institutional system of late Soviet patriotic education had been dismantled by the late 1990s and the five-year programs of patriotic education fell short of established managerial standards, as Sanina argues, Soviet practices were quickly revived due to the habits of the educators (habitus in Bourdieu’s terms) and the popular appeal of the general idea of patriotism as a desirable goal rooted in the values and attitudes of the majority. The skeptical views of the educators expressed in many interviews do not pose a significant obstacle to the implementation of patriotic education programs. According to Sanina, most of those responsible learned the Soviet practices in the 1980s, when the enthusiasm of the 1950s–1970s had largely given way to a pragmatic acceptance of well-developed and conventional techniques.

The book presents rich and compelling evidence for the author’s thesis. Sanina successfully parts with the oversimplified image of propaganda constructed by elites, transmitted via mass media, and passively consumed by the masses. This more nuanced approach, however, also raises a number of questions the book does not answer. First, the “cold,” routinized version of patriotism revealed in Russia’s patriotic education apparently contradicts its openly declared intentions as opposed to the subtle techniques of “banal” nationalism, to use Billig’s term. Does this reflect the mere choice of the easiest way or an underlying strategy? Another issue given hardly any attention in the book is the challenge posed to patriotic education in Russia’s regions with predominantly non-Russian ethnic populations, such as Tatarstan. Do the practices of patriotic education, or their content, or both, differ and in what ways? Finally, it remains particularly difficult to estimate the crucial dimension of efficacy. Do the practices of patriotic education actually boost patriotism, respond to the already existing demand for the official confirmation of existing patriotic attitudes in the population, or bring about some unintended consequences? The latter still largely remains to be seen through future events as well as future research.

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Brian Taylor analyzes President Vladimir Putin’s system of rule, while Jordan Gans-Morse focuses on the evolution of property rights in Russia after the end of the Soviet Union. Taylor is professor and chair of political science at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, and Gans-Morse is assistant professor of political science at Northwestern University.

Taylor’s idea is that Putinism “is not a fully developed, all-encompassing ideology but a system of rule and a guiding mentality, a personality and a historical moment” (2). It is not only a worldview but also a set of habits and emotions. He sees three major implications of the code of Putinism: Putin matters. His actions and those of his team are guided by the code, and this code has made Russia underperform at home both politically and economically, while over performing abroad.
Taylor lays out his argument clearly in the introduction. The first chapter presents the code. Chapter 2 discusses the combination of limited freedom and repression. Chapter 3 emphasizes the importance of clans and networks. Chapter 4 discusses how poorly the Russian economy is run; Chapter 5 how the Russian state is misruled; while Chapter 6 claims that Putin's Russia is punching above its weight. The final chapter poses the question whether Putinism will last forever. In effect, the three first chapters present the code of Putinism, while Chapters 4–6 show what it means for the Russian economy, the political system, and Russia's foreign policy.

This functional structure renders the narrative timeless. Taylor makes the point that the full Putin system was established in 2003–4 in connection with the Yukos affair, but on many points he shows further evolution, with Putin becoming more repressive and pursuing a more aggressive foreign policy.

Taylor is at his best in the first half of the book where he dissects the code. The key ideas are statism, anti-westernism, and conservatism. Essential habits of the code are control, order, unity, loyalty, and hypermasculinity. The main emotions are respect, resentment, and a sense of vulnerability (40). Unlike many others, Taylor downplays the importance of nationalism, and he does not see Putinism as an actual ideology.

The author argues that at the end of the 1990s, Russia could have chosen different roads. Authoritarianism was not inevitable, but Putin chose it. “The political system became more authoritarian with Putin almost always choosing . . . to head toward greater control concentrated in the Kremlin and less room for independent actors” (6–7). Taylor claims that Putin and his team had no grand plan to build an authoritarian regime but that they were guided by their values, habits, and feelings.

A leading idea of this book is that in the absence of mediating institutions, clans or networks came to play a great role. When it comes to organized crime and its role in Putin's rule, Taylor becomes coy. He mentions Karen Dawisha's devastating book Putin's Kleptocracy twice, but he argues that “Russia has kleptocratic behavior but it is not a full-blown kleptocracy . . .” His counterargument is that Dawisha doesn't discuss “what the Russian state does when it is not stealing” (137).

Taylor avoids or downplays the ample evidence of Putin's personal corruption, so he does not include organized crime in the code of Putinism. While he spends a lot of time discussing the flaws of the judicial system and law enforcement, he does not suggest that this might be Putin's aim, only that reform would be inconvenient. This is becoming a clear dividing line in the literature about Putin's Russia. Moscow correspondents who have left Russia and might not want to return offer a much tougher view than western Russia experts who hope to return to the country many times.

Not surprisingly, as a professor of political science, Taylor is excellent when it comes to the functioning of the Russian political system, while his grasp of the economic problems is less pertinent. Yet, on both accounts his judgment is negative and to the point. He offers excellent comparisons between Russia and the other nations of the BRIC group (Brazil, Russia, India, China) with regard to various governance indicators and the performance of the public services, and in all cases Russia’s performance is far worse than its economic level would suggest.

In foreign policy, Taylor charts how Putin has tried to reestablish Russia as a leading great power, and he gives Putin positive grades, while paying limited attention to the damage Putin has caused to his relations with the west and other former Soviet republics. Taylor's final words are pretty negative but cautious. Russia is more authoritarian than is typical of such a relatively wealthy and well-education nation.

Taylor is well-read and well-informed, using excellent quotations. His judgment is judicious and balanced. His book offers an easy read. Curiously, he is highly
reluctant to include names, citing “a former Putin advisor” instead of naming Gleb Pavlovsky, although he is mentioned repeatedly.

Jordan Gans-Morse’s book deals with a much-understudied topic, the evolution of law and property rights in Russia after communism, which he discusses in eight chapters representing a mixture of thematic and chronological discourse. He discusses this development in terms of institutional supply and demand. Chapter 1 starts with the early 1990s and its violence, corruption, and demand for law. Chapter 2 offers a theory of institutional supply and demand, whereas Chapter 3 examines empirically how firms developed their strategies to secure their property rights. Chapter 4 depicts the development of state legal capacity, while Chapter 5 checks to what extent firms found legal strategies useful. Chapter 6 reviews the opposite, the effectiveness of illegal strategies. Chapter 7 discusses the variation in strategies between different kinds of firms. Chapter 8 concludes.

This is a very solid piece of research. Gans-Morse has tried to approach his topic from all sides. Naturally, he has looked into the relevant theories and studied the relevant empirical work, but he has also carried out substantial empirical field work, including 125 in-depth interviews with Russian firms, lawyers, private security agencies, and others, as well as a survey of 301 Russian firms in eight cities. He analyzed his observations thoroughly and soundly with regressions.

Gans-Morse arrives at uncommonly clear and satisfactory conclusions, which make sense but have not been so well empirically supported previously. In the early 1990s, organized crime ruled, but it was defeated in the mid-1990s. Gans-Morse emphasizes the great developments in judicial reform in the 1990s under Yeltsin. Commercial courts were established in 1992. The 1993 Constitution enshrined the principle of an independent judiciary. Two parts of the Civil Code were adopted, as were laws on bankruptcy, the security market, joint stock companies, and others. Vadim Volkov and Kathryn Hendley have studied these matters well before.

A relative rule of law took hold in the early 2000s. The judicial reform in 2001 has rightly been appreciated, but Gans-Morse argues that between 1999 and 2003, “Russia came close to attaining this rule of law ideal, at least in the economic sphere” (191).

It is in the Putin period after 2000 that Gans-Morse breaks new ground, as a new trend emerged. From the end of the 1990s, Russian private companies faced “illegal corporate raiding” (reiderstvo), which implied that law enforcement officials stole private companies by using state powers. The lawless confiscation of the Yukos oil company marked a turning point and the emergence of a “predatory state.” Several other such affairs were to follow with Russneft, Evroset’, Bashneft’, and many others of less significance. Gans-Morse notes “from the mid-2000s onward, countless entrepreneurs faced arrest on trumped-up charges as law enforcement officials . . . sought to acquire firms’ assets at below-market rates . . .” (9).

Gans-Morse summarizes Russia’s development of the rule of law in one figure from the rule of might in the early 1990s to relative rule of law in the early 2000s to state predation in the late 2000s (189). He does not predict the future, but the trend is clearly in the direction of more state predation. His evidence seems solid, and it is difficult to quarrel with his conclusions.

As Russian policy and structures have stabilized, this is a time for writing books rather than articles. These are two excellent books with solid empirical scholarship and good theoretical bases. Taylor offers a new way of looking upon the Putin system, while Gans-Morse breaks new ground in understanding judicial development in Russia after communism.

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