

for its dwindling numbers, affect wages? Secondly, the author might have included a chapter on sectors of the urban economy that are more modern, technologically-sophisticated, and efficient, to provide a somewhat more balanced overall picture.

Overall, Crowley's book makes the critical argument that the elite's fear of workers' unrest has been a major brake on deindustrialization and modernization in Russia. He convinces this reader that workers have been more active, vocal, and influential than experts realized, that we must look not only at elites' interests but at societal actors in order to understand the politics of Putin's Russia. This important, engaging, and authoritative study is essential reading for all who seek such understanding.

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The Putin Predicament: Problems of Legitimacy and Succession in Russia.

By Bo Petersson. Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society. Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2021. 219 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$40.00, paper.

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The exact reasons that drove Vladimir Putin to invade Ukraine in 2022 will long be debated. Though this book was published one year before the invasion, Petersson provides one plausible yet often overlooked explanation: that as an aging charismatic leader, Putin was facing a looming predicament. As Petersson states it: "It is time for him to go, but there is no one in sight to succeed him" (19). The book builds toward a possible connection between that predicament and the decision to invade Russia's neighbor.

The book applies a straightforward Weberian lens to viewing Putin's leadership. By continuing to rely on Putin's personal popularity as a charismatic leader, the regime has failed to create a transition to a rational-legal basis of legitimacy, leading to an impending crisis of leadership succession.

Petersson dates the beginning of this challenge to the protests in 2011–12, which started with demands for fair elections and deepened with Putin's return to the presidency. This created a crisis of confidence and legitimacy, and the fear that a post-Soviet "color revolution" might come to Russia itself. Putin's vaunted popularity ratings remained low through 2013, compelling the Putin leadership to seek new legitimation strategies.

Much of the book focuses on the challenge of creating these strategies, which for Putin's third and fourth terms in office are fundamentally different from what came before. Petersson's research approach is simple and direct: a close reading of Putin's public comments and speeches as the messaging shifted in connection to changing events in Russia. As Putin began his third term, the memory of the chaos of the 1990s had started to fade, and thus the claim that the Putin leadership was providing stability in contrast to the Yeltsin years was losing its purchase. Economic growth had slowed, and the "Euromaidan" revolution in Ukraine in 2013–14 deepened fears of popular unrest in Russia itself.

A new path for legitimacy was created, one that emphasized traditional values, as well as the need to stand up to the west, with Putin as Russia's savior and protector. The Russian president increasingly styled himself as populist, though one in power, defending the "real Russians" from oligarchs and the liberal elites of the US-backed global order. The seizure of Crimea in 2014 provided a "miracle cure" (62) for legitimacy, with a boost in Putin's popularity ratings that lasted for four years.

Yet challenges continued to loom. The unpopular pension reform in 2018 led to another decline in Putin's popularity ratings. In 2020, widespread unrest in Belarus over Aliaksandar Lukashenka's evidently fraudulent reelection again heightened fears of similar unrest in Russia. (Though taking place after the book was written, the uprising in Kazakhstan in 2022 suggested the dangers for autocratic leaders of handing off power to less-than-charismatic successors.)

While Petesson somewhat overstates the threat posed by Aleksei Naval'nyi, he nonetheless makes a compelling case for his impact. Medvedev's position as Prime Minister became untenable after Naval'nyi's damning video detailing the former's vast corruption. Putin's repeated refusal to speak the name of Naval'nyi, even after his poisoning and imprisonment, appeared almost comical.

A chapter on Russia's bungled approach to dealing with the coronavirus already appears a bit dated in light of more recent events—namely the war. But in a penultimate chapter Petersson brings to light Putin's repeated promises to not revise the constitution in order to allow him to run for president once again. In fact, Petersson conceded that he had to rewrite substantial portions of the book when Putin announced the constitutional referendum allowing him to do just that in 2020.

The book could say more, as others have, about how continuing economic stagnation deepened the need for new legitimation strategies. As Petersson briefly notes, substantial economic growth served Putin well in his first two terms, but with lower levels of growth since stability can begin to look like stagnation. Such arguments would only strengthen the book's case about the regime's predicament. In his conclusion, written in early 2021, Petersson asks whether the regime, given the challenges it faces, might seek a repetition of the rally-round-the-flag scenario, "where adventures abroad are used to gain support at home," since "the annexation of Crimea worked like a miracle cure in boosting Putin's popularity and legitimacy" (179). This is certainly not the sole explanation for the fraught decision to invade Ukraine. Yet *Putin's Predicament* persuasively presents the substantial challenges faced by a visibly aging charismatic leader with no successor in sight. Undoubtedly, Russia's disastrous war will only heighten that predicament.

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