

This book does not cover the most recent articulations of racism in Russia after the Ukrainian crisis. We can surmise that phenotypic differences have become less pertinent when framed by the ideology of the “Russian World,” whereas “racially impeccable” Ukrainians have been “Othered” in a non-racist way. The book, nevertheless, can serve as a good theoretical launch pad for such research.

MIKHAIL SUSLOV

Uppsala Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies
University of Uppsala

Reexamining Economic and Political Reforms in Russia, 1985–2000: Generations, Ideas, and Changes. By Vladimir Gel'man, Otar Marganiya and Dmitry Travin. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014. x, 180 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$80.00, hard bound.

Authoritarian Russia: Analyzing Post-Soviet Regime Changes. By Vladimir Gel'man. Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2015. xvi, 208 pp. Notes. Index. \$25.95, soft bound.

Twenty-five years after the foundation of the Russian Federation in December 1991 seems an apt juncture at which to consider the nature of the Russian state and the kind of regime that has begun to cement itself. The books under review constitute two such efforts, both taking the development of the Russian state since *perestroika* as their primary subject matter, yet employing somewhat different approaches to the factors that are shaping the political system. While the authors of both books consider domestic elites to be the primary political agents in Russia, *Reexamining Economic and Political Reforms in Russia* presents a broad-brush, historical account of changes in Russian elite thinking and *Authoritarian Russia* takes steps towards building a theory of authoritarianism, using the Russian case as its focus. Thus, for a thorough understanding of the type of regime that currently exists in Russia and its historical foundations, the two books make excellent accompaniment for one another.

Reexamining Economic and Political Reforms in Russia explores the role of ideas and generational change in the evolution of Russian politics, arguing that the shift from the optimistic “60er” generation to the cynical “70er” generation “was one of the most important factors that had a direct influence on the agenda of modernization transformations of the late twentieth century” (18). The 60ers, or “reformers,” came of age during the Stalin era, whose “ideological programme . . . was inevitably limited to criticism of Soviet reality” (47) due to the highly censored and ideologically orthodox nature of the Soviet public sphere. As such, during *perestroika*, this generation, many of whom had then come to power, initially wanted to reform socialism rather than abandon it. The 70ers, by contrast, grew up during Leonid Brezhnev’s stagnation and are characterized by an “ideology-deprived pragmatic rationalism” (134), seeking to improve their own status and material well-being rather than contribute to the improvement of society. Promoted to leadership positions by Boris Yeltsin, 70ers have remained in place under Putin and, unlike the 60ers, have adopted the view that “the economic problems had undoubted priority over the reforming of the political system of the country” (70). One of the central arguments of the book is that neither the democratic reforms of the 60ers nor the economic reforms of the 70ers were implemented in their entirety, a fact that paved the way for the regime that has consolidated under Putin, which the authors characterize as “unfree market under autocracy” (122). The treatment of policy change through the lens of generational difference is a unique one and greatly adds to our understanding of contemporary Russian political history.

Unfortunately, however, the quality of the copyediting is poor and makes the book difficult to read at points.

Authoritarian Russia aims to make more universal claims about the development and consolidation of authoritarianism. Setting out to answer the question of why Russia has not become a democracy (xiii), the author begins with the assumption that democracies only emerge when constraints are placed on otherwise self-interested, power-maximizing elites. Vladimir Gel'man's analysis shows that Russian political actors after Soviet collapse "faced rather weak institutional and political constraints" (11) and hence were able to shape the new Russian polity to suit their personal goals. In the author's view, three factors cause democratization: the need to resolve social or political conflicts; the level of international influence; and the ideology or preferences of domestic political leaders. In the case of Russia, none of these factors were present in sufficient amounts to facilitate institutional change in this direction. To illustrate this argument, the author explores a series of "critical junctures" at which a more democratic path could have been taken. These include the adoption of the 1993 constitution (39), the elimination of political pluralism in the Duma during Vladimir Putin's first two terms as President (77), and Medvedev's empty rhetoric on modernization which led to disappointment with the regime among the urban middle classes (106). Whether or not one agrees with Gel'man's pessimistic view of human nature upon which his theory of authoritarianism rests (and which stands in contrast to the picture painted of the idealist "60er" generation discussed above), *Authoritarian Russia* provides a deeply compelling account of the logic of the political changes in Russia during the last 25 years. There are also numerous interesting comparisons between Russia and various other regimes commonly considered authoritarian. Indeed, these brief discussions (for example, 83–84, 95–96 and 109), point toward a fruitful future endeavor of deeper comparative analyses of non-democratic regime building.

Taken together, the books under review constitute detailed and innovative analyses of domestic Russian politics and are important reading for students of the post-Soviet space. In terms of the authors' relationship to their subject matter, there is clear disappointment articulated in both texts regarding the perceived stagnation of Russian political and economic development, as well as increasing authoritarian tendencies evident under Vladimir Putin. The two books end with the assertion that Russia is on "the path to freedom," yet one can't help but wonder, given that the analyses presented seem to suggest further stagnation in Russia's medium-term future, whether this assertion is a prognosis or merely a hope.

CATHERINE OWEN
Shaanxi Normal University
Xi'an, China