

Measuring the Unmeasurable Indicators of Russian State Resilience



**MEASURING THE UNMEASURABLE
INDICATORS OF RUSSIAN STATE RESILIENCE**

by

Dr. Joris Van Bladel, Egmont Institute, Senior Associate Fellow

9 October 2023

Content

Content	1
List of figures	1
1. Introduction	2
2. Navigating the Future's Knowns and Unknowns	3
3. A Momentous Summer in Moscow	4
3.1. Rebels without a cause	
3.2. Putin's Suppression of the War Faction	
4. Shedding light on the stability of the regime	8
5. Analyzing Russia's 100 Leading Politicians during the Russian-Ukrainian War	9
5.1. Exclusiveness & stability	9
5.2. Loss and gain of influence	11
5.3. Is a high degree of activity in the list an indicator of strain?	13
6. Conclusions	13
Annex 1: List of experts composing the rating of the 100 most influential politicians in Russia	15
Annex 2: Sources to compose the database of the 100 most influential politicians in Russia.	16
Bibliography	18
Endnotes	20
List of figures	
Figure 1: Newcomers to the Top 100 Political Influencers in Russia.	10
Figure 2: Top 20 Russian Political Influencers During the War: A Dynamic Analysis.	10
Figure 3: Stability and Membership in Putin's Inner Circle: Orlov vs. Minchenko.	11
Figure 4: Monthly Rating Activity as a Stress Indicator.	13
Figure 5: Predicting Vladimir Putin's Successor.	14

“For starters, “What Putin Really Wants” has become a popular guessing game in the political world, and I also participate in this collective exercise.”

“Today, to understand Russia and present one’s understanding publicly often means courage to swim against the tide.”

Lilia Shevtsova.¹

1. Introduction

At the time of this writing, we find ourselves 550 days deep into the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Ukraine’s summer counter-offensive is grinding against the robust Surovikin Line, a multi-layered defense system spanning 1000 kilometers. This defensive network is fortified with anti-tank ditches, dragon teeth obstacles, treacherous minefields, and an intricate network of trenches fortified by heavy artillery positions.

However, what has become increasingly evident is that Ukraine’s counter-offensive is proving to be more challenging than initially anticipated. All parties involved have reluctantly arrived at a grim realization: the need to prepare for an enduring and protracted conflict. The illusion of a swift and decisive military operation has been shattered, giving way to a grim reality—a war of attrition lies ahead.

A war of attrition is a strategic approach aimed at gradually wearing down an adversary, ultimately eroding their will to continue by inflicting significantly higher casualties and material losses than one’s own side sustains. In such a scenario, there is no clear path to military victory for either side, with the emphasis often placed on firepower over mobility and direct confrontation over flanking tactics. It becomes a test of unwavering determination, resilience, and endurance. This sobering observation highlights that the war has evolved into a grueling endurance and capacity test, the outcome of which remains highly uncertain.

Notably, a war of attrition is only partially determined on the frontlines of battle. Equally critical is the leadership and support from the home front. Can the national economy, the political landscape, and the backing of society sustain the military effort, even when there is no discernible goal or endpoint in sight? Therefore, a war of attrition tests civil-military relations and political resolve. Do the opposing factions maintain the will to persevere? Do they possess the resilience and fortitude required to withstand this brutal trial?

In this context, the concepts of resilience, the capacity to absorb shocks and swiftly recover from disruptions, and adaptability become vital. These abstract ideas, often casually referenced in strategic documents and policy discussions, encapsulate the amalgamation of the will to fight with the capacity to maintain and build the necessary assets to continue the war. However, their true test lies in the crucible of adversity, akin to absorbing a metaphorical punch from Mike Tyson.²

In this paper, we embark on the crucial task of evaluating Russia’s political resilience. This fundamental factor may ultimately determine the course and outcome of the Ukraine-Russian war. Building upon our comprehensive study of Russia’s public opinion and its relation to the Ukraine conflict,³ we recognize the importance of this as a critical second analysis, with a

specific focus on the state of the Russian home front.

Based on the dynamic events of the summer in Moscow, we aim to put forward a set of indicators to assess Russia's political resilience, often referred to as Putin's regime stability. However, laying the groundwork with some preliminary methodological considerations is imperative before delving into this challenging endeavor. These remarks reflect an analytical stance that we consider essential to adopt.

We advocate for an approach that eschews maximalist and overly simplistic assessments of Russia's determination in the ongoing war. Instead, we advocate for a measured, nuanced, and patient approach that allows us to understand our opponent's resilience. Such an approach will be instrumental in comprehending the complex and evolving dynamics of the situation, ultimately leading to more accurate assessments and informed decisions.

2. Navigating the Future's Knowns and Unknowns

Speculating on the future of Vladimir Putin and his regime is akin to navigating through obscurity: it's a challenging, unpredictable journey fraught with unexpected twists. The Kremlin's operations are notoriously shrouded in secrecy, leaving us with limited insight and, in many cases, a significant lack of understanding.

Three critical factors further compound this challenge: first, the regime's intrinsic nature, where the informal world often takes precedence over the formal world; second, certain facets of Putin's personality characterized by secrecy and mysterious silence; and third, the complexity intensified by the chaos of the current war in Ukraine. More concretely, these factors signify:

- Brian Taylor's 'code of Putinism' characterizes Russia's regime as a duality: it combines 'hyperpresidentialism' with an informal clan network.⁴ Essentially, it operates as a regime with two faces. On the one hand, it establishes various institutions governed by formal rules. On the other hand, genuine political processes occur discreetly as battles unfold among informal clans—networks composed of small groups of political and economic elites. This regime contrasts the façade of myths and theater presented to the public and the hidden reality where political power is regulated through informal deals and arrangements. To an external observer, it appears as a black box shrouded in rumors, assumptions, and suspicions.
- Putin's personality is known for closely guarding his personal life, whereabouts, and those of his family and friends. Moreover, as a strategy to safeguard his ultimate power position, he deliberately keeps the outside world, including his allies and opponents, in the dark about his plans and ideas.
- An analytical landscape predominantly fueled by rumors, assumptions, and suspicions, with little reliance on concrete evidence, becomes significantly prone to various biases, including the observer effect and confirmation bias.⁵ This vulnerability is further amplified when the information environment is intentionally flooded with misinformation as part of a strategic approach adopted by all parties involved. Additionally, the moral toll inflicted by the reality of war sharpens the ethical framework of analysis, which may obscure an objective examination of the facts.

In essence, as we contemplate the future of Vladimir Putin and his regime, we confront the realm of the unknown and the unknowable—the epitome of uncertainty. Yet, in our engagement with a regime that has prominently featured anti-Westernism as one of its core pillars, it is imperative to speculate about its future. This speculation serves not only to

comprehend the potential risks and threats related to the war in Ukraine but also to gain insights into what lies on the horizon.

In this context, it is crucial to position our speculations within the framework of “intelligence research” rather than pursuing the ideals of a scientific endeavor. These two domains follow distinct methodological frameworks and are guided by different objectives. To illustrate, “intelligence analysis primarily serves interventions, in contrast to scientific analysis, which primarily seeks the pursuit of truth.”⁶ Consequently, intelligence studies emphasize practical outcomes, especially the vital and time-sensitive tasks of warning and anticipation, compared to the scientific realm.

Consequently, it is crucial to acknowledge that the data we will utilize in this paper to assess the stability of Putin's regime may be inherently biased and far from ideal, not without methodological concerns that are open to valid criticism. We are conscious of these limitations, and it is imperative to address them transparently.

The dataset we have established, comprising a longitudinal database of the 100 most influential political figures in Russia, serves as a valuable source of information that provides insights into the actual political landscape, rather than an imagined version. In this context, we reaffirm our dedication to this approach. While acknowledging the inherent challenges of dealing with a proverbial black box obscured by opacity and uncertainty, we acknowledge that our data may not be infallible, but they retain their significant relevance.

Confronting this paradox underscores our formidable challenge—a situation characterized by perilous uncertainty defined by the harsh realities of war. In the face of such adversity, we must grapple with the limitations of available data while diligently pursuing a deeper understanding of the complex landscape we seek to analyze.

3. A Momentous Summer in Moscow

Significant events in Russia marked the summer of 2023. Eighteen months after the commencement of the war, it appears that Putin's fateful decision to invade Ukraine has profoundly impacted domestic politics. The following cues demand attention:

- Following a series of intense and public clashes with Russia's military leadership, Yevgeny Prigozhin, the leader of the notorious Wagner Group, orchestrated a rebellion on June 23rd. On May 5th, for instance, in a graphic video standing before a group of freshly fallen Wagner soldiers, he derisively referred to his adversaries as, “You, scum, sitting in expensive clubs, you think you are masters of life, and you have the right to dispose of their life.”⁷ Displaying audacity, he commanded his mercenary forces to seize control of the military headquarters in Rostov-on-Don and to advance towards the capital. His demands were unyielding: the immediate resignation of Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff Valeriy Gerasimov. By June 24th, the “March of Justice” halted approximately 200 km south of Moscow. Prigozhin's retreat was part of a deal, the specifics of which remain speculative. However, Prigozhin's daring challenge to the seat of power came with a steep price. On August 23rd, he, along with Dmitry Utkin, the founder of Wagner, and eight other passengers, were killed in a plane crash en route from Moscow to Saint Petersburg. The details surrounding the crash are a matter of conjecture. Despite the Kremlin's disclaimer of any involvement in this “accident,” Putin had previously asserted in Andrei Kondrashov's documentary (2018) that betrayal was unforgivable and that “traitors always end in a bad way.”⁸

- A few weeks after Prigozhin's brief mutiny, on July 11th, news emerged that Major-General Ivan Popov, the commander of the 58th Combined Arms Army, had been relieved of duty by Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov. His offense? Speaking candidly to the top brass about the situation on the front lines. In a four-minute-long voice message shared by Russian lawmaker Andrei Gurulyov, who had previously overseen the same 58th Army, the general, using the call sign "Spartacus," openly discussed the dire circumstances at the southern front. He expressed concerns over troop fatigue and criticized the strategic decisions made by Russia's senior commanders on the battlefield. "While the Ukrainian army couldn't breach our front lines, our high-ranking leaders struck us from behind, ruthlessly decimating the army at its most demanding and critical juncture," Popov bitterly lamented.⁹
- On July 21, Igor Girkin, also known as Igor Strelkov, was arrested and detained on charges related to his public endorsement of extremist activities. This notorious military blogger strongly condemned the Russian military, focusing on his criticism of Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu for what he perceived as mishandling, inefficiency, and inadequacy in leading the invasion. In September 2022, he even advocated for the execution of Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu by firing squad.¹⁰ In April 2023, Girkin established the "Club of the Angry Patriots" [Клуб разгневанных патриотов], asserting that the war was being conducted in a mediocre manner [бездарно].¹¹ One of the club's objectives was to prepare the Russian population for total war and promote a complete military mobilization. Notably, Girkin did not hesitate to critique President Putin himself. On July 23, he summarized Putin's late leadership style as "a lot of empty talk, minimal action, and a complete absence of accountability for failures."¹² Nevertheless, Sergei Markov, a Russian political scientist, former close advisor, and staunch supporter of the Russian President, issued a warning to Girkin in January 2023, stating, "...everyone can be subject to criticism, except for the supreme commander of the belligerent army."¹³ On August 29, a Moscow court decided to keep Girkin in custody until September 18th, with the potential for a five-year sentence if he is found guilty.
- On August 10, 2023, during his "Full Contact" [полный контакт] show on Russian state television, there was an extraordinary 2-minute episode where the state propagandist Vladimir Solovyov vehemently reproached Elvira Nabiullina, the president of the Russian National Bank, without directly naming her. He openly criticized the National Bank's lack of communication. He insisted on elucidating the substantial drop in the ruble's value, which had led to Russia becoming a subject of international mockery. He advised those accountable to step down if they couldn't explain.¹⁴ Throughout 2023, the ruble underwent an alarming depreciation of almost 40%, breaching the significant threshold of 100 rubles to the dollar on August 9th. On August 15th, the National Bank took action, raising the interest rate from 3.5% to 12% to fortify the nation's currency. Since the intervention of the national banks, the ruble has exhibited a degree of stability, maintaining a range of approximately 95 rubles to the dollar. Nonetheless, the pivotal factor underscoring Russia's economic predicaments remains unsuitable for public discourse — specifically, its delicate demographic and economic foundations, exacerbated by the unfortunate choice to engage in a conflict with Ukraine.
- On August 15th, Vladimir Kvachkov, a 74-year-old former Russian military intelligence officer of considerable repute, a close Girkin's ally, and a member of the "Angry Patriots Club," was declared guilty by Moscow's Tverskoy District Court. He was found guilty of "discrediting" Russia's armed forces and subsequently fined 40,000 rubles or 380 euros. During his court statement, he allegedly stated, "In my opinion, the following citizens discredit the armed forces: Putin, Shoigu, Gerasimov."¹⁵ It's important to note that this case doesn't carry the same weight or

significance as the previously mentioned events, particularly when compared to how authorities have dealt with the political opposition or the “Party of Peace.”

Nevertheless, it represents a rare instance within Russia’s justice system where pro-war individuals have been targeted rather than dissenters opposing the ongoing conflict.

3.1. Rebels without a cause

Each of the cases mentioned represents its unique set of circumstances and motivations. They do not necessarily form a unified, coordinated sequence of events. Instead, they are the repercussions of Putin’s war effort in Ukraine, manifestations of a malicious plan gone awry.

However, from a particular perspective, a common thread does emerge. As suggested, all the prominent figures, from Prigozhin to Popov, Girkin, Solovyev, and Kvachkov, can be aligned with the “Party of War.” Their stance doesn’t challenge the war itself but underscores their belief that the conflict lacks the requisite levels of aggression and audacity. They subscribe to Machiavelli’s idea that the end justifies all means and advocate for a comprehensive war effort involving total mobilization and the application of all possible military means, including nuclear weapons. Their criticisms are sharply aimed at the military high command, which they perceive as ineffective and complacent, seemingly detached from the realities on the ground.

Within this rationale, these individuals can be viewed as “truth-tellers.” They are unflinching in their public assessments of the situation, particularly when discussing military leadership and strategy. They serve as whistleblowers in this capacity, exposing uncomfortable truths regarding the state of affairs or the consequences of Putin’s choices. Major-General Popov, for instance, highlights deficiencies in artillery, counter-battery artillery, artillery intelligence, and manpower rotation. Prigozhin focuses on ammunition shortages, albeit within a specific political context and not without self-promotion and self-interest. Girkin, with his unorthodox mindset, emerges as a particularly astute military and political commentator. He pinpoints many tactical and strategic issues within the Russian army, many of which are valid. Even his critique of Putin, suggesting that the President has lately become more isolated, hesitant, and therefore less decisive, appears accurate.

Interestingly, these commentators implicitly categorize Russian society into three distinct groups: the suffering Russian people, the complacent and seemingly disengaged strategic leadership and administration, and the sovereign leader, Vladimir Putin. Except for Girkin and Kvachkov, these commentators refrain from directing their criticism toward Putin himself. Instead, their focus centers on a specific stratum of individuals responsible for overseeing the war effort — the Minister of Defense, the Chief of the General Staff, and, in the case of Solovyev, the Governor of the National Bank, specifically Sergei Shoigu, Valeriy Gerasimov, and Elvira Nabiullina.

True or false, the narrative suggests that these figures prioritize safeguarding their privileges over assuming accountability for their assigned duties. They appear to cling to power and status rather than effectively fulfilling their roles. In this narrative, their conduct sharply contrasts with the suffering soldiers and their families who dutifully serve their nation under challenging circumstances, bearing the consequences of the mismanagement by these privileged few.

As such, these naysayers adopt a historical framework to critique the war’s management.

They draw upon the age-old monarchical myth of the Good Tsar versus the evil boyars cliché, where the benevolent tsar is pitted against the corrupt and cruel boyars, who lead luxurious and extravagant lives. The ordinary people suffer in this narrative, and the tsar remains sacrosanct as the nation's savior. Within the context of this misleading historical cliché, the critics can be likened to the 'streltsy' — the "warriors" — who disdain the boyars. They view their rebellion, both in word and in action, as a patriotic act through which they defend the true essence of the Russian state: the suffering people and the untouchable, benevolent tsar.

From a more grounded perspective, however, these radicals are just populists and far-right extremists who operate within their own nationalistic and conservative ideology.¹⁶ They hold onto the fantasy of a mighty Russia with a superior culture and a historical mission, a story they've collectively constructed and maintained. Now, they witness this vision crumbling in the face of the harsh reality of war. What remains is a fascist worldview characterized by vehement criticism of the elite and the administration, a misplaced sense of compassion for the suffering people, an eschatological call for total war, and a disturbing satisfaction in destroying a sovereign nation known as Ukraine.

3.2. Putin's Suppression of the War Faction

Putin's response to the critiques of the warmongers is quite revealing—he opts to disregard their arguments. Thus far, those facing criticism have managed to retain their positions, and despite advocating for an all-out aggressive war stance, Putin has shown reluctance to do so. Instead, except for Solovyev, the critics have been silenced through imprisonment, dismissal, or even death. In this context, Andrey Kolesnikov calls the Putin regime a "signaling system" [Сигнальная система] where the message towards the "Part of War" is crystal clear: do not touch the President. Furthermore, it's worth revisiting Andrei Kondrashov's documentary, in which Putin firmly stated that challenging him is inadvisable. [что с ним спорить не нужно].¹⁷

This leads to several intriguing insights into the current state of Putin's regime:

- After silencing the "Party of Peace," Putin has now redirected his focus toward critics within the "Party of War." This shift may be considered the main consequence of Prigozhin's rebellion in June. Through these actions, Putin has consolidated his hold on power, effectively shielding himself from challenges on both the left and right sides. Consequently, as of now, the ultra-patriots do not appear to present a significant threat to the Kremlin. Simultaneously, the election season seems to be secured, with the presidential elections in March 2024 approaching a high point.¹⁸
- It becomes evident that loyalty holds greater importance than effectiveness for Putin.¹⁹ In fact, it is the essential ingredient that sustains the system, also known as Putinism. Nevertheless, this emphasis on loyalty comes with a price, resulting in the entrenchment of power, a growing authoritarianism within the regime, and the adoption of increasingly desperate measures. These transformations are all byproducts of the decision to engage in war, as they did not initially define the regime's character, confirming Mark Galeotti's observation that "Putinism is great in anything but fighting wars."²⁰ This approach will prove detrimental in the long run, eventually leading to its potential collapse.

Indeed, the Russian paradox persists: Putin is often described as a "Weak Strongman,"²¹ and his regime appears to possess elements of both strength and fragility simultaneously. However, it is essential to recognize that proclaiming Putin's regime as on the brink of

collapse is one thing while assessing the when and how of any potential collapse is an entirely different challenge.

Making wild, maximalist, or clichéd predictions about Russia's future without a specific timeframe or substantial argumentation borders on speculation, reflects wishful thinking, and, more importantly, can be both futile and dangerous. They establish the groundwork for strategic surprise and subsequent distress.

In the following sections, we will argue that, at least for the present moment, the Putin regime exhibits stability and appears to be gaining confidence. This assessment holds even in light of the tumultuous events that have unfolded in Russia during the recent summer.

4. Shedding light on the stability of the regime

The foundation of our assessment regarding Putin's stability relies on a monthly rating compiled by Dmitry Orlov, the General Director of the Agency for Political and Economic Communications. Established in 2004, the Agency for Political and Economic Communications is a Russian communication firm actively involved in research related to political ratings and various media and communication projects. One notable long-term project they undertake is the assessment of the top 100 leading politicians in Russia.²²

It is crucial to emphasize that Dmitry Orlov holds multiple roles as a political scientist, consultant, and strategist. Furthermore, he is a Supreme Council of the United Russia party member and has received honors, including the Silver Archer Award and commendations from the Russian president. Given Mr. Orlov's evident political affiliation and viewpoint, it is essential to consider this perspective when evaluating the data and analysis provided.

The selection of this particular database may appear somewhat arbitrary, but its consistency and coherence are its primary virtues. This choice enables us to conduct an analysis grounded in observable "facts," albeit recognizing that these facts may carry inherent biases. Indeed, there were other conceivable options for achieving this analysis. An alternative perspective on the functioning of the Putin regime draws inspiration from Yevgeni Minchenko's concept of "politburo 2.0," which draws noticeable parallels to the operational methods of the Communist Party during the Soviet era.

Minchenko's model highlights the emergence of an informal, network-based governance structure, effectively characterizing Putin's regime as we understand it today. This regime is primarily constructed around Putin's central role as the ultimate arbiter of power dynamics, supported by a cadre of trusted individuals commonly referred to as "the inner circle," "Collective Putin," or, more recently, "the war cabinet."²³ We will revisit Minchenko's perspective later in our analysis. For now, it is worth noting that Orlov's approach lends itself well to quantitative analysis, whereas Minchenko's model is less suited for such a methodical approach.

The methodology employed by Orlov is transparently disclosed. To compile a monthly rating of the 100 most influential politicians in Russia, Orlov seeks the opinions of 28 experts representing diverse backgrounds, including political scientists, political strategists, media experts, and representatives of political parties. (The list of these experts can be found in Annex 1.) These experts are tasked with assessing the influence of various Russian politicians on a scale from 1 to 10, specifically focusing on their roles within the administration of the President of the Russian Federation, the Government of the Russian Federation, and the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. Each expert individually evaluates the

influence of the candidates presented in the questionnaire. Subsequently, the average scores of these expert assessments are calculated. Each expert also has the opportunity to add up to five personalities they believe should be included in the rating but are not in the questionnaire. If a candidate not initially included in the questionnaire is mentioned by at least two experts, that individual will be assessed by all participants in the study in the following month.

The final rating is a consolidated assessment of the influence of 100 Russian politicians, as determined by the leaders of the Russian expert community. The personalities included in the rating based on the survey results are categorized into sections, including "very strong influence" (очень сильное влияние) for positions 1–20, "strong influence" (сильное влияние) for positions 21–50, and "average influence" (среднее влияние) for positions 51–100. This methodology aims to provide a comprehensive view of political influence in Russia, as perceived by experts in the field.

It's evident that the ratings are event-driven, meaning that the occurrences within a given month significantly impact the attention and perception of individuals in the rankings. This approach aligns with the nature of Russia's society, which, in an autocratic system, tends to have well-defined and inflexible structures and procedures. In this sense, the ratings serve as a reflection of the realities of Russia.

Building on the available ratings, we've constructed a comprehensive database covering the war period from February 2022 to September 2023. (Please refer to Annex 2 for detailed sources.) This extensive dataset has allowed us to conduct a thorough analysis, shedding light on the regime's stability.

5. Analyzing Russia's 100 Leading Politicians during the Russian-Ukrainian War

5.1. Exclusiveness & stability

When examining the evolution of the 100 most influential Russian politicians during the war period spanning from February 2022 to September 2023, a striking observation emerges: the corpus of influential figures has shown limited openness to newcomers or substantial changes. In concrete terms, over the course of 20 months of observation, only 14 newcomers managed to secure a place in this influential ranking. However, when we scrutinize the status of these 14 newcomers as of the September 2023 rating, only seven have managed to maintain their positions within the top 100 list. Furthermore, most of those who have endured in the list occupy relatively peripheral positions.

One particular personality warrants closer attention: **Aleksandr Kurenkov**, a lieutenant general who assumed the role of Minister of Emergency Situations in May 2022. Notably, this ministerial post was previously held by Sergei Shoigu, the current Minister of Defense, from 1994 to 2012. His remarkable ascent in influence sets **Aleksandr Kurenkov** apart, gaining 36 places over the entire period. Nevertheless, he is classified as a figure of moderate influence, falling within the ranking range of 100-50, a dynamic we will delve into more deeply later in our analysis.

Name	Out of list Feb/22	Left in List sep/23
Aleksandr Kurenkov	101	64
Michail Fradkov	101	79
Sergei Perminov	101	84
Nikolai Tokarev	101	85
Leonid Slutsky	101	92
Valeri Zorkin	101	93
Veronika Skvortsova	101	95
Ella Pamfilova	101	101
Sergei Surovikin	101	101
Aleksandr Khloponim	101	101
Sergei Potanin	101	101
Arkady Dvorkovich	101	101
Evgeni Prigozhin	101	101
Vladimir Lisin	101	101
Total	14	7

Figure 1: Newcomers to the Top 100 Political Influencers in Russia.

The further up the list one ascends, the more stability it exhibits. Within the category of individuals with strong influence (ranging from places 21 to 50), there are only five newcomers, and notably, one newcomer – Andrei Turchak - has managed to secure a position in the list of individuals with very strong influence or within the top 20.

Using the same rationale as **Aleksandr Kurenkov**, it's worth noting the remarkable trajectory of **Andrei Tarchuk**. As a Russian Federation Senator from Pskov Oblast and the secretary of the General Council of the United Russia Party, he is another figure who has experienced a notable ascent on the influence scale over the observed period.

Name	Rating feb/22	Rating sep/23	Influence dynamic
Vladimir Putin	1	1	0
Michail Mishustin	2	2	0
Sergei Sobyenin	8	3	5
Anton Vaino	6	4	2
Dmitry Medvedev	3	5	-2
Sergei Shoigu	4	6	-2
Igor Sechin	14	7	7
Aleksei Gromov	13	8	5
Sergei Kiriyenko	9	9	0
Nikolai Patrushev	7	10	-3
Anton Siluanov	15	11	4
Andrei Turchak	23	12	11
Sergei Lavrov	5	13	-8
Dmitry Peskov	17	14	3
Aleksandr Bastrykin	20	15	5
Vyacheslav Volodin	11	16	-5
Aleksandr Bortnikov	12	17	-5
Aleksei Miller	16	18	-2
Elvira Nabiullina	10	19	-9
Andrei Belousov	18	20	-2

Figure 2: Top 20 Russian Political Influencers During the War: A Dynamic Analysis.

The fact that the summer of 2022, marked by various incidents and widespread speculation about cracks in the Putin regime, is not significantly reflected in these ratings is an additional indicator of the regime's stability.

As a brief detour, comparing Minchenko's assessment of the most influential politicians could be intriguing, primarily to determine whether Orlov's top 20 list receives any validation. Several months into the war, Minchenko identified 11 individuals as members of the Politburo 2.0. Although Minchenko does not assign a specific hierarchy to this group, we can make the following comparison between Orlov's ranking system and the individuals recently mentioned by Minchenko¹

		Orlov	Minchenko
		Ranking Sept 22	Politburo 2.0
1	Nikolai Patrushev	10	1
2	Sergei Kiriyenko	9	1
3	Igor Sechin	7	1
4	Sergei Shoigu	6	1
5	Dmitry Medvedev	5	1
6	Sergei Sobyanin	3	1
7	Mikheil Mishustin	2	1
8	Yuri Kovalchuk	0	1
9	Sergei Chemezov	0	1
10	Gennady Timchenko	0	1
11	Arkady Rotenberg	0	1

Figure 3: Stability and Membership in Putin's Inner Circle: Orlov vs. Minchenko.

In this comparison, we can discern that Minchenko's list emphasizes the significance of informal connections between Putin and his inner circle more than Orlov's list. Minchenko's Politburo includes official politicians who are assessed as highly influential. However, when Minchenko mentions businessmen who, despite not holding government positions, wield substantial informal influence—figures like Arkady Rotenberg, Gennady Timchenko, and Yuri Kovalchuk—these individuals do not appear in Orlov's top 100 list.

The question of who better reflects Russia's reality between the two is undoubtedly a matter of debate. In our assessment, it becomes evident that the informal political landscape carries an importance at least equal to that of the formal one, albeit with the caveat that this engenders a considerable amount of uncertainty and consequently leads to speculation. What holds particular significance is that, despite the variance in the individuals mentioned, Minchenko's evaluation concurs with Orlov's observation that the Politburo remains remarkably stable and has not been significantly affected by the ongoing war.

5.2. Loss and gain of influence

Several noteworthy trends emerge when examining the influence dynamics within the observed period, which encompasses gaining or losing influence based on the ratings. As previously mentioned, **Andrei Tarchuk**, ranked 12th, experienced the most significant increase in influence, advancing by 11 positions. Following closely behind is **Igor Sechin**, who holds the seventh position and gained seven places.

Conversely, among this group of influential figures, the individual who witnessed the most substantial decline in influence is **Elvira Nabiullina**, the Governor of the Russian National Bank, followed by Sergei Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Three individuals managed to maintain their positions without any shifts. Notably, **Vladimir Putin** remains predictably stable at the top. Additionally, **Michail Mishustin**, the Prime Minister, retains the second most influential position in Russia during the Russian-Ukraine war. Lastly, **Sergei Kiriyenko**, the First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of Russia, consistently occupies the ninth position.

These rankings also offer insight into which institution is regarded as the most influential in Russia. The **Presidential Administration** takes the lead with six occupied spots and a combined weight of 51. Following closely is the **Cabinet**, with five positions secured and a combined weight of 70. The lower this combined weight, the higher the ranking and the more influential the institution is assessed. Moreover, this exclusive group has four or five **Siloviki** (individuals with backgrounds in security or military services), depending on whether **Igor Sechin** is considered a Silovik.

When examining the overall top 100 list, it becomes evident that **Dmitri Rogozin**, **Aleksei Kudrin**, and **Dmitri Kochnev** have experienced the most significant declines in influence, losing 48, 40, and 40 places, respectively. Their rankings have resulted in them landing in the bottom ten positions of the top 100 list.

Conversely, those who have experienced the most significant gains in influence are **Aleksander Kurenkov**, **Igor Levitin**, and **Vladimir Yakushev**, advancing by 36, 31, and 24 places, respectively. It's worth noting that **Igor Levitin**, positioned at 39th place, holds the role of an Aide to the Russian President and works within the Presidential Administration. **Vladimir Yakushev**, ranked 51st place, serves as a regional leader, holding the position of Presidential Plenipotentiary Representative in the Ural Federal District.

The development of **Evgeni Prigozhin's** position within the top 100 list is intriguing. He entered the list as late as December 2022 and remained on it until May 2023. Throughout these six months, his highest ranking was 84 in December 2022, while his lowest position within the list was 94 in February 2023. This suggests that political experts did not assess his influence as particularly high during this period, which is in contrast to the significant disruption he caused to the system in July 2023.

From this observation, we can draw two possible conclusions. Either the political experts were mistaken in their assessment, potentially underestimating Prigozhin's influence, or they accurately evaluated his position as inconsequential, perceiving him as not powerful enough to destabilize the system. In hindsight, it appears they were correct, as Prigozhin has been removed from the political scene and no longer wields a significant role.

However, it's essential to exercise caution and not extrapolate this conclusion too broadly. It's worth noting that ranking lists of this nature may not necessarily possess predictive value, as they reflect experts' assessments of the political situation retrospectively on a monthly basis. Politics is a dynamic field, and unexpected developments can occur that are challenging to foresee solely based on historical assessments.

5.3. Is a high degree of activity in the list an indicator of strain?

Despite the eventful summer of 2023, which included notable events like the rebellion of Evgeni Prigozhin, much discussion has been about the increased strain on Putin and his regime, even suggesting it was in danger. However, it's important to highlight that Orlov's rating list does not reflect this heightened tension.

Hypothetically, suppose we were to operate under the assumption that a substantial number of changes and a high degree of dynamism in the list, accompanied by significant rankings shifts, would indicate increased tension. In that case, the data does not align with this hypothesis. Specifically, the summer of 2023 does not reveal any exceptional changes or extensive rotations in the list, particularly when compared to the first nine months of the war.

In contrast to the first half of 2023, we observe an uptick in activity, but it does not reach exceptionally high levels. This observation suggests that while there may have been notable events and discussions about an increased strain on Putin and his regime, these factors did not result in significant shifts or instability within the ranking list during the summer of 2023.

	jan	feb	mrt	apr	mei	jun	jul	aug	sep	okt	nov	dec
Number of changes			310	364	278	321	277	339	338	361	277	268
Significance of changes			87	89	83	93	77	82	89	86	82	79
Degree of activity			397	453	361	414	354	421	427	447	359	347
	jan	feb	mrt	apr	mei	jun	jul	aug	sep			
Number of changes	240	120	228	196	207	355	233	296	279			
Significance of changes	83	62	75	78	81	88	80	88	82			
Degree of activity	323	182	303	274	288	443	313	384	361			

Figure 4: Monthly Rating Activity as a Stress Indicator.

While this reasoning should not be overemphasized, it does indicate that, contrary to some Western observers' expectations, Putin's regime in the summer of 2023 appeared to be more stable than it was often perceived or hoped to be.

6. Conclusions

Based on the dataset we've compiled, we are unable to identify any significant shifts within the political elite or any clear indications that the Putin regime is experiencing specific strains. This runs counter to speculations that the events of the summer, particularly Prigozhin's rebellion, have eroded or weakened the Russian government. In fact, in light of developments in September and October, we can observe a growing sense of self-assurance and determination to assert Russia's influence in Ukraine. Examples of this can be seen in Moscow's state budget discussions, which reveal a marked increase in military spending, as well as Russia's tacit mobilization efforts.

Regrettably, we must also acknowledge some unfavorable political developments within the Western alliance that supports Ukraine. These include the success of pro-Russia parties in Slovakia, the Polish-Ukrainian dispute related to Ukrainian grain exports, and the blocking of US financial aid to Ukraine by a minority of extremist Republicans in the US Senate. Clearly,

in a protracted conflict where political resolve and unwavering determination to fight are crucial, these developments have a detrimental impact on Ukraine and, by extension, our overall situation. It's worth reminding the reader that for Russia, effectiveness holds greater significance than efficiency, implying that time is more in Russia's favor than Ukraine and its allies.

However, can our observation of Russia's political stability, and by extension, the database we have primarily relied upon to support this observation, offer any predictive value? The answer is unequivocally no. As mentioned, our database relies on a subjective and biased assessment based on retrospective observations of political events and activities. What we can confirm is that the events of the summer of 2023 had a relatively minor impact on the stability of the Russian regime and Putin's position. Therefore, considering Russia's structural weaknesses, we categorize Putin's regime as "quasi-stable." This suggests that unforeseen events, often referred to as "black swans," are critical to monitor when assessing the regime's stability. The challenge is that black swan events, by their very nature, come as surprises and are unknown and unknowable in advance. The only way to prepare for such an uncomfortable situation is to employ strategic imagination along with a cautious and patient approach to Russia's actions and postures. Equally important is the need to fortify our own resilience and determination to counter Russia's unacceptable actions in Ukraine.

We conclude by introducing our own speculative perspective to the ongoing discussion about the post-Putin era and the potential successors in the Kremlin. The table below will present the names frequently circulating in this debate, enriched by our analysis, which includes the addition of Aleksandr Kurenkov. Subsequently, we will compare this list to our assessment based on Orlov's rating list. In a final column, we will provide the ages of these candidates, underscoring the significance of age in this context. It is worth noting that Vladimir Putin assumed the presidency at the age of 48, and Dmitry Medvedev followed suit at 42. This raises the question of whether age might play a pivotal role in this ongoing discussion.

Suggested names	Ranking Sept/23	Age	Suggested names	Ranking Sept/23	Age
Mikhail Mishustin	2	57	Dmitry Patrushev	34	46
Sergei Sobyarin	3	65	Andrey Turchak	12	48
Dmitry Medvedev	5	58	Aleksandr Kurenkov	64	51
Sergei Kiriyenko	9	61	Alexey Dyumin	70	51
Andrey Turchak	12	48	Mikhail Mishustin	2	57
Vyacheslav Volodin	16	59	Dmitry Medvedev	5	58
Andrei Belousov	20	64	Vyacheslav Volodin	16	59
Dmitry Patrushev	34	46	Sergei Kiriyenko	9	61
Aleksandr Kurenkov	64	51	Andrei Belousov	20	64
Alexey Dyumin	70	51	Sergei Sobyarin	3	65

Figure 5: Predicting Vladimir Putin's Successor.

It's worth noting that even the notion of a normal power transition in Russia is itself a subject of considerable speculation. To maintain consistency and avoid contradicting ourselves, we will abstain from providing any additional commentary on our suggestions.

Annex 1: List of experts composing the rating of the 100 most influential politicians in Russia

- Zverev Sergey (Social Networks Development Company);
- Kostin Konstantin (Society Development Fund);
- Orlov Dmitry (Agency of Medical and Economic Communications);
- Alexey Chesnakov (Center for Russian Political Conjuncture);
- Ilya Grashchenkov (Center for Regional Policy Development),
- Gleb Kuznetsov (Expert Institute for Social Research);
- Badovsky Dmitry (Institute of Socio-Economic and Scientific Research);
- Gaman-Golutvina Oksana (Russian Association of Political Science);
- Brilev Sergey (channel "Russia 1");
- Diskin Joseph (National Strategy Council);
- Turovsky Rostislav (Center for Medical Technologies);
- Kolesnikov Andrey (Carnegie Endowment, recognized foreign agent);
- Remizov Mikhail (Institute of National Strategy);
- Polyakov Leonid (Institute of Socio-Economic and Scientific Research);
- Gontmakher Evgeniy (IMEMO RAS);
- Marianna Maksimovskaya ("Mikhailov and Partners");
- Mikheev Sergey (political scientist);
- Mukhin Alexey (Center for Political Information);
- Simonov Konstantin (Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation);
- Lvov Stepan (VTsIOM);
- Pautova Larisa (Public Opinion Foundation);
- Zudin Alexey (MGIMO Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation);
- Ivanov Vitaly (political scientist);
- Bovt Georgy (political scientist).
- Nikonov Vyacheslav ("United Russia");
- Kulikov Oleg (Communist Party of the Russian Federation);
- Gusev Dmitry ("A Just Russia");
- Naumov Stanislav (LDPR);
- Ivanenko Sergey ("Yabloko").

Source: [Рейтинг 100 ведущих политиков России в сентябре 2023 года \(apcom.ru\)](#) (Last concluded 4 October 2023)

Annex 2: Sources to compose the database of the 100 most influential politicians in Russia.

- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in February 2022. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В ФЕВРАЛЕ 2022 ГОДА), 1 March 2022, [Рейтинг 100](#)
- [ведущих политиков России в марте 2022 года \(arcom.ru\)](#) (Last consulted 7 October 2023).
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in March 2022. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В МАРТЕ 2022 ГОДА), 1 April 2022, [Рейтинг 100 ведущих](#)
- [политиков России в марте 2022 года \(arcom.ru\)](#) (Last consulted 7 October 2023).
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in April 2022. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В АПРЕЛЕ 2022 ГОДА), 28 April 2022, [Рейтинг 100 ведущих](#)
- [политиков России в апреле 2022 года \(arcom.ru\)](#), (Last consulted 7 October 2023).
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in May 2022. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В МАЕ 2022 ГОДА), 31 May 2022, [Рейтинг 100 ведущих политиков России в мае 2022 года \(arcom.ru\)](#), (Last consulted 7 October 2023).
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in June 2022. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В ИЮНЕ 2022 ГОДА), 29 June 2022, [Рейтинг 100 ведущих](#)
- [политиков России в июне 2022 года \(arcom.ru\)](#) (Last consulted 7 October 2023).
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in July 2022. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В ИЮЛЕ 2022 ГОДА), 1 August 2022, [Рейтинг 100 ведущих политиков России в июле 2022 года \(arcom.ru\)](#) (Last consulted 7 October 2023).
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in August 2022. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В АВГУСТЕ 2022 ГОДА), 31 August 2022, [Рейтинг 100 ведущих](#)
- [политиков России в августе 2022 года \(arcom.ru\)](#) (Last consulted 7 October 2023).
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in September 2022. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В СЕПТЕМБЕРЕ 2022 ГОДА), 30 September 2022,
- [Рейтинг 100 ведущих политиков России в сентябре 2022 года \(arcom.ru\)](#) (Last consulted 7 October 2023).
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in October 2022. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В ОКТЯБРЕ 2022 ГОДА), 1 November 2022, [Рейтинг](#)
- [100 ведущих политиков России в октябре 2022 года \(arcom.ru\)](#) (Last consulted 7 October 2023).
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in November 2022. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В НОЯБРЕ 2022 ГОДА), 30 November 2022, [Рейтинг](#)

- [100 ведущих политиков России в ноябре 2022 года \(аресом.ru\)](#) (Last consulted 7 October 2023).
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in December 2022. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В ДЕКАБРЕ 2022 ГОДА), 29 December 2022, [Рейтинг](#)
- [100 ведущих политиков России в декабре 2022 года \(аресом.ru\)](#) ((Last consulted 7 October 2023).
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in January 2023. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В ЯНВАРЕ 2023 ГОДА), 2 February 2023, [Рейтинг 100](#)
- [ведущих политиков России в январе 2023 года \(аресом.ru\)](#) (Last consulted 7 October 2023).
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in February 2023. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В ФЕВРАЛЕ 2023 ГОДА), 2 March 2023, [Рейтинг 100](#)
- [ведущих политиков России в феврале 2023 года \(аресом.ru\)](#) (Last consulted 7 October 2023).
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in March 2023. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В МАРТЕ 2023 ГОДА), 2 April 2023, [Рейтинг 100 ведущих](#)
- [политиков России в марте 2023 года \(аресом.ru\)](#) (Last consulted 7 October 2023).
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in April 2023. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В АПРЕЛЕ 2023 ГОДА), 3 May 2023, [Рейтинг 100 ведущих](#)
- [политиков России в апреле 2023 года \(аресом.ru\)](#) (Last consulted 7 October 2023).
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in May 2023. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В МАЕ 2023 ГОДА), 1 June 2023, [Рейтинг 100 ведущих политиков России в мае 2023 года \(аресом.ru\)](#) (Last consulted 7 October 2023).
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in June 2023. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В ИЮНЕ 2023 ГОДА), 4 July 2023, [Рейтинг 100 ведущих политиков России в июне 2023 года \(аресом.ru\)](#) (Last consulted 7 October 2023)
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in July 2023. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В ИЮЛЕ 2023 ГОДА), 2 August 2023, [Рейтинг 100 ведущих политиков России в июле 2023 года \(аресом.ru\)](#) (Last consulted 7 October 2023).
- Ranking of the 100 leading politicians of Russia in August 2023. (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В АВГУСТЕ 2023 ГОДА.), 1 September 2023. [Рейтинг 100 ведущих политиков России в августе 2023 года \(аресом.ru\)](#) (Last consulted 7 October 2023)
- Ranking of 100 leading politicians of Russia in September 2023 (РЕЙТИНГ 100 ВЕДУЩИХ ПОЛИТИКОВ РОССИИ В СЕНТЯБРЕ 2023 ГОДА), 3 October 2023. [Рейтинг 100 ведущих](#)
- [политиков России в сентябре 2023 года \(аресом.ru\)](#) (Last consulted 7 October 2023)

Bibliography

- Alperovich, Vera, "The Russian far-right and the second Ukrainian campaign," SOVA Research Center, 1 August 2022. [The Russian far right and the second Ukrainian camp / SOVA \(sova-center.ru\)](https://sova-center.ru) (Last consulted, 4 September 2023)
- Anton Barbashin Political Discussion with Andrey Pertsev, skazheniya Vospriyatiya: Strelkov-Girkin[Distortions of Perception: Strelkov-Girkin], *Russia Talk* 29, 26 July 2023. [Искажения Восприятия: Стрелков-Гиркин - Russia Talk 29 \(Андрей Перцев\) - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) (Last consulted, 4 September 2023)
- BBC News Russian Service, [Telegram: Contact @agurulev](https://t.me/@agurulev), «Voznikla slozhnaya situatsiya so starshim nachal'stvom». *Pochemu komanduyushchiy 58-y armiyey ushel so skandalom?* [There was a problematic situation with senior management." Why did the commander of the 58th Army leave with a scandal?], 13 July 2023. [«Возникла сложная ситуация со старшим начальством». Почему командующий 58-й армией ушел со скандалом? - BBC News Русская служба](https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-61844444) (Last consulted, 31 August 2023)
- Corcoran, Jason, Putin is facing pressure from Russia's hawkish nationalists who want an all-out war in Ukraine, *The Insider*, 17 September 2022. [Russia's Hawkish Nationalists Who Want All-Out War in Ukraine \(businessinsider.com\)](https://www.businessinsider.com) (last consulted, 1 September 2023)
- de Valk, Gilliam & Onno Goldbach, "Towards a robust β research design: on consulted and different classes of unknowns," *Journal of Intelligence History*, Vol.20, Nr.1, 2021, pp. 72-87. Full article: [Towards a robust \$\beta\$ research design: on reasoning and different classes of unknowns \(tandfonline.com\)](https://www.tandfonline.com) (Last Consulted 4 September 2023).
- Durmus, Murat, *Cognitive Biases: A Brief Overview of over 160 Cognitive Biases*, lulu.com, 2022.
- Egorov, Georgy, and Konstantin Sonin, Why Did Putin Invade Ukraine? A Theory of Degenerate Autocracy, Becker Friedman Institute, Working Paper No. 2023-52, July 2023.
- Frye, Timothy, *Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin's Russia*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021.
- Galeotti, Mark and Ekaterina Schulmann: "Ekaterina Schulmann and Mark Galeotti on the Latest Evolution of the Regime in Russia," Pushkin House, 27 June 2023. [Ekaterina Schulmann and Mark Galeotti on the Latest Evolution of the Regime in Russia - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) (Last consulted 6 September 2023)
- Kahneman, Daniel, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.
- Kondrashov, Andrey, "Putin," a documentary film broadcast on Russian state television on March 13, 2018. [Путин Фильм Андрея Кондрашова - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) (Last consulted, 31 August 2023)
- Lazareva, Yevgeniya, Политолог Минченко: «Транзита власти нет. Путин идет на выборы» [Political scientist Minchenko: "There is no transit of power. Putin is going to the polls"], *Vremya i den'gi*, [Политолог Минченко: «Транзита власти нет. Путин идет на выборы» | Время и Деньги \(e-vid.ru\)](https://e-vid.ru) (Last Consulted 20 September 2023.)
- Le Monde (International English language edition), Russian former separatist commander detained on 'extremism' charges, 21 July 2023. [Russian former separatist commander detained on 'extremism' charges \(lemonde.fr\)](https://www.lemonde.fr) (Last consulted, 31 August 2023)
- Manifest Kluba razgnevannykh patriotov [Manifesto of the Club of Angry Patriots], [Клуб рассерженных патриотов \(angrypatriots.ru\)](https://angrypatriots.ru) (Last consulted, 3 September 2023)
- Mediazona, "Delo o «diskreditatsii» armii protiv Kvachkova", 15 August 2023. [Дело о «дискредитации» армии против Квачкова \(zona.media\)](https://zona.media) (Last consulted 6 September 2023)

- Minchenko, Yevgenie, rossiyskiye elity cherez god posle nachala svo [russian elites one year after the beginning of svo], Minchenko Consulting, 20 May 2023. [rossiyskiye elity cherez god posle nachala svo \(minchenko.ru\)](https://minchenko.ru) (Last Consulted: 20 September 2023.)
- Moscow Times, "Russia Fines Pro-War Ex-Military Intelligence Officer for 'Discrediting' Army," 15 August 2023. [Russia Fines Pro-War Ex-Military Intelligence Officer for 'Discrediting' Army - The Moscow Times](https://www.themoscowtimes.com) (Last consulted 6 September 2023)
- Pertsev, Andrey, 'The only person who isn't fed up is Putin', Meduza, 6 January 2023, '[The only person who isn't fed up is Putin' In 2022, the Russian political establishment 'donned the camo' — and found itself at odds with what ordinary Russians really want — Meduza](https://www.meduza.tv) (Last consulted 16 September 2023)
- Pravda* "Markov urged Strelkov to stop insulting attacks on Putin: they crossed the boundaries of what is acceptable" [Markov prizval Strelkova prekratit' oskorbitel'nyye napadki na Putina: pereshli granitsy dopustimogo], 10 January 2023. https://www.pravda.ru/news/society/1787559-igor_strelkov_vladimir_putin/ (Last consulted, 31 August 2023)
- Taylor, Brian D., *The Code of Putinism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Van Bladel, Joris, "Captivated by war: The Russian People in the Face of the Ukraine War, Mobilization, and Tactical Defeat," Egmont Paper 118, 27 February 2023. [Joris-Van-Bladel Paper 118.pdf \(egmontinstitute.be\)](https://www.egmontinstitute.be) (Last Consulted 4 October 2023)
- Vesti-Ru, "Putin: predatel'stvo proshchat' nel'zya, a so mnoy luchshe ne sporit' [Putin: You can't forgive betrayal, but it's better not to argue with me], March 2018. [Путин: предательство прощать нельзя, а со мной лучше не спорить \(vesti.ru\)](https://www.vesti.ru) (Last consulted, 1 September 2023)
- Wefer, Carlin, "Lilia Shevtsova on what Putin Really Wants," *Foreign Policy Rising*, 16 February 2022. [Lilia Shevtsova on What Putin Really Wants \(foreignpolicyrising.com\)](https://foreignpolicyrising.com) (Last consulted, 4 September 2023)
- [Полный контакт с Владимиром Соловьевым 10.08.2023 - Я политик \(yapolitic.ru\)](https://yapolitic.ru) The particular episode occurred during the time frame of minute 47 to 49.

Endnotes

¹ Carlin Wefer, "Lilia Shevtsova on what Putin Really Wants", *Foreign Policy Rising*, 16 February 2022. [Lilia Shevtsova on What Putin Really Wants \(foreignpolicyrising.com\)](https://foreignpolicyrising.com) (Last consulted, 4 September 2023)

² We refer to the well-known statement by Mike Tyson: "Everybody has a plan until they are punched in the mouth."

³ Joris Van Bladel, "Captivated by war: The Russian People in the Face of the Ukraine War, Mobilization, and Tactical Defeat", Egmont Paper 118, 27 February 2023. [Joris-Van-Bladel_Paper_118.pdf \(egmontinstitute.be\)](https://egmontinstitute.be) (Last Consulted 4 October 2023)

⁴ Brian D. Taylor, *The Code of Putinism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

⁵ Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011; Murat Durmus, *Cognitive Biases: A Brief Overview of over 160 Cognitive Biases*, lulu.com, 2022.

⁶ Giliam de Valk & Onno Goldbach, "Towards a robust β research design: on consulted and different classes of unknowns", *Journal of Intelligence History*, Vol.20, Nr.1, 2021, pp. 72-87. Full article: [Towards a robust \$\beta\$ research design: on reasoning and different classes of unknowns \(tandfonline.com\)](https://tandfonline.com) (Last Consulted 4 September 2023).

⁷

⁸ "Putin", a documentary film by Andrey Kondrashov, was broadcast on Russian state television on March 13, 2018. [Путин Фильм Андрея Кондрашова - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) (Last consulted, 31 August 2023)

⁹ Telegram: Contact @agurulev; BBC News Russian Service, «Voznikla slozhnaya situatsiya so starshim nachal'stvom». *Pochemu komanduyushchiy 58-y armiyey ushel so skandalom?* [There was a problematic situation with senior management." Why did the commander of the 58th Army leave with a scandal?], 13 July 2023.

[«Возникла сложная ситуация со старшим начальством». Почему командующий 58-й армией ушел со скандалом? - BBC News Русская служба](https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-62444444) (Last consulted, 31 August 2023)

¹⁰ Jason Corcoran, Putin is facing pressure from Russia's hawkish nationalists who want all-out war in Ukraine, *The Insider*, 17 September 2022. [Russia's Hawkish Nationalists Who Want All-Out War in Ukraine \(businessinsider.com\)](https://www.businessinsider.com) (last consulted, 1 September 2023)

¹¹ Manifest Kluba razgnevannykh patriotov [Manifesto of the Club of Angry Patriots], [Клуб рассерженных патриотов \(angrypatriots.ru\)](https://angrypatriots.ru) (Last consulted, 3 September 2023)

¹² Le Monde (International English language edition), Russian former separatist commander detained on 'extremism' charges, 21 July 2023. [Russian former separatist commander detained on 'extremism' charges \(lemonde.fr\)](https://www.lemonde.fr) (Last consulted, 31 August 2023)

¹³ "Markov prizval Strelkova prekratit' oskorbitel'nyye napadki na Putina: pereshli granitsy dopustimogo" [Markov urged Strelkov to stop insulting attacks on Putin: they crossed the boundaries of what is acceptable], *Pravda*, 10 January 2023. https://www.pravda.ru/news/society/1787559-igor_strelkov_vladimir_putin/ (Last consulted, 31 August 2023)

¹⁴ [Полный контакт с Владимиром Соловьевым 10.08.2023 - Я политик \(yapolitic.ru\)](https://yapolitic.ru) The particular episode occurred during the time frame of minute 47 to 49.

¹⁵ Moscow Times, “Russia Fines Pro-War Ex-Military Intelligence Officer for ‘Descrediting’ Army”, 15 August 2023. [Russia Fines Pro-War Ex-Military Intelligence Officer for ‘Descrediting’ Army - The Moscow Times](#) (Last consulted 6 September 2023); Mediazona, “Delo o «diskreditatsii» armii protiv Kvachkova”, 15 August 2023. [Дело о «дискредитации» армии против Квачкова \(zona.media\)](#) (Last consulted 6 September 2023)

¹⁶ For a good overview of the link between Russia’s far-right extremism and the “Party of War”, see: Vera Alperovich, “The Russian far-right and the second Ukrainian campaign”, SOVA Research Center, 1 August 2022. [The Russian far right and the second Ukrainian camp... / SOVA \(sova-center.ru\)](#) (Last consulted, 4 September 2023)

¹⁷ “Putin: predatel'stvo proshchat' nel'zya, a so mnoy luchshe ne sporit' [Putin: You can't forgive betrayal, but it's better not to argue with me], Vesti-Ru, March 2018. [Путин: предательство прощать нельзя, а со мной лучше не спорить \(vesti.ru\)](#) (Last consulted, 1 September 2023)

¹⁸ Anton Barbashin Political Discussion with Andrey Pertsev, skazheniya Vospriyatiya: Strelkov-Girkin[Distortions of Perception: Strelkov-Girkin], Russia Talk 29, 26 July 2023. [Искажения Восприятия: Стрелков-Гиркин - Russia Talk 29 \(Андрей Перцев\) - YouTube](#) (Last consulted, 4 September 2023)

¹⁹ Georgy Egorov and Konstantin Sonin, Why Did Putin Invade Ukraine? A Theory of Degenerate Autocracy, Becker Friedman Institute, Working Paper No. 2023-52, July 2023.

²⁰ Quote from a talk between him and Ekaterina Schulmann: “Ekaterina Schulmann and Mark Galeotti on the Latest Evolution of the Regime in Russia”, Pushkin House [13:55-14:00], 27 June 2023. [Ekaterina Schulmann and Mark Galeotti on the Latest Evolution of the Regime in Russia - YouTube](#) (Last consulted 6 September 2023)

²¹ Timothy Frye, *Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin’s Russia*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021.

²² [О нас \(apecom.ru\)](#) (Last consulted, 4 September 2023)

²³ Yevgeniya Lazareva, Политолог Минченко: «Транзита власти нет. Путин идет на выборы» [Political scientist Minchenko: “There is no transit of power. Putin is going to the polls”], Vremya i den'gi, [Политолог Минченко: «Транзита власти нет. Путин идет на выборы» | Время и Деньги \(e-vid.ru\)](#) (Last Consulted 20 September 2023.) Yevgenie Minchenko, rossiyskiye elity cherez god posle nachala svo [russian elites one year after the beginning of svo], Minchenko Consulting, 20 May 2023. [российские элиты через год после начала сво \(minchenko.ru\)](#) (Last Consulted: 20 September 2023.) There is a lot of discussion -and guessing- about Putin’s inner circle. See, for instance, Andrey Pertsev, ‘The only person who isn’t fed up is Putin’, Meduza, 6 January 2023, ‘[The only person who isn’t fed up is Putin](#)’ In 2022, the Russian political establishment ‘donned the camo’ — and found itself at odds with what ordinary Russians really want — [Meduza](#) (Last consulted 16 September 2023); Nevertheless, the same names associated with the Russian political elite remain remarkably consistent, with some nuanced variations.