 1991--96 such as Igor Sechin, as well as acquaintances from Saint-Petersburg known to Putin prior to the presidency, such as Vladimir Kozhin (Baturo and Jelkink 2021, 65). In fact, as early as 1998, while working in the presidential administration and then as FSB director, Putin began to secure the appointments of some of his old-time associates, including Nikolay Patrushev, Sergei Ivanov, Victor Cherkesov or Sergey Chemezov who all moved together with him as he was assuming ever higher positions (Felshtinsky and Pribylovsky 2008, 82–86).

The pace of personnel changes increased after the March 2000 presidential election. Then, in 2001, while the cabinet was still dominated by the "old" elite, Sergey Ivanov and Boris Gryzlov assumed the powerful defence and interior cabinet portfolios.[2] Still, the "old" elite has remained influential throughout the ranks. In the middle of 2000, as reconstructed by an authoritative Russian newspaper, the new president at best controlled approximately 15 percent of about 150 key political and civil service officials, while the "old" elite was still significantly larger and influential (Drankina et al. 2000). Because of his security service background and appointment powers as president, Vladimir Putin was able to place his

[2] Ivanov worked in Leningrad KGB directorate while Gryzlov, also from Leningrad, had ties with Patrushev and Kozak, Putin's associates from Saint-Peterburg (Zhegulev and Romanova 2011).

supporters to key posts in security institutions early on. Yet, even in the beginning of 2003 he was still apparently unable to replace the cabinet officials who represented other interests. Political pundits have employed the analogy of corporate shares to compare the relative influence on politics, arguing that "the president does not have the controlling stake [...]. There are many stakeholders [...] The president is no longer a minority stakeholder as he was in the beginning, he builds up his stake methodically and meticulously, acquiring assets that he regards as key" (Arkhangel'skaya 2001).

Elite Turnover in Russia

While numerous studies exist on informal politics in Putin's Russia (Belton, 2020; Dawisha, 2015; Kryshtanovskaya & White, 2003; Ledeneva, 2006; Sakwa, 2010; Zygar, 2016), they each provide only partial assessments regarding the composition of the ruling coalition including regarding the ties and relationships between officials. Here we draw on quantitative data based on responses from a large panel of experts who were tasked with assessing the most influential political actors in Russia under Putin on a monthly basis, from 1999 to 2016. Specifically, to measure the degree of influence of Putin's associates within Russia's political elite, that is, his immediate patron-client network over time, we can draw from the data in the Russian ruling coalition, introduced in (Baturo & Elkink, 2021). The panel of experts included and evaluated the most influential individuals in the cabinet, presidential administration, enforcement agencies, state companies, legislature, and regions as well as the most important private businessmen, each month, over time, 537 individuals in total.

In Russia, as in the Soviet Union earlier, and in contrast to Central Asia and the Caucasus, where informal networks are largely based on ethnic or family ties, these networks are largely organised by a shared professional or educational background, and they retain significant rigidity over time if not lifetimes (Gill, 2018; Ledeneva, 2006). For each individual included in the expert assessment of the hundred most important members of the Russian ruling coalition, the data categorize their ties to other individuals in terms of their shared personal, educational or professional background, under whose chain of command such individuals had worked earlier for significant periods of time, and who have exerted

influence in elevating such individuals to important political or civil service posts, as reported in the media.[3]

Figure 1 traces the increasing institutional penetration of the individuals affiliated with Putin into the ranks of Russia's ruling coalition, from September 1999. The data reveal that the "new" elite slowly and steadily increases its influence, yet even in the middle of 2001 the "old" elite dominates by the order of two to one. Only in late 2003 does Putin's "new" elite break through and clearly come to dominate the ruling coalition. Indeed, following the arrest in October of 2003 of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a powerful businessman with political interests, the majority of oligarchs have accepted the new rules of the game, and Putin's chief of staff, influential Alexandr Voloshin, also left, which opened the doors for Putin's team to remake the composition of the presidential administration, and then, with the dismissal of Prime Minister Kasyanov that followed in 2004, the cabinet as well.[4] While both "old" and "new" elites have remained in parity from late 2003 to late 2004, from December 2004 Putin's group has become clearly dominant. In fact, from late 2003 on, the presidential administration begins to resemble the office of the old mayor of St Petersburg, stacked with Putin's close associates from those days, including Dmitry Medvedev as his new chief of staff (Arkhangel'skaya 2003).

[3] The data are sourced from monthly surveys of individual influence among political actors, the 100 Most Influential (Leading) Politicians of Russia, conducted by the Vox Populi survey company (from 2002 Vox Populi-T), together with the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* newspaper, from 1994. Baturo and Elkink (2021) have processed the data from various sources into a machine-readable format, added institutional and political affiliations of the individuals assessed, added biographical details including personal and professional ties between the officials, among other.

[4] Zygar (2016) refers to a story, which may be apocryphal, yet fitting, in which Igor Sechin, deputy chief of staff at the time, allegedly thanked Kasyanov for showing their Saint-Petersburg team how to govern the country and that they could do it on their own from then on.

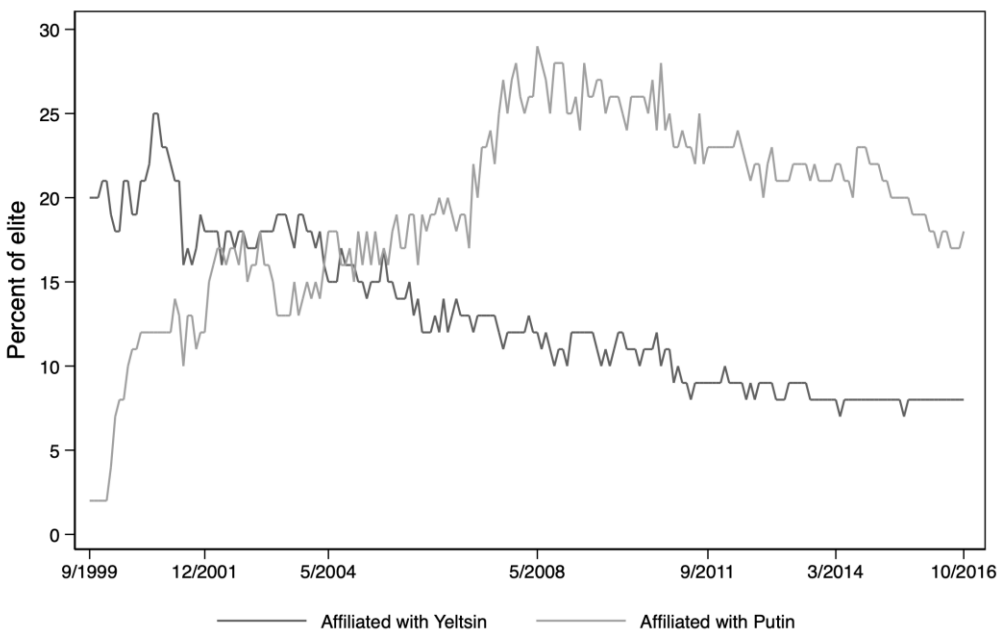
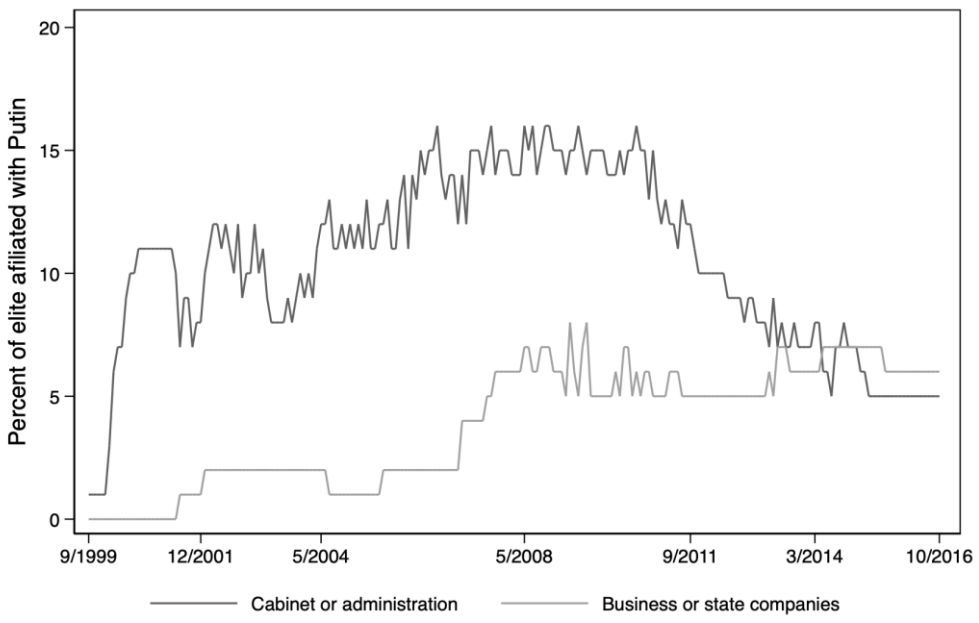


Fig 1: Elite Composition of Russia's Ruling Coalition Note: Per cent of individuals in the ruling coalition with shared personal or professional affiliation with Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin. Based on monthly expert surveys of the Top 100 most influential politicians in Russia (in presidential administration, cabinet, top state companies and institutions, security agencies, most important private company CEOs or owners, etc) (Baturo and Jelkink 2021, 205–14).



o

Fig 2: Elite Composition in Political and Economic Segments Note: Per cent of individuals in the ruling coalition with shared personal or professional affiliation with Vladimir Putin, with either cabinet/presidential administration, or in private business or major state companies. The data are explained in Figure 1.

From early 2007 to 2010, at the same time as Putin's popularity continues to surge (see Figure 3), the "new" elite have come to dominate the ranks of the ruling coalition, so that almost 30 per cent of the most important officials in administration, cabinet, important state companies and institutions, hailed from the group of Putin's associates from his pre-presidential days. Figure 2, which distinguishes between individuals in the cabinet and administration on the one hand, and those in the state companies and business, on the other, shows that the "new" elite becomes and remains dominant---until 2011, when it begins to decline as we discuss below, while Putin's associates in the key economic positions gain prominence from late 2007 on.

While President Putin was able to make many strategic appointments by virtue of his executive powers, he was also able to thwart opposition against his initiatives by maintaining the perception among elites that he has become the only game in town, also as their most valuable asset able to prevail in elections and thus to protect and provide the existing rent-seeking opportunities for them (Dawisha 2014). Putin was able to exploit the relative success

of the second Chechen war and an improved economic situation as painful economic reforms enacted in the 1990s have finally come to bear fruit, converting it into high public approval unmatched by other politicians (Rose, Mishler, & Munro, 2011; Treisman, 2011). The rapid acquisition of control over mass media – the takeovers of ORT and NTV noted above – made criticism of the Russian ruler practically difficult.[5] Furthermore, Putin's acquisition of control over Gazprom – the largest natural gas company in the world – meant that by May 2001 he and the state had access to a very large source of revenue independent from the so-called oligarchs.[6]

As Figure 3 demonstrates, following the initial spike in late 1999, Putin's approval declined to the mid-60s in late 2000, but grew steadily from early 2001, reaching the 80s by the time of 2004 presidential election. Putin's approval subsequently declined to the 60s, largely over mass protests against unpopular social benefit reforms in 2004 and 2005. Boosted by a high economic growth at the time however, his popularity climbed back to the 80s in 2006-2008 period.[7] Yet from 2010 onwards Putin's popularity began a slow but steady decline, which only accelerated upon his return to the presidential office following September 2011 announcement that his placeholder, Medvedev would not pursue a second term (Baturo and Mikhaylov 2014). In turn, the rally around the flag effect following the takeover of Crimea in March 2014 has returned Putin's popularity back to high 80s, where it remained for four years until an unpopular pension reform was announced in 2018 which brought Putin's approval back down. Notably, while on average Putin's popularity has remained high throughout the period in office, and despite the governmental control over the media established early in 2000s, his popularity clearly reflected economic conditions in the

[5] Even though the government introduced even more repressive measures over printed and online media later on, particularly following the 2011 protests and Putin's return to the presidency, as early as 2001 the Kremlin already has a significant de facto control over electronic media.
[6] Unlike in the subsequent Yukos case, the Russian state was the largest shareholder in Gazprom, giving Putin the prerogative to legally remove Board Chairman, Victor Chernomyrdin. In June 2000 Medvedev became its board chairman while in May 2001 Putin's close associate, Miller, became Gazprom's CEO. Kommersant, 19 March 2003, ``Gazprom is the government and president's purse,'' at http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/371826.
[7] Due to his sky-high popularity at the time, in the last two years of his "first" second presidential term Putin was often referred to as the "national leader," irrespective of whether he would retain presidential office in 2008 or opted to comply with the constitution. See "Gleb Pavlovsky: Putin Will Remain National Leader," February 2, 2007, Argumenty i Fakty N84.

country, namely the proposed social benefits reform in 2004, economic decline following the 2008-9 economic crisis, and a pension reform of 2018.

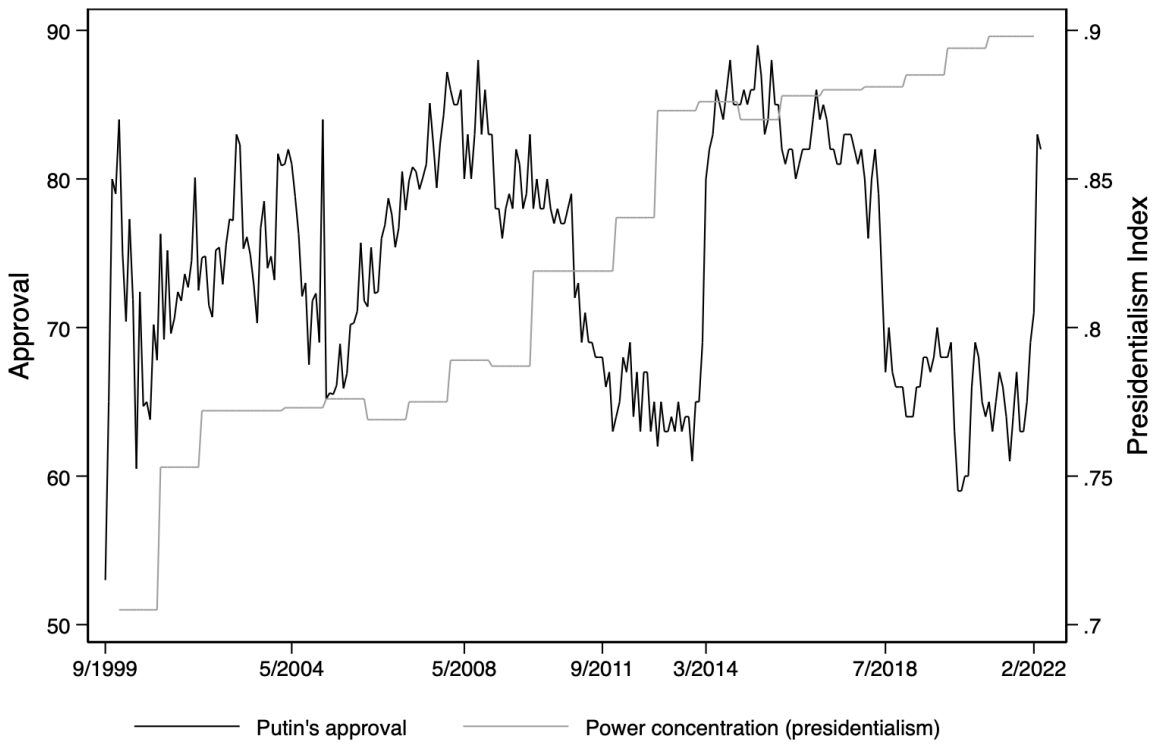


Fig 3: Approval and the Concentration of Power. Note: The left vertical axis reports the percentage of respondents who approve of the activity of Vladimir Putin: "In general do you approve or disapprove of the activity of Vladimir Putin as president (prime minister) of Russia?" Based on monthly data from http://www.levada.ru/indikatory/odobrenie-organov-vlasti/. The right axis reports annual values of presidentialism index, V-Dem (Coppedge et al. 2019).

Regime Personalization

As argued earlier, Putin was well positioned to personalize his regime by virtue of a very powerful constitution, adopted but not fully utilized for such purpose, by his predecessor. Still, he began to fine-tune the institutional structure to ensure stronger executive control over legislative, judiciary branches, as well as regional authorities and state companies. Many regional governors were able to thwart the Kremlin in the 1990s as they

had control over public sector workers, regional police, and significant administrative powers (Hale 2003, 243). Putin has utilized his decree powers when shortly after election, when in May 2000 he created a new office of president's plenipotentiaries to (also newly created) seven federal districts – clusters of federal regions not stipulated in the constitution, tasked with monitoring regional compliance with federal laws, among other (Petrov 2002). While the utility of enlarged districts have quickly proved rather weak, early on this initiative has signalled a new policy direction, and arguably disoriented the governors as to the federal center's intentions. In 2000, new laws were adopted that stripped governors of their automatic seats in the Federation Council, the upper federal legislative chamber, replacing them with regional legislators. Governors, now lacking the automatic parliamentary immunity, could then also be dismissed if they violated federal laws (Golosov 2011). Furthermore, in August 2001 the president acquired the authority over firings and hirings of regional heads of police, so that governors lost their authority over regional police as well.

That is, even though in the December 1999 election the elite was divided between the pro-Kremlin *Unity* party and its rival, Fatherland party headed by regional bosses Luzhkov, Shaymiev and former prime-minister Primakov (Golosov 2011, 626), governors lost their will to challenge the centre as they meekly observed Putin's national popularity and his resolve to acquire more control. Following 1--3 September 2004 Beslan terror attacks, the president introduced further measures to curtail regional powers and abolished direct elections of governors from 11 December 2004 that were now to be appointed by the president (candidates proposed by the president were to be formally approved by regional legislatures)[8] (Sakwa 2010).

The authoritarian reversal underway was not checked by the courts as the latter have lost their, albeit limited, independence by then. As early as 2000 the president probed the resolve of the judges by introducing appointments of his own representatives to judiciary qualification collegiums---bodies responsible for judicial appointments, and gain, met no resistance. From 2001 a new judiciary reform under Dmitry Kozak, another associate of

[8] In 2012, however, following the wave of 2011--12 protests, President Medvedev returned direct gubernatorial elections. Still, the system was more restrictive than that previously abolished in 2004, with cumbersome registration requirements in place.

Vladimir Putin, placed judges under a firmer presidential control by limiting their tenure. Further steps followed, when in 2014 the Supreme Court was merged with the Supreme Arbitration Court.[9] The president has also acquired control over enforcement agencies early in his time in office, stuffing all important positions in police, security services and related agencies with his personal loyalists. He mostly relied on his already existing executive appointment authority, without the need for further institutional changes. Still, to weaken a powerful office of the prosecutor general, in 2007 a new Investigative Committee under direct president's control was established in the prosecutor's office, headed by Putin's loyalist from Saint-Petersburg, and then in 2011 it was split from the prosecutor office altogether as an independent agency, taking a prominent role against public opposition.

As the presidentialism index (Coppedge et al 2019), which serves as a proxy for regime personalisation indicates (see Figure 3),[10] there was a significant deterioration in 2000 and 2001 when Putin was able to fine-tune the "hardware" of the 1993 Constitution for more executive control over the branches of government and the regions. However, from 2004 to 2012, while the authoritarian reversal has continued in Russia, it took a more gradual trajectory. As one example of this, Putin, being restricted from running in 2008 election, rather than following the precedent of the majority of his post-Soviet peers by abolishing or extending presidential term limits, opted to comply with the constitution and circumvented the ban by placing his loyalist, Dmitry Medvedev, into the presidential office, while himself working from the subordinate prime-ministerial office in 2008 to 2012 (Baturo and Mikhaylov 2014). Then, the concentration of power increased quite dramatically, particularly in 2012 and 2013.

As also shown in Figure 3, Putin's concentration of power, as measured from the presidentialism index, jumped most notably in the period 2011 to 2014, precisely when he faced protests and declining popularity in the polls. From late 2011 on the process of

[9] The latter was arguably the most professional judiciary institution in the country that had often ruled against authorities in its tax claims against businessmen. The merger thus reduced judicial independence even further.

[10] The V-Dem codebook explains that "Presidentialism means the "systemic concentration of political power in the hands of one individual who resists delegating all but the most trivial decision making tasks" [...]; It focuses more specifically on the extent to which the President is free from constraints by other institutions or actors.

autocratization in Russia gathered pace, as Putin's return to the presidency in 2012 proved more difficult than anticipated. Following unprecedented election fraud in the December 2011 legislative election, a series of mass demonstrations put Putin's populist authority to the test (Koesel and Bunce 2012). Faced with a deteriorating economic situation and diminishing popularity, and no longer secure in his mass support, from late 2011 to 2014 he turned to building his regime into a personalist authoritarian regime proper.[11] Putin reversed the decline in his approval ratings after taking over Crimea and making mass appeals for the restoration of Russia's great power status, but at the expense of further crackdowns on political opposition (McGlynn, 2023).

This post-2012 period also corresponded to a change in his relationship with political elites, including his own associates he had relied earlier for governance. As seen from the data on the elite composition of Russia's ruling coalition displayed in Figure 1, from 2012, when Putin returned to his second "first" term, he began a second round of elite replacement. Among others, Vladimir Kozhin, an associate from St Petersburg, in 2014 had lost his office as a chief of presidential property department which he headed from 2000. Vladimir Yakunin, one of the closest Putin's associates and a founder of "Ozero" ("Lake") cooperative in the 1990s (Dawisha 2014), in 2015 was dismissed as the head of Russian Railways, one of the largest state companies in Russia. Likewise, Viktor Ivanov, a colleague from KGB and Saint-Petersburg's mayor's office, departed from the Federal Narcotics Service in 2016 and lost his position in the Security Council, while Sergey Ivanov, Putin's chief of staff, left in 2016. Even earlier Dmitry Kudrin, Putin's finance minister was fired by President Medvedev for insubordination in 2011 yet surprisingly was not brought back when Putin has returned to the presidential office in 2012. In short, following 2012, Putin became willing to let go even his closest associates, on whose loyalty he has previously relied on to assume control. By that time, Putin had been in power for twelve years. As a result, the role of his earlier St.

[11]Among other things, in 2012 the freedom of assembly was significantly curtailed with the introduction of steep financial penalties for participation. The same year, a new law related to foreign agents further restricted NGOs, and a defamation law, as well as internet restrictions were all rolled out. Then, 2014 saw a new law restricting foreign ownership of the media, in effect curtailing many previously independent media outlets.

Petersburg associates had diminished, as Putin no longer required their unquestionable loyalty to assume control over institutions, which had been largely accomplished by then.

Putin has increasingly come to replace his associates known to him from pre-presidential days with younger, more technocratic appointments, even for the top posts, such as Prime-Minister Mikhail Mishustin, 55 years old at the time of his replacement in 2020 of Dmitry Medvedev, one of the closest Putin's associates whom Putin had trusted to secure the presidential office in 2008-12 for him, and who has served as prime minister from 2012-20. Among 33 cabinet ministers in 2020, arguably only Dmitry Patrushev, the son of Nikolay Patrushev, the Security Council Secretary, Putin's former colleague from Leningrad KGB directorate, has retained personal affiliation with the president. Instead, some of the most influential Putin's associates, such as Igor Sechin, Putin's assistant from Saint-Petersburg's mayor's office, and one of the most influential politicians during Putin's tenure as the deputy chief of staff and then Vice Prime Minister, in 2012 left political ranks for the CEO post of Rosneft, state oil company, while Herman Gref left to become CEO of Sberbank, a major state-owned bank. The flight into private sector and public enterprises is also reflected in Figure 2 which shows the decline of Putin's associates among political posts even though they may remain influential in non-political roles.

In Russia, while the ruler's power has grown, his associates have also benefited from autocratization since Putin and his personal popularity have arguably shielded them from competition and ensured rent-seeking opportunities, giving them elevated political positions they would not have obtained otherwise. Still, at the time, the relationship was reciprocal and Putin needed them at least as much as they needed him, if not more, as he requires loyal lieutenants to penetrate, and then run all important institutional segments of the Russian regime. As Putin has remained in office for a sufficient period of time – in this case, around 10 to 12 years, the distinction between the old loyalists and other officials has lost its relevance, and he was free to rely on all members of the ruling coalition to pursue his political goals.[12] What was crucial in the Russian case was the fact that Putin has shown his

[12] (Brooker 2000, 57–58) also differentiated between weak and strong personalist rule which are distinguished by whether the leader is primarily an agent or a principal in his relationship with his launching organization or elite group.

resolve not to back down, and to face the unprecedented mass protests and then returned to the presidential office for a much longer mandate. In effect, his authority came to be perceived as permanent, and authoritarianism proper is the government that is "forever" (Linz 1998, 20–21). At that time, many officials who were previously affiliated with other elite groups, or were not affiliated at all, have served under Vladimir Putin long enough to come to perceive him as their patron. In a sense, loyalty, rather than being the property of the relationship between Putin and his associates forged in his pre-presidential days, becomes the property of the personalist system, shared by all. As a result, the ruler has leverage to appoint, reshuffle, or dismiss at all.

Erdoğan and Post-Populism in Turkey

The Erdoğan regime in Turkey exemplifies not only the populist acquisition and retention of power but also the transition to personalist authoritarian rule (Esen & Gumuscu, 2018). Over time, Turkey has not only witnessed democratic erosion but has also undergone a gradual and consistent personalization of power. The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP) was founded in 2001 by a diverse group of relatively young politicians, including Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who in spite of being banned from participating in elections for violating Turkey's strictly secularist penal code while Mayor of Istanbul, was named AKP chairman over other leaders because his "popularity was higher." (Smith, 2019, p. 65). Although the main backbone of the party cadres was the Islamist Welfare Party (Refah Partisi- RP), its founding members claimed to unite Islamist, nationalist, and center-right forces for a conservative democracy (Ozbudun 2006, Tepe 2005). The AKP won its first national electoral victory in 2002 and it has remained in power through consecutive electoral victories for more than 20 years, becoming one of the longest-ruling parties among contemporary populist radical right parties. Throughout its rule, religiously conservative sections of the society have acted as the backbone of the party's support and the rise of the AKP reflected an upward mobility and increased representation of these groups (Cinar 2016; Kaya 2015; Aytaç and Elçi 2019; Celik and Balta 2020; Balta et. Al. 2022).

Erdoğan himself began his ascent to national prominence by winning the race for Mayor of Istanbul in 1994 on the back of a 25 percent plurality of the vote. Although barred from taking office at the AKP's 2002 election victory, his stand-in as Prime Minister, Abdullah Gül shortly rescinded the ban, allowing Erdoğan to win a by-election and assume

the leadership. Within the AKP, Erdoğan increasingly centralized power, shifting away from a collective leadership approach to a centralized, top-down decision-making process. He leveraged the AKP's historical success and economic growth to bolster his image as the strong, charismatic leader who could deliver on promises and protect the interests of the masses. This personalized approach resonated with a significant portion of the AKP's voter base, further strengthening Erdoğan's position as the undisputed leader of the party (Celik and Balta 2020; Over and Tuncer-Ebetürk 2022; Selcuk 2016).

In contrast to Russia, Turkey's electoral authoritarianism is marked by more intense elite and political contention, partly due to longer legacy of political parties, the robust influence of the military over civilian institutions, and the relatively well-developed business groups whose interests diverged from the regime (Demiralp 2009). Indeed, even a cursory look at current electoral politics in Russia and Turkey reveals that competition and instability are more pronounced in Turkey than in Russia. Over the past ten years, Turkey has held a presidential election and local elections in 2014, two general elections in 2015, a referendum on introducing a presidential system in 2017, two sets of presidential and parliamentary elections in 2018 and 2023, and municipal elections in 2019. Many of these elections, excluding the municipal ones, were snap elections called by the incumbents. Consequently, electioneering has become a perpetual state of affairs in Turkey's political landscape. This mode of electioneering, coupled with the presence of strong political parties, has made Erdoğan’s attempts to overcome elite resistance and personalize power highly contentious. Nevertheless, while as in Russia an exact moment of authoritarian reversal is also absent, it is increasingly clear that Turkey has also become a personalist authoritarian regime.

Elite Cohort Replacement

In the early years of the Republic, the majority of ministerial elites came from the most developed Marmara and Aegean regions, while those born in the least developed eastern and southeastern regions were significantly underrepresented. However, during the AKP period, there has been a decline in the number of cabinet members from the western regions and a notable increase in those from less developed areas (Sayari and Bilgin, 2011: 753). The circulation of the elites was facilitated by the existence of a large religiously more conservative elite emerged as an unintended effect of the neoliberal economic policies that have created “opportunity spaces” for religious groups in the social, economic and political

spheres (Göle 1997, Yılmaz 2009, Demiralp 2009, Balaban 2021). The arrangement of cabinet ministers has also unveiled several other discernible patterns. Primarily, almost 50% of cabinet ministers during the AKP era possessed either Master's or PhD degrees, indicating a blend of both populist and technocratic approaches to policy-making, particularly in the initial phases of the AKP's governance. This technocratic approach garnered support from the middle and upper classes for AKP's policies, thereby fortifying its authority (Oncel and Balta, forthcoming).

Moreover, a conspicuous alteration in elite substitution pertains to the military sector. Historically, the military exerted influence as a primary source of ministerial appointments. Throughout Turkish history, authoritarian governance and the influence of the military as an institutional actor have been prevalent (Altınay 2004, Akça and Balta 2013, Sakallıoglu 1997). The military elite thus represented a key potential constraint on the personalization of power. In 2002, there began a marked decline in the inclusion of cabinet members with military backgrounds, and there was a complete absence of such individuals in the cabinet prior to the 2016 coup attempt. This transformation in the composition of ministerial elites signals the waning impact of the military in political spheres, signifying a noteworthy shift in power dynamics within Turkey. However, it was only after the 2016 coup attempt that the influence of the military elite in Turkey experienced a comprehensive decline.

Upon assuming power in 2002, the AKP leadership recognized the military's influential position as a significant obstacle to their governance. In a bid to solidify their political control, the AKP initiated a series of legal and institutional changes aimed at diminishing the military's political sway. A pivotal facet of this reshaping of civil-military dynamics was the reconfiguration of the National Security Council (NSC). Through AKP-led reforms, the NSC's ability to make decisions was curtailed, civilian participation within the council was augmented, and its role was restricted to advisory functions. The AKP's electoral potency, particularly following the 2007 elections, heightened the contestation between the party and the military establishment. Utilizing the judicial system, the Party orchestrated public trials named 'Ergenekon' and 'Balyoz,' thereby enmeshing the judiciary in politics and targeting military figures allegedly linked to coup plots. Concurrently, the government actively inserted itself into military promotions and appointments, underscoring its unwavering determination to assert control over these procedures (Akca and Balta 2013).

In its attempt to consolidate its authority, particularly within bureaucratic circles, and to control the military, the AKP established a strategic partnership with the Gülenists -an powerful Islamist fraternal movement led by Fetullah Gulen, later named FETO by the government. According to Yavuz (2018: 13), the Gülen rested on three pillars: a piety-centered communal network [cemaat], a global educational and media movement [hareket], and a covert religio-political entity known as a 'parallel structure of the state' [parallel yapı], aimed at influencing state mechanisms. In line with De Mesquita and Smith's (2011) selectorate theory, the Gülen movement, operating through an extensive covert network within bureaucracy, military, and judiciary, empowered the AKP to maintain its dominance despite substantial challenges from the establishment. Consequently, the alliance between Turkey's two foremost religio-political entities, the AKP and the Gülen organisation, ushered in an unparalleled era of political achievements for religiously-oriented organizations within the modern history of the Turkish Republic (Yavuz 2018).

The authoritarian reversal underway was not checked by the courts, as with regard to the regime's control of public institutions, one of the most critical transgressions has been its interventions in the judiciary. Changes implemented under the constitutional referendum of 2010 have brought Turkey's judiciary under strict government control. As Sözen (2019a, p. 292) argues, the judiciary was 'instrumentalised . . . in the name of the people, against the government's constantly shifting and enlarging groups of its enemies'. The criminalisation and control of the opposition through judicial means made it difficult for ideologically divergent groups to form a crosscutting democratic alliance (Sözen 2019a, p. 292).

Control over institutions was not limited to the judiciary. Government control over the national parliament and the Supreme Election Council (Yüksek Seçim Kurulu, henceforth YSK) allowed partisan manipulation of voter rolls, large-scale voter intimidation, ballot-box stuffing, falsification of results, and constant revisions to the rules of the electoral game depending on the AKP's needs (Esen & Gumuscu 2016, p. 1589). In all these appointments and coinciding institutional grap, the coalition with Gulenists played a major role, as the group's key aim and organizational strategy was based taking over the state from within. The Gülenists, in partnership with the ruling party, amassed significant influence across the realms of media, business, and bureaucracy by 2015.

This coalition began to weaken as the AKP solidified its authority and removed internal challengers. As Erdoğan personalized power, his interest in accumulating more power increased and restrictions toward this objective decreased, while the ruling coalition sought the opposite. Tensions escalated regarding the distribution of resources and authority among the AKP's political leaders, particularly after the Gülenists gained dominance in the judicial sector. The AKP leadership diverged from the Gülenists, notably following the Arab uprisings of 2011, due to differing visions of foreign policy and society (Martin 2022, Tas 2018). Following the 2014 Gezi protests, the coalition suffered a severe fracture, leading the AKP to wage an all-encompassing campaign against the Gülenists. After the 2015 elections, the AKP forged an alliance with the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), supplanting its previous de facto coalition with the Gulenists. Gradually, the MHP elites, leveraging their longstanding ties to the Turkish security establishment, began to supplant the security bureaucracy.

The Gülen organisation's complete dissolution and Erdoğan's total grip on power, however, would eventually occur with the 2016 failed coup attempt. Indeed, as Timoneda et. al (2023:883) argue "failed coups – being overt and irregular challenges originating from inside the regime normally involving members of the security forces – are unique shocks that can usher in an advantageous context for visible and sharp increases in personalism" because it weakens elites' ability and willingness to strike again. Through the disclosure of details regarding the allegiance of various segments and groups within the governing alliance, unsuccessful coup attempts enable autocratic leaders to pinpoint and remove competitors, while also curtailing the inclination of the remaining elites to contest their authority.

Th effect of the failed coup was a multifaceted personalization of power. Following the coup attempt, the Turkish government enacted a state of emergency, conferring exceptional authority upon the President. This led to a sweeping and comprehensive purging initiative across the military and various state bodies, targeting mostly the adherents of the Gulenists, which is now designated as FETO, an organization deemed terrorist in nature. Under the state of emergency, a cumulative total of 125,678 public officials have been removed through Decree Laws (KHK). [13] As per Interior Minister Soylu's 2019 declaration,

[13]Olağanüstü Hal İşlemleri İnceleme Komisyonu 2021 Faaliyet Raporu. Accessed: [08.08.2023],

the Ministry of Interior saw 38,578 personnel dismissed and 5,679 individuals suspended, encompassing 31,000 police officers, 4,159 gendarmerie personnel, 348 coast guard members, and civil administrators. [14] In the present dataset, the count of police force dismissals has risen to 34,636. [15] In the context of the campaign against FETÖ, 20,077 Turkish Armed Forces members were discharged via decree laws, with 1,243 of them being deprived of their ranks. [16] In the judiciary, a total of 4,360 judges or prosecutors have faced removal through 20 distinct decrees since July 16, 2016. [17]

As part of the restructuring process, the government also abolished the traditional position of the Chief of General Staff and replaced it with a new position called the Commander of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK). These changes marked a radical transformation in Turkey's civil-military relations, completely reducing the military's influence and increasing the civilian government's control. The 2017 referendum, which granted Erdoğan vast executive powers, epitomized the shift towards a more presidential system with the President having greater control over the government (Esen and Gumuscu 2018; Sozen 2019). The approved constitutional amendments introduced heightened personalization to the system by shifting authority from the parliament to the president. This new system was a "super presidential system" characterized by executive powers largely free from substantial parliamentary oversight. In pivotal political matters like the initiation of

URL: [https://ohalkomisyonu.tccb.gov.tr/docs/OHAL_FaaliyetRaporu_2021.pdf]
Tüm raporlar için: Olağanüstü Hal İşlemleri İnceleme Komisyonu Resmi Websitesi,
URL: [https://ohalkomisyonu.tccb.gov.tr/]
[14]"FETÖ'den 511 Bin Kişi Gözaltına Alındı." AA Haber, Erişim Tarihi: [08.08.2023],
URL: [https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/fetoden-511-bin-kisi-gozaltina-alindi/1413885]
[15] Emniyet Genel Müdürlüğü (EGM), "01.04.2022 Tarihli Basın Açıklaması." Erişim Tarihi: [08.08.2023],
URL: [https://www.egm.gov.tr/01042022-tarihli-basin-aciklamasi]
[16] Milli Savunma Bakanı Akar: 20 Bin 77 Terörist İçimizden Temizlendi." NTV Haber, Erişim Tarihi: [08.08.2023],
URL: [https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/milli-savunma-bakani-akar-20-bin-77-terorist-icimizden-temizlendi,o3z3EWKpq0qcGLTpULMJtg]
[17]Darbe Sonrası Türkiye'de Hakim ve Savcıların Toplu İhraçları Turkey Tribunal, Erişim Tarihi: [08.08.2023],
URL: [https://turkeytribunal.org/tr/haberler/darbe-sonrasi-turkiyede-hakim-ve-savcilarin-toplu-ihraclari/]

early elections, legislative actions, and budgetary endorsement, the president's authority aligns with the majority or qualified majority in the parliament.

With the inclusion of the "partisan president" provision through the referendum, the president is no longer obligated to maintain impartiality and can affiliate with a political party. Consequently, President Erdoğan was permitted to concurrently hold the positions of the Presidency and AKP chairmanship, thus concluding his former approach of exerting control over the ruling party externally through caretaker arrangements (Esen and Gümüşcu 2018). The transformation of support for the AKP into support for Erdoğan's personalist rule have also accelerated the transformation AKP's party structure, leading to the marginalization of internal dissent, dismissal of key founding figures within the party and the concentration of power in the hands of a few loyalists (Lancaster 2014).

Following that period, two significant figures within the AKP, both of whom had previously held ministerial roles, defected. Ali Babacan, the former economy minister, defected the party to establish the Deva Party. Meanwhile, Ahmet Davutoğlu, the former foreign minister and prime minister, embarked on creating his own party. During the 2023 general elections, both of these newly formed parties joined the Nation Alliance, a coalition opposed to the People's Alliance led by Erdoğan. Notably, these parties attracted a significant number of defectors from the AKP. Yet due to the shifting character of the regime and its increased personalized nature, these defectors were unable to attract a vote share from the AKP.

As explained above, Erdoğan's rise to prominence as a charismatic leader happened in tandem with the weakening institutions that could challenge his authority (Oder 2021, Soyaltın-Collela 2022; Demiralp and Balta 2021; Esen and Gumuscu 2016). Yet this also happened in parallel with a rise of a powerful and loyal business class, whose interests supported by the legitimacy garnered through the charismatic power of the President Erdoğan (Aydınlı & Erpul 2021).

A New State-Business Model

The ascent of the AKP to political dominance coined with the expansion of small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises, known as small industrialists, and the rise of a loyal

business class. The small industrialists have risen as a prominent middle-class faction within working-class communities, playing a crucial role in the AKP's electoral achievements (Balaban 2021). According to Balaban (2022), the influence of these small industrialists hinged on their privileged socio-cultural accessibility in everyday life. They resided in the same neighborhoods as their employees and maintained visible connections with them in public settings like mosques and coffeehouses. The coalition of these middle and conservative working classes have offered the electoral support to the AKP and become essential in conferring a sense of "democratic legitimacy" to the system (Esen and Gümüşçü, 2021: 1079). These groups have benefited particularly from the pro-growth economic policies of the AKP and enjoyed discretionary use of legal instruments such as tax audits, debt collection operations, and court orders.

From 1971 to 1990, Turkey's voluntary business association arena was dominated by the Istanbul-based TÜSİAD—a very powerful business association consisting of the top capital groups of Turkey (Arat 1991 : 135). In 1990, MÜSİAD that was founded by devout entrepreneurs being the first and the most prominent Islamic business association in Turkey, representing several large but mainly medium-sized enterprises. These two business collectives showcased contrasting economic objectives, ideological inclinations, and varying degrees of affiliation with the AKP.

During the 2000s, politically affiliated firms enjoyed lucrative state contracts through substantial bids in sectors like energy, tourism, construction, and health, with the public procurement system playing a pivotal role in this process (Kimya 2019). The AKP government made over 150 legal changes to the public procurement system to direct public resources to politically loyal groups, leading to a shift toward less transparent and less competitive procurement practices (Gurakar, 2016:23).

Gurakar's research illustrates the distribution of different types of firms' shares in terms of the total number and value of contracts awarded between 2002 and 2015. In terms of contract value, firms directly connected to the ruling AKP (some of which were MÜSİAD members) secured around 38% of all contracts, while TÜSİAD and affiliated organizations' members combined received 13%. Foreign firms secured approximately 4% of the contracts. Firms categorized as "local others" won 45% of the 49,355 procurement auctions. However, the value of these contracts accounted for only one fourth of the total value of all contracts.

Sectorally, TÜSİAD-TF members obtained contracts for manufacturing goods, while AKP-affiliated firms mostly engaged in construction and services sectors, securing state contracts in those areas (Gurakar 2016: 68).

This sectoral distinction can be attributed to the fact that most of the politically connected firms active in procurement tenders, especially those linked to the AKP, are relatively new companies founded in the mid-to-late 1990s and 2000s. They tend to operate in the services and construction sectors to minimize risks. However, the fundamental mechanism of elite cohort replacement in state-business relations transpired through newly established large firms that gained substantial state contracts in energy, tourism, construction, and health sectors (Kimya 2019). The AKP government's alterations to the public procurement system, totaling over 150 legal amendments, facilitated the allocation of public resources to politically loyal groups, resulting in a shift toward less transparent and competitive procurement methods (Gurakar, 2016:23). Prominent firms like Kolin, Limak, Cengiz, Kalyon, and Makyol secured a significant share of tenders for electricity distribution. A similar pattern emerged with public tenders related to gas distribution, where firms with links to the AKP were awarded the majority of contracts in both large and medium-sized cities (Gurdal, 2022:164).

A pivotal role was held by the construction sector, emerging as a vital instrument for the AKP's retention of political supremacy. In contrast to both member nations of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and certain economies of comparable magnitude, Turkey has witnessed a remarkable surge in construction expenditures, propelling it to a prominent global standing in terms of the construction industry's impacts on GDP (Tugal, 2023: 465). According to Yağcı (2021: 762), this focus on the construction sector embodies a transient pro-growth coalition. This sector yields immediate gains without necessitating extensive investment in research and development, and it limits the private sector's exposure to substantial risks since the government offers guarantee payments in the event of private sector losses. One of the key entities that played a significant role in the construction sector is the government- backed housing agency of Turkey (TOKİ- Housing Development Administration of Turkey). Through the approval of the Presidency, TOKİ gained significant authority and control over state lands and its projects, particularly social housing initiatives, have been strategically employed by the AKP

to increase its vote-share, gain popularity among the citizens and also to redistribute public resources to loyal business groups (Gurakar 2016) .

In this context, as highlighted by Kimya (2019: 353), corruption has evolved into an inherent element within a political framework molded by state-driven systemic favoritism, regulatory measures, and institutional ambiguity. It is no longer solely a product of a limited cluster of individuals motivated by criminal intentions and short-term objectives. Instead, partisan allocation of resources toward both the economic elites and the urban underprivileged, employing increasingly corrupt and clientelistic methods, has emerged as the pivotal factor in upholding the regime (Esen and Gümüşçü, 2021: 1076). In essence, the AKP's economic tactics are propelled by two intertwined dimensions: the generation of resources to uphold the party's populist policies and the accumulation of capital to sustain loyal business elites (Ocaklı, 2018: 375).

The post-populist moment in Turkey, thus, characterized by the intricate relationship between the AKP and the business sector and rested on creation of a loyal business elite. This elite has then played a central role in financing the regime through contributions to AKP-linked charities, foundations, and the party itself (Esen and Gümüşcu, 2018). Notably, these groups' investment in pro-AKP media and onwherskip of mainstream media outlets by business conglomerates holds significant importance, as the ruling party's favorable control over media resources serves as a foundational pillar in the consolidation of electoral authoritarianism in Turkey (Esen and Gümüşcu, 2018: 361, Sayarı, 2014: 665).

Discussion

Verbal attacks on “the elite” are perhaps the most common trope of populist rhetoric. Whether defined in economic, political, or cultural terms, it is the elite that almost always forms the other to which “the people” are opposed. Elites are said to obstruct the people’s will and indeed to stand in the way of democracy. Yet to suppose that populist rule actually promises a more authentic, participatory, or deliberative form of democracy would be misguided. In practice, populists aren’t so much opposed to elites, as they are to their opponents. Going back to perhaps the earliest democracies of Ancient Greece and Rome, the demagogues and *populares* were just as “elite” as those they opposed (Paul D Kenny, 2023). Populist leaders in power seek to replace independent elites from political, technocratic,

security, and business backgrounds in favor of loyalists. Their aim is not to do away with elitism, but to remove the informal check on their power posed by powerful elites.

Yet it is also clear that many, indeed most, populists are unable to make the transition to personalist dictatorship. We propose that this has less to do with formal institutional restraints than it does with their ability to remove and replace regime elites. In this respect, the United States offers an instructive counterexample to those of Russia and Turkey. All the evidence suggests that Trump made concerted efforts to undermine America's democratic institutions, even considering using the United States military to interfere with the counting of the vote. Yet in the end, American democracy held firm. Trump has been indicted on multiple charges related to his efforts to violate US election law.

Certainly, there are many critical formal institutional differences between the American and Russian and Turkish cases. Yet even though it was Trump's prerogative to make a vast number of appointments to the government, he lacked the network contacts to ensure that true loyalists were in place throughout. Even key appointees like Jeff Sessions, refused to back him when the chips were down. Trump had little influence on the composition of the administrative elite beyond the immediate perimeters of the White House and Mar-a-Lago. Moreover, beyond a few kooks like Michael Flynn, he was persistently viewed with suspicion by the military. He thus lacked they key instrument – force – needed for an authoritarian takeover. Lastly, an authoritarian personalization of power by Trump would also likely have provoked the resistance of sections of the economic elite. Again, Trump had no effect whatsoever on the composition of the country's economic elite (Pierson, 2017), hardly a surprise given the size and diversity of the American economy compared with somewhere like resource-dependent Russia. Being unable to systematically control public opinion, Trump was constrained from using high popularity ratings to remove elites throughout the system.

References

Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2006). *Economic origins of dictatorship and democracy*: Cambridge University Press.

Albertus, M., & Menaldo, V. (2018). *Authoritarianism and the elite origins of democracy*: Cambridge University Press.

Applebaum, A. (2020). *Twilight of democracy : the seductive lure of authoritarianism* (First edition. ed.). New York: Doubleday.

Baker, P., & Glasser, S. (2022). *The divider : Trump in the White House, 2017-2021* (First edition. ed.). New York: Doubleday.

Bartels, L. M. (2023). *Democracy erodes from the top : leaders, citizens, and the challenges of populism in Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Baturo, A., & Elkink, J. (2021). *The New Kremlinology: Understanding Regime Personalization in Russia*: Oxford University Press.

Baturo, A., & Elkink, J. A. (2016). Dynamics of regime personalization and patron–client networks in Russia, 1999–2014. *Post-Soviet Affairs, 32*(1), 75-98.

Baturo, A., & Tolstrup, J. (2023). Incumbent takeovers. *Journal of Peace Research, 60*(2), 373-386.

Belton, C. (2020). *Putin's people : how the KGB took back Russia and then took on the West* (First American edition. ed.). New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Bermeo, N. G. (2003). *Ordinary people in extraordinary times : the citizenry and the breakdown of democracy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Canovan, M. (1981). *Populism* (1st ed.). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Canovan, M. (1999). Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy. *Political studies, 47*(1), 2-16.

Coppedge, M. (2017). Eroding regimes: What, where, and when? *V-Dem Working Paper, 57*.

Dawisha, K. (2015). *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* : Simon and Schuster.

De la Torre, C. (2018). Latin America's shifting politics: Ecuador after correa. *Journal of Democracy, 29*(4), 77-88.

Diamond, L. (2021). Democratic regression in comparative perspective: scope, methods, and causes. *Democratization, 28*(1), 22-42. doi:10.1080/13510347.2020.1807517

Donovan, T. (2019). Authoritarian attitudes and support for radical right populists. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties, 29*(4), 448-464.

Donovan, T. (2020). Right populist parties and support for strong leaders. *party politics, 27*(5), 858-869. doi:10.1177/1354068820920853

Esen, B., & Gumuscu, S. (2018). Building a competitive authoritarian regime: State–business relations in the AKP's Turkey. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies, 20*(4), 349-372.

Galston, W. A. (2018). *Anti-pluralism: the populist threat to liberal democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Gill, G. (2015). *Building an authoritarian polity: Russia in post-soviet times*: Cambridge University Press.

Gill, G. (2018). *Collective leadership in Soviet politics*: Springer.

Haggard, S., & Kaufman, R. (2021). *Backsliding: Democratic regress in the contemporary world*: Cambridge University Press.

Hale, H. E. (2014). *Patronal politics: Eurasian regime dynamics in comparative perspective*: Cambridge University Press.

Hett, B. C. (2018). *The death of democracy : Hitler's rise to power and the downfall of the Weimar Republic* (First U.S. edition . ed.). New York, New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Houle, C., & Kenny, P. D. (2018). The political and economic consequences of populist rule in Latin America. *Government and opposition, 53*(2), 256-287.

Juon, A., & Bochsler, D. (2020). Hurricane or fresh breeze? Disentangling the populist effect on the quality of democracy. *European Political Science Review, 12*(3), 391-408. doi:10.1017/S1755773920000259

Kaltwasser, C. R. (2012). The ambivalence of populism: threat and corrective for democracy. *Democratization, 19*(2), 184-208.

Kenny, P. (2021). The Strategic Approach to Populism. *Routledge Handbook of Populism in the Asia Pacific. London: Routledge*.

Kenny, P. D. (2017). *Populism and patronage : why populists win elections in India, Asia, and beyond* (First edition. ed.). Oxford, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Kenny, P. D. (2020). "The enemy of the people": Populists and press freedom. *Political Research Quarterly, 73*(2), 261-275.

Kenny, P. D. (2023). *Why Populism? Political Strategy from Ancient Greece to the Present*. New York: Cambridge.

Kryshtanovskaya, O., & White, S. (2003). Putin's militocracy. *Post-Soviet Affairs, 19*(4), 289-306.

Kyle, J., & Mounk, Y. (2018). The populist harm to democracy: An empirical assessment. *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 18*.

Laclau, E. (1977). *Politics and ideology in Marxist theory : capitalism, fascism, populism*. London: NLB.

Ledeneva, A. (2006). *How Russia Really Works. Informal Practices in Politics and Business*: Cornell University Press New York, NY.

Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2010). *Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the Cold War*: Cambridge University Press.

Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How democracies die* (First edition. ed.). New York: Crown.

McGlynn, J. (2023). *Russia's war*. Medford: Polity Press.

Moffitt, B. (2020). *Populism*. Cambridge, U.K. ; Medford, Massachusetts: Polity Press.

Mounk, Y. (2018). *The people vs. democracy : why our freedom is in danger and how to save it*. Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: Harvard University Press.

Mouzelis, N. (1985). On the concept of populism: populist and clientelist modes of incorporation in semiperipheral polities. *Politics & Society, 14*(3), 329-348.

Mudde, C. (2004). The populist zeitgeist. *Government and opposition, 39*(4), 541-563.

Müller, J.-W. (2016). *What is populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2018). *Cultural backlash : Trump, Brexit, and the rise of authoritarian-populism*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Novokmet, F., Piketty, T., & Zucman, G. (2018). From Soviets to oligarchs: inequality and property in Russia 1905-2016. *The Journal of Economic Inequality, 16*, 189-223.

Pappas, T. S. (2019). *Populism and liberal democracy: A comparative and theoretical analysis*: Oxford University Press.

Parrish, S. (1998). Presidential decree authority in Russia, 1991–1995. In J. Carey & M. Shugart (Eds.), *Executive decree authority* (pp. 62-103). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Pierson, P. (2017). American hybrid: Donald Trump and the strange merger of populism and plutocracy. *The British Journal of Sociology, 68*(S1), S105-S119. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12323

Pirro, A. L. P., & Stanley, B. (2022). Forging, Bending, and Breaking: Enacting the "Illiberal Playbook" in Hungary and Poland. *Perspectives on Politics, 20*(1), 86-101. doi:10.1017/S1537592721001924

Roberts, K. M. (1995). Neoliberalism and the transformation of populism in Latin America: The Peruvian case. *World Politics, 48*(1), 82-116.

Rose, R., Mishler, W., & Munro, N. (2011). *Popular support for an undemocratic regime : the changing views of Russians*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Ruth-Lovell, S. P., Lührmann, A., & Grahn, S. (2019). Democracy and populism: Testing a contentious relationship. *V-Dem Working Paper, 91*.

Sakwa, R. (2010). *The crisis of Russian democracy: the dual state, factionalism and the Medvedev succession*: Cambridge University Press.

Schäfer, A. (2022). Cultural Backlash? How (Not) to Explain the Rise of Authoritarian Populism. *British Journal of Political Science, 52*(4), 1977-1993. doi:10.1017/S0007123421000363

Shevtsova, L. (2007). Russia–Lost in Transition: The Yeltsin and Putin Legacies. In. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Shils, E. (1956). *The torment of secrecy : the background and consequences of American security policies*. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press.

Short, P. (2022). *Putin* (First US edition. ed.). New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Smith, H. L. (Cartographer). (2019). Erdoğan rising : the battle for the soul of Turkey [395 pages, 16 unnumbered pages of plates]

Svolik, M. W. (2012). *The politics of authoritarian rule*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tooze, J. A. (2006). *The wages of destruction : the making and breaking of the Nazi economy*. London ; New York: Allen Lane.

Treisman, D. (2011). *The return : Russia's journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev* (1st Free Press ed.). New York: Free Press.

Tsygankov, A. (2015). Vladimir Putin's last stand: the sources of Russia's Ukraine policy. *Post-Soviet Affairs, 31*(4), 279-303.

Urbinati, N. (2015). A revolt against intermediary bodies. *Constellations, 22*(4), 477-486.

Weyland, K. (2017). A political-strategic approach. *The Oxford handbook of populism*, 48-73.

Weyland, K. (2020). Populism's threat to democracy: Comparative lessons for the United States. *Perspectives on Politics, 18*(2), 389-406.

Weyland, K. (2023). *Why populist authoritarianism rarely turns into repressive dictatorship*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Los Angeles.

Zakaria, F. (1997). The rise of illiberal democracy. *Foreign Aff.*, *76*, 22.

Zygar, M. (2016). *All The Kremlin's Men: Inside The Court of Vladimir Putin* (First edition. ed.). New York, NY: PublicAffairs.