The Influence of Institutional and Non-institutional Aspects of the Authoritarianism on Today’s Political Processes in Russia

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The problem of authoritarianism is now becoming ever more relevant. The comprehensive analysis of authoritarianism takes into account the dynamics of authoritarian attitudes and values at the individual level, the means of political control, and the prospects of institutional transformations in contemporary Russia. This research proposes a new approach to the analysis and measurement of authoritarianism in order to determine the nature and the influential effect of the authoritarian syndrome on political processes and, moreover, to find the reasons for the viability of authoritarianism in modern Russia. What are the individual, societal and political prerequisites that contribute to increasing authoritarianism? The analysis of political changes in Russia’s system over the past decade shows the dynamics of the political institutions of state power from pro-democratic to authoritarian. Institutional changes in the political system have responded to the requirements of the population for authoritarianism—the desire for strong leadership and the establishment of order. How does the implementation of state policies both enhance and benefit from widespread authoritarianism? This research represents an attempt, on the basis of systematic studies of authoritarianism, to identify effective ways to overcome the authoritarian syndrome and to determine the trajectory of the evolution of political institutions in Russia.

Keywords: the authoritarian syndrome, the transformation of society, the cultural trauma, the culture, the political education

Forming a new society, the Russian authorities are not to be thought over the question that except of new or renewed institutions, simulated processes and a constructed virtual reality, there is another component—a political-cultural component. On the one hand, all interactions are determined by a socio-cultural system, on the other hand, have an effect on it.

The agenda to contemporary social and political researches is determinated by non-scientific queries and requirements. The study of the socio-political transformations is just an example of work of researchers and scientists which is determined by practical needs. Request practices contributed to the fact that the advance-guard of scientific researches has become a subject matter concerned with the study of interaction and interdependence of the political culture and the political institutions in the process of the democratic transition and societal transformation of the society as a whole.

Urnov (2012, p. 6) took note of underestimation of the cultural factor of democratization, the lack of systemic researches devoted to the role and problems of culture in transitology.

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For the most part, this article is devoted to the important problem of interaction between culture and politics in the process of the political (and societal) transformation—an updating, and a threat of the authoritarian syndrome as a result of the cultural trauma is generated by the transition.

First of all, it is necessary to clarify key concepts: the political transformation, the culture, and the authoritarian syndrome.

Political transformation means the transition of a society from a socio-economic and politico-cultural system to another.

Culture means that each of many different cultures is a direct regulator of behavior and represents constellation of subjective meanings, values, attitudes, stereotypes, roles, tastes and styles of behavior.

The analysis of the political processes in contemporary Russia points to increasing the authoritarianism in social consciousness. The main components of the authoritarian syndrome are the desire of rigorous governing, social hierarchy, paternalistic perception of power, the trend to xenophobia and nationalism, and the concept of superpower. The results of opinion surveys prove that fact. The analysis of the authoritarian syndrome and its influence on political issues has become urgent.

In modern science, a number of works that have become classics are devoted to the content of the authoritarian syndrome and conditions of its emergence, offering a scale measuring a degree of the authoritarianism in a society (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Fromm, 2000). There are also empirical studies that reveal the essence of the authoritarianism or its individual components in some countries, including Russia (Abalakina, Ageev, & McFarland, 1990; Urnov, 2012; Samoylova, 1994; Yurtaykin, & Dyakonova, 2001).

Russian current citizens ambiguously perceive occurring political processes. Contradictions and discrepancies are observed between levels of cognitive and behavioral attitudes toward the political process. In this regard, it makes sense to raise a question to find causes of such discrepancies for the analysis of contemporary political practices and predicting political behavior of citizens. There is still an unanswered question—Why are some citizens more susceptible to democratic attitudes and practices in some politico-cultural spaces, while others are resistant to them demonstrating the authoritarian mind, and why do not these citizens adapt to change, while others do that? What is it—the structure of the nature of the individual, socio-economic factors and the political and cultural background related to susceptibility to the authoritarian anti-democratic values, attitudes and behavioral practices?

Theory

The intensity, incidence and sustainability of the authoritarian syndrome depend on the degree of the cultural trauma as a result of the political and societal transformation. This assumption requires the explanation and specification.

Polish sociologist Sztompka (2001a) offered a theoretical and conceptual explanation of post-communist transformations. Sztompka (2001a) called his theory a concept of the cultural trauma.

He defined six stages of the traumatic condition, which was used as a research tool describing the post-Soviet changes in Russia and in the light of a qualitatively different look at the problem of the authoritarian syndrome:

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1 See Levada Center Foundation, “Public Opinion” Foundation.
(1) Stage I: the favorable structural and cultural preconditions

The society loses its homogeneity, consistency and stability. Conflicts and contradictions arise and rapidly spread at all the structural and cultural levels of the society organization. In Russia, they are the state of stagnation in the Soviet economy, clearly economic and technological lag compared to the West, the huge national debt, the threat of loss of the superpower status, and the depreciation of the industrial and military capabilities. Radical change occurred in all spheres of life: work, leisure, consumption, education, participation in politics, and religion;

(2) Stage II: the traumatic event or situation

In Russia, they are the collapse of the empire and loss of savings, the impoverishment of the population and the suspension of business, the rapid growth of unemployment and crime, the status degradation, the crisis of health and education systems;

(3) Stage III: the traumatic state of the society

The traumatic situation may actually exist, but does not manifest itself until it does not stick the label of social problems. The traumatic situations develop into the traumatic state because of an interpretive action by individuals, agents, or media. Actors contribute to activation or neutralization of the traumatic situation. Some people perceive the traumatic events destructively, but for others it is useful and desirable. Sztompka (2001b) explained that the reason for the different sensitivity and susceptibility to the traumas was the differentiation of access to a fund of the cultural patterns and interpretation. Some groups have a higher ability of perception and interpretation of traumas, while others have no real means of overcoming the crisis. The decisive factor in overcoming the trauma is the presence of the individual social, cultural and educational capital;

(4) Stage IV: the formation of a new cultural system

The emergence of new democratic institutions in a situation of shortage, or rather lack of people willing to act in new political, institutional and cultural contexts and clash of incompatible cultures triggered the activation of the authoritarian syndrome in post-Soviet Russia. Those who turned out to be incompatible with a new cultural system had a high level of frustration with a dominant attitude on suspicion of everything;

(5) Stage V: the post-traumatic adaptation

The post-traumatic adaptation involves the use of either the active coping strategies, or conversely, the strategy of reconciliation with them. Merton (2006) proposed the model of individuals adapting to realities of the society. The active adaptation includes innovation (the creative class) and rebellion (the leaders of extremist groups), the passive ritualism and retretizm (homeless). The passive adaptation strategy is dominant in Russian society, aggravates effects of the traumatic events, and contributes to stability of manifestations of the authoritarian syndrome.

Moreover, there should take note of another aspect—the Russian ruling class did not have resources, experience and sufficient knowledge of the positive interpretation of effects of the collapse of the country, and rationalization of the traumatic events. The elite merely interpreted change in the slogan “Vote or Lose”, “Yes-Yes-No-Yes”, and “Party, let me steer”;

(6) Stage VI: the overcoming trauma

The final phase of an overcoming trauma, in fact, aligns with the end of the transitional period. Sztompka (2001b) noted that means of the cultural trauma for overcoming, along with the presence of high levels of education, were the level of tolerance, relativistic views, and presence of large social networks, which served as shock absorbers traumas.
What counts as overcoming the cultural trauma or the completion of the “transition” period? What are the political-economic and socio-cultural changes that could be determined to phase overcoming of the cultural trauma? The problem of definition remains unresolved due to lack of reliable criterion for evaluation.

Method

Legatum Prosperity Index\(^2\) was used in this article. The unique index of an overall assessment of the national wealth includes eight sub-indexes and data of 79 variables for 110 countries since 2008. The choice of countries, due to the fact that this article illustrates Sztompka’s concept of the cultural trauma, is in the case of Russia. The processes of post-communist Poland were analyzed by Sztompka in his article.

The way of overcoming trauma to prosperity and welfare is unique for each country. The data of the index should be interpreted with reasonable degree of conditionality. The index does not determine a final chance to augment wealth or to collapse a country, but some data assert obstacles impeding prosperity, such as the authoritarian syndrome.

Eight sub-indexes (see Figure 1) are as follows:

1. The economy sub-index includes: macro-economic policies, economic satisfaction and expectations, foundation for economic growth and an efficient financial sector;
2. The entrepreneurship and opportunity sub-index includes: entrepreneurship environment, innovative activity, and access to opportunity. The conditions for business development in Russia compared to Poland are good, business communication infrastructure is well developed, however the Internet security and the business rules are provided and adhered poorly;
3. The governance sub-index includes: effective and accountable government, fair elections, and widespread political participation of the society and the rule of law;
4. The education sub-index includes: access to education, quality of education, evaluation of human capital;
5. The health sub-index includes: basic health outcomes, health infrastructure and preventive care, physical and mental health satisfaction;
6. The safety and security sub-index includes: assessment of threats to national and personal security, protection and maintenance of national and personal security;
7. The personal freedom sub-index includes: the availability and guaranteed protection of individual rights and freedoms, the level of social and political tolerance;
8. The social capital sub-index includes: the level of trust in a society, social cohesion and engagement, charity, voluntary and volunteer organizations, the evaluation of the institutions of family and marriage, the prevalence of religious networks.

Looking at the overall rating of Russia\(^3\) holding the 59th place, and Poland\(^4\) holding the 28th, both countries are characterized by an average rate of economic growth and middle-life satisfaction of the population: 5.4 and 5.8 (0 > 10), respectively. Russia’s position has been improved since 2009, rising from the 62th seat to the 59th. Access to education and the quality of education are relatively the same in Russia and Poland. There is a low level of the political competition, a high level of corruption in the public sector, and

inefficient implementation of policy despite of an economic progress in Russia. Among Russians, 76% trust the army, while only 35% of them believe in the judicial system and 29% of Russians believe that the election process is honest. Poland to some extent is ahead of Russia in terms of democratic governance, taking the 36th place, while Russia is only the 96th. The Polish government is a democratic and effective implementation of the government policy. Poland has a high level of the system of checks and balances, the competition between the executive and legislative branches of its government. Poland’s success is partly related to an available capacity of the national culture and the influence of the West, which provides the overcoming of the cultural trauma as a result of the post-communist transformation and creates favorable conditions for the democratic institutions.

Russia faces a number of serious national problems: the internal migration, the refugee movements, and the emigration of intellectuals and the middle class. There is also a moderate risk of a personal safety for citizens to express their public political views. There are public displays of political violence and political repression. Poland also has the emigration of professionals and the middle class, however 68.2% of Poles feel their personal safety.

Russians trust each other limited by a narrow family circle. Active interaction between them is poor, social and religious networks are weak. There is a low level of the philanthropy and the volunteerism. Polish society is characterized by strong family relationships and developed religious networks; 39% of the population in 2010 spent money for charity and 13% of Poles were volunteers in various organizations over the last year.

Table 1 shows the comparison of countries on the Indexes.

Based on the comparative analysis of the countries using Legatum Prosperity Index, it can be assumed that the cultural trauma has been overcome by Poland. Polish society forms a new cultural system in contrast to Russia, where the cultural trauma turns up to be more significant in strength, the nature of influence and character of depth of the traumatic events, which contributes to stability and prevalence of the authoritarian syndrome in Russian society.
There are several symptoms of the cultural trauma occurred in Russian society which, in essence, are components of the authoritarian syndrome.

It is prevalence of the xenophobia and the nationalism. This is an acutest problem of growth of the nationalism among the youth. The spread of the nationalism is through blogs and social networks. The growing influence of the social networks (e.g., vk.com, twitter) promotes the growth of nationalist sentiment among the young. Some nationalist groups are posted on the website (vk.com), accounting for an average of three to 110,000 people.  

As for the attitude to other countries, 47% of Russians believe that Russia is now a great empire and plays an important role in solving international problems. Also 39% of Russians believe that Russia’s foreign policy should be followed more distance in relations with the United States, where 76% of Russians see it as an aggressor, seeking to take control of all countries of the world. Every second Russian belongs to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-negative attitude (50%). The negative attitude increases with age—from 40% among young people up to 55% among people approaching retirement age. Only 13% of Russians show the positive attitude toward NATO, especially people with high personal income and young people (21%).

As for the role of the state, according to the Levada Center in the period of 1990-2009 years in response to the question “What principle of relations between the state and its citizens would you personally support?”, Russians who answered that “government should care more about people” increased from 57% to 79% and the proportion who considered “people should take the initiative” has decreased from 25% to 12%. In 2009, Russians who believed that “most people in Russia cannot survive without constant care of the state” was 80% versus 15% who held the opposite view. In 2008, 78% of respondents claimed that “the state which takes full care of its citizens, gives them ample safeguards and controls the economy” provides more freedom to its citizens than the state, “which for the most part does not interfere in economic affairs, and provides its only citizens of the minimum social guarantees”, the opposite opinion was held by 14% (Moscow Levada Center, 2011).

The healing of the cultural trauma, change trends of the public perception and, ultimately, overcoming the

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Table 1
The Comparison of Countries on the Indexes (Place/Total Number of Countries)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index of comparison</th>
<th>Russia</th>
<th>Poland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legatum Prosperity Index (110 countries)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Life Satisfaction Ranking (110 countries)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Capita GDP Ranking (110 countries)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Competitiveness Index (139 countries)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Human Development Index (169 countries)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heritage/Economic Freedom Index (179 countries)</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corruption Perceptions Index (178 countries)</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision of Humanity Global Peace Index (153 countries)</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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authoritarian syndrome may occur as a result of that the traumatic situations lose their significance, related to political developments, economic success and development of the civil society, the formation of a full-fledged middle class and favorable external circumstances or as a result of transformation of an authoritarian to a democratic political culture.

Lewin (2000, pp. 160-196) wrote about the need for concerted efforts to transform the culture. The changes of the “cultural climate” include: the formation of new cultural patterns on the cognitive and behavioral levels of human, effective campaign with the myths, customs, symbols and social illusions, retraining of citizens and government officials at all levels. Lewin emphasized the importance of the personal experience. The person should be based on the personal experience—childhood, adolescence or experience of everyday life—in order to feel and to adopt new practices of thinking and behavior. Direct experience is not substitute for either a lecture. There should be a high degree of involvement of people in trouble, otherwise, the behavior does not affect, and thus is not entrenched in the minds of citizens. The effective cultural change should use an individual approach to citizens, taking into account age and all existing education hierarchy in the state, replace the ruling class and shape the public opinion.

Touraine (1998) wrote, in The Return of Human Acting, about a special role of political education and civic education aimed to confront the loss of social and political integrity. Dewey (2000) in his book Democracy and Education wrote that the political education was the essential tool for constructing and maintaining the democratic system. Dewey (2000, pp. 85-98) pointed out that democracy was not in the form of governance, and it was a way of life. The role of political education in the development of the modern democracy is to involve citizens in a political process as a guarantor of this system: “Democracy is an ongoing effort to establish a sphere of civil status and ensure that the private beliefs and group affiliation can come together and connect it to the atmosphere of mutual respect” (Touraine, 1997, p. 733). Sherbinin (2005), a well-known researcher in the field of the political education, wrote that because of the similarity of the political models and the history of Germany and Russia in the 20th century, it should look closely at the half-century experience in search of the educational models, post-totalitarian political didactics in FRG (The Federal Republic of Germany). Today’s practical problems, in his opinion, should include underestimation of effective interdependence of the political process and the level of political education of citizens (Sherbinin, 2005, pp. 4, 219-223).

Conclusions

The traumatic situation, related to the collapse of the state and the former economic system, revision of past traditions, violation of their traditional way of life, thinking and their perception of a friend/foe, led to the actualization of the authoritarian syndrome, and in particular some components. The major cultural trauma and limited cultural foundation (cultural environment has a limited fund of structural and cultural resources, identifies the corridor range of solutions, translates behavioral patterns of practice, and determines a possibility of production, interpretation and perception of meanings and practices) provide stability of reproduction of the widespread authoritarian syndrome in a society. Of course, the authoritarian syndrome is not diagnosed in people who have the social, cultural and educational capital, which allows overcoming the cultural trauma and adapting to new cultural and social situations.

Sztompka (2001a) drew attention to the fact that the effects of radical transformations and changes affected the cultural fabric directly depending on the accumulated intellectual potential of a society. The
changes either lead to enrichment, or decrease in fund structural and cultural resources. As a result of deep changes, country will become competitive and prosperous, or fasten in crises and will be inevitable decay.

The answer to the question, if Russia has overcome the authoritarian syndrome, and whether Russia is capable to overcome it, largely depends on the knowledge of the power and its actions.

References
Urnov, M. (2012). The role of culture in the transition to the democracy. Social Sciences and Modernity, No. 6, 5-17.