

Neopatrimonialism: The Russian regime through a Weberian lens

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Introduction

“Since any order is better than any disorder, any order is established” – this Hobbesian observation by Adam Przeworski captures the existing level of certainty about the classification of the current Russian regime (1991: 86). The mere existence of the Russian Leviathan is the only fact beyond doubt, its genus and species being a matter of controversy: is it an electoral authoritarianism, a hybrid regime, a managed or defective democracy, an autocracy, a petro-state, or perhaps a fascist state, as asserted by Alexander Motyl 2016? The answer would not only interest scholars but also elucidate the country’s prospects and the probability of regime change (Fisun 2012: 91).

Initially, the majority of researchers perceived the nascent Russian Federation along with the other post-Soviet states as a part of Samuel Huntington’s third wave of democratization 1991 and studied it within the framework of modernization theory and transitology. Fukuyama’s 1989 essay “The End of History”⁴² contained levels of euphoria towards countries including Russia, but this mood did not last for long; Russia’s political development urged ever-growing skepticism concerning the teleological certainty of its eventual democratic transition. The “theoretical dead end” of the traditional dichotomy of democracy versus authoritarianism has resulted in a plethora of regime definitions “with adjectives” (Collier and Levitsky 1997: 430). Disappointment in the post-Soviet transition encouraged the application of concepts originally conceived for studying Third World countries, e.g. neopatrimonialism, which emerged in the 1970s under similar methodological circumstances in African and Latin American Studies (Fisun 2012: 87–89).

42 Fukuyama, F. 1989. “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, 16:3–18.

One of the theory's authors, Shmuel Eisenstadt, directly connected its development to the "critical attitude to some of the assumptions of the first studies of modernization and political development" (1973: 8).

The key questions of this chapter are the following: 1) is the theoretical framework of neopatrimonialism applicable to Russia under Putin?; and if so, 2) how can it be instrumental in enhancing our understanding of this regime. To answer the first question, I will initially present the concept of neopatrimonialism and discern its key independent variables: hierarchy of patron-client bonds; rent extraction; and conditional property. Secondly, I identify every variable with a key trait of the contemporary Russian socio-political structure, providing the background and description of the considered phenomena. The second question will be addressed by a critical discussion of the place and utility of the neopatrimonial lens in the academic debate about Putin's regime classification.

1. The Concept of Neopatrimonialism

1.1. Theoretical foundations

The concept of "patrimonialism" was coined by Max Weber in his unfinished magnum opus *Economy and Society*, where he distinguished it from both feudal and legal-rational bureaucratic ideal types of government. He describes patrimonial domination as considering "all governing powers and the corresponding economic rights as privately appropriated economic advantages." It is historically rooted in a prince's household administrations, which regarded the realm as a *patrimonium* [paternal estate in Latin], granting to the clients economic and social privileges, fiefs, tax-farming licenses, etc. (Weber 1978: 236). The essential trait of patrimonialism is, therefore, the lack of distinction between the public and private spheres of society, both being owned by the ruler as a source of personal wealth (ibid.: 226–241).

The application of Weber's concept of patrimonialism to modern states was conceived by Guenther Roth in 1968. In the Weberian

ideal types of rule, he discerns two distinct components: 1) foundation of legitimacy and 2) mode of administration. He argues that although the traditional legitimacy of Weber's patrimonialism is mostly absent in the modern world, its "actual operating modes and administrative arrangements" do persist, thereby justifying the application of this framework to modern political systems (Roth 1968: 195).

Roth calls such modern forms of patrimonialism "personal rulership," requiring no particular belief in the ruler's personality and based on material stimuli. Its elements are by no means absent from Western societies, taking the form of factions or political machines merging with governmental powers. However, in underdeveloped countries the proportion of personal rulership is dramatically higher, while legal-rational bureaucracy is virtually non-existent; this renders the countries into private instruments of the powerful, and thus "properly speaking, not states at all" (*ibid.*: 204–206).

In the absence of the economic integration present in the industrialized Western countries, patrimonialism plays a major integrative role. This is where the political center is formed around the informal distribution of the state's economic resources and privileges by the patron, in exchange for loyalty and support from the lower levels of its clientist bureaucracy (Teobald 1982: 550).

1.2. The Neopatrimonial System

Shmuel Eisenstadt continued working on this approach by coining the term "neopatrimonialism" for developing countries with a particular political system, where the modern nation-state structures are interwoven with the patrimonial mode of administration (1973: 12). He argued that being founded on elements of traditional authority, neopatrimonialism is usually perceived as being rooted in the past, a rudiment so deeply embedded in the social and political fabric of a polity that legal-rational type of rule fails to eliminate it completely. Hence, neopatrimonialism becomes a form of traditionalist reaction to modernization's failures (Gel'man 2015: 458).

This co-existence of patrimonial and legal-rational bureaucratic types of domination is the distinctive feature of neopatrimonialism. In contrast to Weberian patrimonialism, there is the distinction between the private and the public realm, at least formally, in the form of a legal-rational bureaucratic framework of a “modern” state. This separation, however, is only observed if no personal interests of the ruling groups are involved. Hence, two contradictory “systems of logic” are simultaneously present, permeating each other: the excessive personal relations of patrimonialism penetrate the bureaucratic legality and twist its “logic, functions, and output,” albeit without suppressing it entirely. Thus, “informal politics invades formal institutions” (Erdmann and Engel 2007: 104).

This informal neopatrimonial “core” plays the role of a de facto constitution in both politics and the economy, circumscribed by the shell of formal institutions such as official constitutions, legal codes or electoral systems. However, such a shell is not a mere camouflage for neopatrimonialism, but a mechanism of power-sharing among the ruling groups that increases the regime stability. They maintain the balance of power among the members of the winning coalition according to certain principles (Gel'man 2015: 458).

1.3. The Key Variables

The following “core” characteristics can serve as independent variables for classifying a certain regime as neopatrimonial, corresponding to three contextual “variable sets” of neopatrimonialism delineated by Robin Theobald in 1982, i.e. the characteristics of society’s political and economic factors as well as the specificity of its bureaucracy. In his view, considering these aspects would facilitate an understanding of why such regimes exist, rather than merely describing them. It would also help to “differentiate between bureaucratic structures in societies at different stages of socio-economic development” (Theobald 1982: 558–559). I will employ the concept of extractive institutions from Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson as an additional reference point for my further argument.

1. Personal rule: through a hierarchy of informal patron-client relationships, decision-making is concentrated in one center of political power and exercised through personal ties. The rational-legal system is structured as a by-product of the patron-client resource distribution. It matters only in as much as it is instrumental, directly or indirectly, for securing and maximizing rent extraction⁴³ (Gel'man 2015: 457). Acemoglu and Robinson define such political arrangements as extractive and assert their strong synergy with the extractive economic institutions, which, in fact, “inherently depend on such political institutions for their survival” (2012: 92).

2. Rent extraction: personal enrichment is the major rational goal of the political class on all levels of government. The ruling groups consider the public sphere their private domain, using their formal position for appropriating public wealth. Hence, the functioning of formal bureaucratic institutions is aimed at the preservation and consolidation of ruling groups' power to maximize the amount of rent and ensure the continuity of its extraction (Erdmann and Engel 2007: 109-110). Within the framework of Acemoglu and Robinson, this trait of neopatrimonialism would be described as extractive economic institutions “designed to extract incomes and wealth from one subset of society to benefit a different subset” (2012: 86).

3. Conditional property: the autonomy of political and economic actors in a neopatrimonial polity is conditional and can be reduced or abolished by an informal decision which would be post factum formally legalized by the façade institutions (Gel'man 2015: 458). Hence, the ruling groups appropriate not only the public but also the private sphere of society. Any property right is dependent on the political position and influence of its holder, and exists only whilst she or he possesses sufficient personal clout within the informal patron-client network to preserve it. The higher the level of en-

43 It is important to underline that the no institutional façade of a polity can contradict its classification as neopatrimonial. This aspect raises a substantial methodological question: how does neopatrimonial domination correlate with the other political and economic classifications? This will be addressed further in this paper.

gagement in economic activity, the more necessary a well-established patronal network is to stay afloat in such kinds of extractive institutions, “under which the rule of law and property rights are absent for large majorities of the population” (Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson, 2005: 397).

2. The Case of Putin’s Russia

The key variables of neopatrimonialism can be observed in Putin’s Russia as a particular constellation of formal institutional arrangements and informal practices of its political class, which is rooted both in the country’s history and in recent developments of post-Soviet power consolidation.

2.1. The Power Vertical

Henry Hale describes the informal hierarchy of Putin’s Russia as a “single power pyramid.” The informal patronal pyramids, or political machines, are complex networks of patron-client relations called the “administrative resource.” They exist on all levels of society and operate “by personal incentives and private benefits made to specific individuals (jobs, contingent opportunities to gain private income, bribes, help with local problems, assistance to relatives, etc.) as well as explicit or implicit threats made to these same individuals” (Hale 2010: 34). President Yeltsin’s “competing-pyramid” system in the 1990s saw the rivalry of many regional and corporate patronage pyramids of semi-autonomous regional leaders and so-called “oligarchs,” ushered to power respectively by swift decentralization and privatization.

Gaining control over the political and economic factors that emerged from these two major post-Soviet reforms was the primary task for Vladimir Putin as he rose to power as Yeltsin’s successor in 2000. By the end of his first two terms as President, he had transformed the informal patronal power structure into a “single-pyramid” or “power vertical” system where the “president has effectively combined the most important lower-level patronal networks into one large nationwide political machine” (Hale 2010: 35). Putin controls the informal power vertical by distributing patronage to a

network of various rent-seeking clients all representing their own power pyramids, such as cronies of the “inner circle,” the military and secret services, industrial magnates, and loyal regional elites (Fisun 2012: 92).

The power vertical is therefore divided into smaller informal patron-client pyramids, competing for access to rents, and involved in formal and informal subordination along a web of informal exchanges. The formal presence of competitive elections means that vote delivery also constitutes a major resource in these exchanges. Such power sub-verticals can be observed even within law enforcement structures, educational institutions, private businesses and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Gel'man 2015: 460). However, subordination and control are not the only functions of the neopatrimonial power vertical; it also distributes selective incentives of increased access to rent which are not available for those less loyal actors. Corruption under Putin is therefore not a side effect, but a vital part of Russian neopatrimonial governance, which can use both carrots and sticks to encourage clients' competition in order to prove their loyalty. The most prominent example of such competition in business is the rivalry between the oil and gas giants Gazprom and Rosneft. Russian law enforcement also operates with fierce competition for rent-extracting privileges, e.g. between the Office of the Prosecutor General and its formally subordinate agency, the Investigative Committee (*ibid.*: 461–462).

Russian formal institutions are historically consistent with informal neopatrimonial rule. Its Communist regime in the later stages demonstrated a decay into neopatrimonialism, where personalism and clientelism subverted, but also helped to maintain, the formal bureaucratic party-state system. Hence, the socio-political developments in the 1990s were shaped by Soviet neopatrimonial legacies as well as by economic pressure; this was accompanied by the need to build a new democratic institutional façade to secure legitimacy and fulfill the essential state functions necessary for rent extraction under new circumstances (Robinson 2011: 441). Yeltsin's 1993 Constitution established a super-presidential system with a virtually technical government without any political role, that role fully belonging to the President. This formal organization was also

a direct successor of the late Soviet Union with its power distribution shared between the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Council of Ministers. Furthermore, it echoed the administration scheme of the Russian Empire with the entirely subordinate Committee of Ministers and corresponded to informal neopatrimonial dynamics, where bureaucracy merely administers the state as the ruler's *patrimonium* (Gel'man and Starodubtsev 2014: 10–11).

To reiterate, the institutional and legal system of Russia as a modern state, its democratic Constitution with the division of powers, multiparty parliamentary system, private and public law, can be described as a mere shell, subordinated to the machinery of informal patron-client bonds. For political and economic actors these neopatrimonial bonds determine their access to various resources based on personal exchanges of loyalty and capital and not on formal laws and contracts (Fisun 2012: 92).

2.2. Rent Extraction

Power maximization in politics and rent maximization in the economy constitute a rational goal for the ruling groups. Putin and his close associates have achieved this goal by building a single-peaked hierarchy that has maintained the stability of extractive political and economic institutions and solidified their dominant position in the existing configuration of both political and economic actors (Gel'man 2015: 459).

The inner circle of the Russian President, consisting of his school friends, judo sparring partners, colleagues from the early 1990s, and personal physicians, was instrumental in creating a network of personally loyal clients to manage the key economic assets previously belonging to independent power pyramids, in the private and public sector alike. All the President's men, or to be more precise, their personal affiliation with Putin and swift rise to wealth and power in the 2000s, came under the spotlight after being targeted by US and EU sanctions after the Russian annexation of Crimea and its 2014 military incursion into other Ukrainian regions

(Gardner 2014). The largest single origin of Putin's trust in his cronies is the 1990s country cottage co-operative *Ozero*, explicitly mentioned by the U.S. Treasury Department in its sanctions announcement. One of its members, Vladimir Yakunin, represents an exemplary case of neopatrimonial rent extraction by having transformed the Federal Ministry of Railways into virtually a private asset (Heritage 2014).

Soon after Putin's accession to the Kremlin, Yakunin became the Deputy Transport Minister and took over the Ministry two years later. In 2003, a Presidential Decree transformed the Ministry of Railways, which had existed since 1946, into the state-owned monopoly Russian Railways (RZD), soon to become a joint-stock company under Yakunin's control. Its subsidiary companies could not bear the losses from the outstandingly high tariffs RZD dictated and requested state intervention. In 2011, the federal government transferred the coverage of transport operators' losses to the regional authorities, which in turn did not have sufficient funds and therefore requested them from the federal budget. This scheme effectively transferred taxpayers' money into Yakunin's mainly offshore accounts. However, the amount of rent available to its CEO, Yakunin, according to his position in the power pyramid, could still be increased. In 2015, upon the request of the RZD, the federal government drastically increased rail infrastructure fees, thus aggravating the public financial burden of commuter train subsidies and causing their complete shutdown in some regions. After direct intervention by the President, the trains were reintroduced, but taxpayers still had to pay the bills presented by RZD. Despite criticism of Yakunin in the media and calls for his removal as CEO, the personal patronage of Putin made Russian railroads his private holding with all its functions subordinate to rent extraction. To sum up, the former federal ministry and still formally state-owned monopoly of Russian Railroads, the biggest employer in the country, was appropriated by the President's crony who turned it into a tool for rent maximization (Gel'man 2015: 456–458).

Yakunin's eventual forced retirement after the aforementioned commuter train scandal exposes another important issue of

neopatrimonial rent extraction — its inherent limits. Such a weakening of state capacity by personal exploitation of extractive institutions, which in this case left millions of Russians without any means of transportation, cannot continue so far as to cancel the legal-rational shell of the modern state entirely, thus drifting into full patrimonialism. The elites' rational interest in perpetuating rent extraction secures the existence of the modern state's basic functionality, which is critical for socio-political stability. The exact minimum is contingent and depends on multiple social and economic factors, which aim to prevent popular unrest. In the case of modern Russia, these factors are mainly state security and the Soviet legacy of social security in the form of state pensions and some level of free healthcare and education (Robinson 2014: 16). While securing the stability of a neopatrimonial polity, the limit of rent extraction also exposes the inherent tension between the traditional appropriation of the public sphere as a form of personal wealth and its legal-rational framework in a modern state structure (Robinson 2011: 437).

2.3. Conditional Property

One of the most prominent Western scholars of Russian history, Richard Pipes, employs the Weberian concept of patrimonialism to explain the entire history of Russia. He sees its primary cause in the lack of institutionalized property rights and, in the broader sense, of unconditional human rights violated by the arbitrary power of the state: "A despot violates his subjects' property rights; a patrimonial ruler does not even acknowledge their existence." This patrimonial legacy persisted in the course of numerous modernization attempts such as the ones by Peter I and the Bolsheviks, because they were performed with the same arbitrary methods. Having introduced the façade of the Western political structures, while failing to adhere to the very concept of property rights, these reforms entrenched the patrimonial core, thus laying the foundation for Russia's undemocratic and ineffective development trajectory (Pipes 1974: 22–23).

The Russian regime under Putin is an example of an economy based on conditional property instead of private property, implying that one's right to control and use an asset is dependent on one's political influence. The façade's institutions, e.g. the formally independent judiciary branch, function as an instrument of property requisition and redistribution among members of the power vertical. Informal core decisions to cancel one's property rights are formally framed as a court ruling (Darden 2010: 70). Apart from multiple negative effects on the economy, the persistence of conditional property raises the stakes for actors considering participation in elections or any other form of political activity. The fate of one's economic assets is informally determined by the ruling groups, which selectively use the formal legal procedures for rewarding the loyal actors and punishing the disloyal ones. (ibid.: 72)

The exemplary case of such arbitrary property redistribution is the "Yukos affair." In 2003, the opposition-leaning owner of the Yukos oil empire and the richest man in Russia, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, was put in jail, while his business was acquired by the state-owned oil company Rosneft to the personal benefit of its CEO, Igor Sechin, another member of Putin's inner circle. Khodorkovsky was twice charged and found guilty of corruption and money laundering and was sentenced to 11 years in prison. He has directly accused Sechin of plotting for his arrest and plundering his oil company:

The second, as well as the first case, were organized by Igor Sechin. He orchestrated the first case against me out of greed and the second out of cowardice (Franchetti 2008).

In fact, the Yukos affair was a part of a larger Kremlin strategy to intimidate or confiscate businesses that could potentially be active in politics. In 2000, soon after taking office, Putin met with the leading business owners to warn them that they could count on retaining control of their assets only as long as they complied with his wishes in politics. Khodorkovsky broke this "pact" by financing the opposition, thereby precipitating his arrest (Hale 2010: 37)

In a state with conditional property, any uncertainty of political succession or regime change becomes hazardous. For neopatrimonial ruling groups, the costs of dissent, losing an election or any other political involvement, are intolerable, as their failure would most probably mean losing freedom and all their assets. The elites' support for authoritarian rule can, *inter alia*, be perceived as a natural desire for secure property. This security is, however, unattainable in the long run, since any power vertical would ultimately come to a crisis of succession (Darden 2010: 76).

Another effect of the neopatrimonial fusion of economic and political power and the resulting conditional property regime is that Russian business activity abroad necessarily produces a certain degree of involvement in the domestic politics of foreign countries. Since being in control of any significant economic assets implies political influence within the informal patron-client framework, the presence of Russian companies means that they can use their patron's government connections to promote their business interests using state power, including military force, as happens in many post-Soviet countries (Darden 2010: 78). Ukraine, with its strategically important gas pipeline and production of crucial parts for the aerospace and defense industries, represents the most striking example. In 2013, just before the Russian annexation of Crimea, 24 percent of Ukrainian exports went to Russia (Dunnett 2015). Its banking and energy metallurgy sectors are still heavily dominated by the major Russian companies controlled by influential members of the Russian power vertical, despite three years of a de-facto state of war between the two countries (Yakimenko 2016).

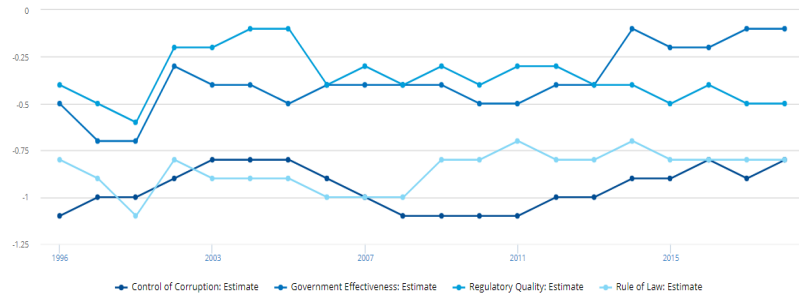
3. Pro et Contra

The primary argument for studying Putin's Russia as a neopatrimonial state is the heuristic potential. While the usual classifications of Putin's Russia is either as a hybrid regime (Diamond 2002) or as competitive authoritarianism, where the polity is described primarily in terms of electoral politics, levels of democracy, or formal institutions (Levitsky and Way 2002), neopatrimonialism examines a deeper level of societal relations (Robinson 2014: 6-7). The

focus on Weberian legal-rational institutionalization and the role of informal patronal relations offers an explanation as to why some regimes with a different political structure perform similarly on the level of decision-making and governance, thus rendering the entire democratic-authoritarian dichotomy a more superficial framework of political analysis. Any formal constitutional arrangement would thus be a mere “by-product of neopatrimonialism in the political arena” (Gel’man 2015: 459).

For instance, notwithstanding a significant increase of centralization as well as a departure from democratic standards during Putin’s rule, the data shows no significant change in the governance-related variables from 1996 to 2018, the last date available (Figure 1). The country’s seemingly radical departure from the 1990s influenced only the formal political façade, with little impact on the level of actual institutionalization since the prevalence of informal patronal relations persisted. Russia remained within the neopatrimonial space of these variables as defined by Neil Robinson (2011: 444).

Figure 1: Governance in Russia (World Bank, 2019)



Source: Worldwide Governance Indicators

The neopatrimonial lens enables us to explain such data by covering both the formal political regime and its underlying model of governance, and cannot be reduced to either one of these elements (Gel’man 2015: 458).

On the other hand, neopatrimonialism is widely criticized as a nearly catch-all concept attempting to explain too much and thus failing to explain anything. The relationship between the elements

of patrimonial rule and legal-rational bureaucratic rule is never clearly defined, thus allowing virtually any regime to qualify as neopatrimonialism with far-reaching conclusions. Being, in fact, a hybrid of two Weberian ideal types of domination, neopatrimonialism shares all the usual criticisms of hybridism, such as inherent vagueness and serving as a *deus ex machina* to support any claim, perhaps even two contradictory ones (Erdmann and Engel 2007: 96, 114). As an example, we shall employ a question mentioned at the beginning of this paper, i.e. what are the prospects of the current Russian regime? Scholars offer diametrically opposed assessments of this issue within the same neopatrimonial framework. Gel'man contends that its established neopatrimonial system is inherently stable, since its rational logic dictates that the elites ensure "the preservation of a stable economic and social order, in which the ruling group runs unchallenged and maintains the relative well-being of the population at large" (2015: 461). The low level of institutionalization suggests that even an abrupt change of leadership and liberal reforms of the formal institutional shell would not be able to affect the informal patron-client relations at the core of the Russian political system. Any intentions towards democratization would be eventually "emasculated and perverted by rent-seekers, who are interested in the privatization of gains from policy reforms and in the socialization of their losses" (Gel'man 2015: 463). Whereas Fisun argues that the system is prone to intra-elite conflicts which may eventually lead to a "color revolution" similar to Ukraine and Georgia, which is understood as a "response by some influential elites to the enhanced enforcement and coercive functions of the neopatrimonial state." In the situation of economic recession and consequently diminishing rent supply, the competition of patron-client interest groups could subvert the stability of the established power vertical (Fisun 2012: 94–95). This criticism definitely calls for a greater level of operationalization and delimitation of neopatrimonialism against cognate but weaker concepts such as clientelism or patronage, but does not refute its interpretative value *per se*.

Finally, the neopatrimonial interpretation of the Russian political system provides a promising framework for explaining its specific features, such as persisting authoritarian tendencies, by

putting it not only in the post-Soviet and in Eastern European context but comparing it to a variety of regimes in regions such as Africa and Latin America. As these regions have been studied in the neopatrimonial perspective since the 1970s, such a broad perspective offers more data for comparative analysis. Discerning neopatrimonial patterns in the political systems of countries with such a high degree of dissimilarity also provides a wide range of opportunities for applying the Most Different Systems Design⁴⁴ of comparative research.

Conclusion

The concept of neopatrimonialism is derived from the works of Weber for the analysis of modern political domination. It interweaves patrimonial administrative practices with the legitimacy and formal institutional façade of a modernized bureaucratic state.

Vladimir Putin's governance of Russia serves as an example of neopatrimonial rule and comprises all of its key traits. His personal rule through an informal patron-client hierarchy takes the form of a consolidated power vertical with different interest groups competing for access to public and private assets as sources of privately appropriated rent. The maximization and perpetuation of this rent is the driving force for decision-making at all levels of the Russian political class, which results in a rational limitation of appropriation to ensure the maintenance of essential public services and military capabilities. The destructive economic effects of neopatrimonial extractive institutions and conditional private property are aggravated by a vicious circle of political effects i.e. elites' reluctance to take any political action. The Russian neopatrimonial system presents the ruling groups with a "throtter,"⁴⁵ the offer part being the increased access to rent extraction in the case of compliance

44 Most different systems design (MDSD) is a type of theory-driven small-N analysis that compares cases that are maximally different on all but the variable of interest (Otner 2009: 570).

45 A term coined by political philosopher Hillel Steiner. It is a portmanteau word, which blends "threat" and "offer".

and the threat part being the loss of assets and possible risks for life and freedom.

Although the neopatrimonial approach may need some methodological refinement, it proves useful in identifying the administrative patterns behind the formal political structure of the modern Russian regime. It offers a glimpse into a deeper informal level of governance, which is not covered by the analysis within the traditional democracy-authoritarianism dichotomy, as offered by concepts such as hybrid regime or competitive authoritarianism, and thereby opens up a broad potential for comparative research.

That said, it is important to appreciate that no conceptual framework can grasp social reality in its entirety. Some approaches, like neopatrimonialism, are more instrumental in organizing the comparative analysis and enhancing understanding, some are less. Since a tendency towards conceptual unanimity or even lasting consensus would be counterproductive, definitional pluralism of multiple competing frameworks that amplify each other is not just inevitable, but desirable.

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