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Putin's "constitutional coup": context and implications

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The points I would like to raise in the discussion are:

- 2020 appears to be one of serious changes in Russian politics, but is it more accurate to claim the character of the system has not changed at all. In fact, all that has happened is existing practices and norms have been formalised into the constitution? Has anything new been revealed in 2020 about the nature of the Putin system?
- The nation-wide referendum and the regional elections do not appear to have done anything to stop the sliding ratings of President Putin, United Russia and the State Duma. Is it fair to say the increased use of administrative resources to achieve the desired results has done nothing to boost regime legitimacy but has confirmed regime stability (the loyalty of regime clients in the regions and the state apparatus)?
- Can we argue 2020 was planned in 2019 as a big year to stop the slide in regime popularity through reform, cabinet reshuffle, constitutional plebiscite and WWII parade? How far has this worked? It would appear the ideational/narrative message of the regime have remained unaltered (standing up to the West, traditional values, Russia's 1000-year history) at a time when circumstances (Covid-19 and economic crisis) demand new narratives. Is this one of the key aspects of corrosion of regime legitimacy in 2020? Do the 'ideological' statues (on mentioning God, against falsification of history, territorial unity, Russians as state-forming people) in the new constitution really have any resonance with ordinary people - does it just play to Putin's core supporters? Is there any evidence the focus on WWII in 2020 brought any gains for the Kremlin?
- What other evidence for falling legitimacy can be found outside of Levada Center polling (which is flawed due to high rejection rates of 70-75%)?
- Is it fair to say the current political methods of securing regime political monopoly rely on (i) selected repression; (ii) state media information war; (iii) administrative resources in elections; (iv) loyalty of state apparatus: power vertical, police and army and courts. If so, with these pillars of stability in place, the Kremlin can quite easily ignore massive protest movements such as Khabarovsk? What is missing in this picture? How else does the Kremlin negotiate the loyalty of regional elites?

- Question of apathy in Russian population: hard to argue there has been a mass response to the 2020 reforms. In Russia there is a whole chunk of the population who have not participated in politics in any meaningful way. I could paraphrase their sentiments as follows: is 'Nothing can be done, it is all decided in advance without us. All the alternatives are just as rotten as those in power, rotten at top and outside, if you try and do something you will lose, so best to leave it all. Don't think about it. Leave it to others.' Is it fair to say this apathetic group are the key swing voters between pro- and anti-regime stances? Based on what we have seen in Belarus this year, what needs to happen in Russia to make apathetic people change their minds?