

# The Presidential System and Russian State Governance

Lingzhi Hua<sup>1\*</sup>

1. Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, 210023, China

\*Corresponding Author

**ABSTRACT.** *The Constitution of 1993 establishes the organizational form of state power with the presidential system as the core, which has a positive significance to Russia's completion of system transformation, healing the trauma of people caused by shock therapy, and taking the road of capitalist development. However, with the weak system of the separation of powers, the Russian presidential system and the strong groups are too powerful, which leads to the strong personal color of national governance. Therefore, while maintaining the authority of the presidential system, it is needed to ensure the institutionalization and scientization of decision-making, strengthen social supervision, develop civil society, improve the level of citizens' political participation, and ensure the effective operation of Russian state governance on the road of democracy.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Russia, presidential system, state governance*

The presidential system of Russia plays an important role in taking use of various social resources, accelerating the transformation of society and promoting economic and social development in Russia. The fundamental system with constitution as the core and the political system with presidential system as the core have been established, with Russia's national governance system being constantly improved and governance capacity being continuously improved. Nevertheless, special attention must be paid to the risks and hazards brought by the powerful presidential system to national governance.

## 1. Low Administrative Efficiency and Countermeasures

Modern political decision-making is highly differentiated and specialized, and the highly differentiated characteristics of specialized institutions and organizations for political decision-making are developing in different directions. So it is easy to lead to errors and biases in decision-making with the power of the President alone or few people. Without listening to a wide range of opinions, the President would make

decisions subjectively, which can easily lead to blind command and inefficient administration, bringing about disastrous consequences.

### ***1.1 The Weak System of the Separation of Powers***

Although the system of separation of powers has been established in Russia, the restriction and balance of powers is still very weak. Firstly, in the power system with the presidential system as the core, although the Federal Parliament, as a representative and legislative body, exercises legislative functions and supervises the parliament, it has very limited direct constraints over the President. The President can exert significant influence by dissolving the Duma and holding elections ahead, while the Duma is actually unable to impeach the President and amend the Constitution. Even the legislative power of the Duma is, to a large extent, limited by the dual veto of both the President and the Federal Council. Secondly, the efforts of the President's staff to strengthen the vertical regime by bureaucratic means are aimed at consolidating the existing ruling system and weakening the role of government. So the government has no decision-making power or autonomy in social and economic matters and thus can only act in accordance with the general policies of the President and the brain trust. The President can easily dissolve the government, leaving it unstable and difficult to maintain policy continuity. Besides, the government is unable to work independently, actively or effectively, resulting in the ineffectiveness of government at all levels from central to local, which is in great contrast to the President's personal prestige. Thirdly, the marginal status of the Duma in political system directly causes the lack of sufficient power support for the function of political parties, and demonstrates a unique phenomenon of "no ruling party". What's worse, with the imperfect construction of organization and the lack of the foundation of civil society, Russian political parties hence have limited functions in national life, failing to become the main political media of state power and civil society.

### ***1.2 Blindness in Decision-making Caused by too much Presidential Power2. Methodology***

The President's dictatorial tendencies also occur in the ordinary affairs of government, especially during the Yeltsin years. For example, the dismissal of Rotionov, the Defense Minister, and Samsonov, the chief of staff, in May 1997 was an arbitrary decision made in a rage without any foreboding or planning; in 1998, Yeltsin frequently changed the prime minister, from the sudden dismissal of Chernomyrdin's government to the dismissal of Kiryenko's government after only five months in power, and then to Primakov, Stepasen and Putin. As Lord John Acton stated, "Absolute power means absolute corruption." Such kind of actions of Yeltsin is purely for the sake of maintaining his status and coping with the aftermath, putting national interests aside.

### ***1.3 Too Much Power of Strong Groups in Government***

Due to the continuous expansion of the scale of the organization, members of the organization become unable to participate in the activities equally, and the continuous improvement of specialization enables only a few people to take these roles. Thus the powers will inevitably fall into the hands of a few “elites”. And the actions of the elites who want to maintain their power often violate democratic beliefs. As the iron law of oligarchy says “When a social group acquires the authority of collective power, it is likely to do whatever it takes to maintain the power”. And Russia has the tendency to transform rapidly from business oligarchy to powerful sector oligarchy. By regulating oligarchs and strengthening the centralization of power, powerful groups increasingly tend to form closed cliques, forming political alliances and exerting influence on the President’s decisions with various means based on their own interests and ignoring the needs of the people.

Cadres from the “KGB” system and other powerful sectors have accounted for 25% of the top posts in Russian politics, including the President’s advisers, government ministers, “Presidential Representatives” of the federal districts, governors and so on, who control the country’s administrative, economic, judicial and media-regulating powers. Such a proportion of cadres were 11% under Yeltsin and only 3% under Gorbachev. And in order to protect their vested interests, they are unwilling to accept supervision at all levels under the basic principles of democracy. [1] [2]

### ***1.4 The Tendency of Individual Dictatorship***

It is generally believed that a group’s worship of leaders is often latent, such as absolute obedience to any signal from the leader, heartfelt support for the leader’s decisions, and extreme enthusiasm for the leader. After Putin came to power, on the one hand, Russia developed steadily by centralizing power, cracking down on oligarchs and stimulating the economy; on the other hand, some basic principles of democracy have been destroyed in the process of implementation. Putin said on his visit to Germany in April 2005 that “the Constitution does not prohibit the discontinuity of a third election”. But Medvedev, who was elected as the President after Putin, actually gained the support of public opinion through the recommendation of Putin and the propaganda and praise of the media, which is similar to the abdication system in primitive society, while Putin actually extended his term by serving as the Prime Minister. Putin was elected as the President for a third time in 2012 and appointed Medvedev as the Prime Minister. Thus the core of Russian state power enters a period of “two main figures alternating in power” in the recent ten years, which ensures the continuity of the policy considered from the positive point of view. However, at the same time, it must be paid attention to that the country is not the private property of an individual or a group, and long term leadership is undoubtedly a red flag. The institutional arrangement of the state through the will of the individual is the regression of democracy and a bad precedent to set. Although Putin is a wise leader, if future presidents follow suit, it would be a

mockery of democratic principles and a return to the system of designated successors in Soviet communist era because it is certainly out of place to place the country's fate on one or two people.

## **2. Guard against Totalitarian, Dictatorship and Deepening of Democracy**

The progress and development of the society depends on the joint efforts of history. No matter how prominent a leader is, he or she cannot create a perfect system, not to mention getting rid of some weaknesses and defects in his or her personal character. The authoritarian system sets relatively high demands on the leader's character, and its shortcomings are often magnified due to the lack of constraints and supervision of a good system. It is an inevitable choice for Russia to adopt the presidential system, because only powerful political power can safeguard national sovereignty, national security and national defense capability. But it should also be democratic, fully respecting public opinions and serving the general public. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the restriction and balance of power, to change the direction of national policy and the tendency of political development excessively depending on personal preferences and choices, and to ensure the regularity and persistence of political behaviors and political decisions. [3] [4]

### ***2.1 To Ensure Russian Presidential System on the Track of the Rule of Law***

There are two indicators to consider whether a country's political system is developing: is it becoming increasingly more reasonable in structure and more perfect in function. The process of political development is a process in which the political ruling class and its allies are increasing, and democratic rights in the society are growing from nothing and from less to more. The same is true of the political development of Russia. As the core of Russia's political system, the presidential system must be supported by the majority of the people. And only by running on the road of the rule of law can make the organizational structure of the political power more standardized and orderly, the political decision-making more scientific and effective, and the ability of self-reform constantly enhanced.

Since the Constitution of 1993 established the regime with a strong presidential system at its core, Russia has developed rapidly in all aspects of society and economy and the national strength has been rapidly restored and enhanced. At present, Russia is at the stage of the coexistence of insecure charismatic authority and unsound legal-rational authority, and the authoritative politics based on the rule of law is the necessary stage and the internal process of Russian political development. However, in the long run, it is supposed to attach more importance to and give full play to the role of laws and institutions in political development, weakening the personal charm of the President. Because of Russia's background of the long terrible tradition, the public's fear of the powerful sectors, and the fact that the current main leaders were born in powerful sectors and need the support to stabilize the regime, the power of strong sectors will get strengthened in the short term, with the key of taking use of the power of democracy to create a horizontal

and vertical system of oversight so that the general public have the right to restrict the powerful departments.

## ***2.2 To Strengthen Social Supervision***

The democratic approach is more of an institutional arrangement, highlighted by the fact that those people who hold the highest authority are elected in competitive elections. In a democracy, the elected decision-makers are not entitled to enormous power, but share it with the rest of the society. In this sense, Russia is a country that has completed the work of democracy. Political supervision is a kind of supervision made by the system of political life to the application and operation process of the public political power of the state, because there is the possibility of imbalance, variation and inefficiency in political power, therefore, it is necessary to strengthen political supervision. In the actual situation of the Russian political system, strengthening the supervision of the power of the Russian President enables the stability and institutionalization of the regime for a long time.

First of all, strengthen citizen supervision. Citizen supervision refers to the supervision of individual citizens over state organs and their functionaries based on the rights granted by the Constitution and laws, which demonstrates the principle of popular sovereignty advocated by the constitutional states since modern times as well as the division of state power and civil rights and the restriction of state power. Citizen supervision is of much importance to Russia's powerful presidential system, which mainly includes citizens' right to know, to vote, the rights of equality and freedom of speech and so on. Citizens understand the basic conditions of the country and express their political preferences through voting, demonstration, protest and other forms. On the one hand, citizen supervision safeguards their legitimate interests. On the other hand, it restrains the presidential system to operate on the right track to prevent the blindness and subjectivity of decision-making.

Secondly, strengthen group supervision. Group supervision is mainly manifested as the supervision of the interest groups, which are active political participants aiming to realize a particular claim or interest of its own. Though interest groups are not well organized, they are wide-ranging and have close relations with the public, therefore, they can better reflect the interests and opinions of the people, and quickly transmit the political attitudes to the supreme decision-making body, which makes them function better to correct errors and deviations. Public power is supervised through the interference in legislation, influence on election and government, and litigation and protest. Thus in order to prevent the submission of supervision to the power of enforcement, it is necessary to strengthen supervision at all levels and establish an improved supervision system so as to accelerate Russia's transition to legal-rational authoritative society as soon as possible.

Thirdly, strengthen supervision by public opinion. Supervision by public opinion mainly acts as a deterrent and restraint to express certain opinions, suggestions and appeals and to supervise political authorities with the aid of news agencies such as newspapers, radio, television and the Internet, as well as letters, leaflets, rallies, etc.

Bentham believes that public opinion is an effective check on the authority of the ruler, and the core of the freedom of speech and publication is to ensure that citizens have the right to learn about the activities of the government and to criticize the government. Thus supervision by public opinion is conducive to the rapid formation of huge social pressure, and the huge reactions to political and economic decision-making errors can make up for the lack of legal and moral norms.

After the founding of Russia, the field of thought was completely opened up and the freedom of speech has been developed rapidly. A striking example is the return of Solzhenitsyn to Russia, a master of thought and literature, at the invitation of Yeltsin. As an important channel and means of political communication and participation in modern society, mass media such as radio, television, newspapers and the Internet provide information and a window for citizens to express their views and to participate in political activities, which allows citizens to express their political appeals, and forms invisible pressure on the President and the government, so as to improve their behaviors to be more reasonable and democratic. Therefore, supervision by public opinion is an indispensable part of s political development.

### ***2.3 The Cultivation of Civil Society***

An important reason for the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of Russia is people's demand of the recognition of basic human rights and freedoms as subjects in the constitution and law, and the demand of gradual development of civil society, with these rights and freedoms realized in the establishment and structure of civil society.

Russian leaders focus on cultivating people's modern sense of citizenship. The basic democratic rights of citizens were guaranteed and nurtured during the Yeltsin years, and since Putin came to power, he has pushed more aggressively for the establishment of the Social Council of the Russian Federation with no partisanship, and made efforts to establish the norms of mutual respect, tolerance for the coexistence of different religious beliefs to promote the development of civil society. Citizens are the motivation to facilitate the development of political civilization, and their status and function in the development of political civilization is achieved by virtue of the constant improvement and maturity of each citizen's sense of democracy, which is the ideological foundation for the stable operation of political system. The cultivation of modern citizenship requires to make the people aware that they can administer the state and society through their own participation in politics and to increase their sense of political responsibility and enthusiasm. So constructing civil society is the only way for Russia to modernization and the fundamental guarantee for its long-term stability. In addition, an orderly civil society is advantageous to the improvement of the presidential system. After the radical reforms of liberalism, Russia has broken the highly centralized political system with a strong mark of feudalism at great cost and established the framework of bourgeois democratic political system. Economically, Russia destroyed the planned economy that seriously hindered the development of productive forces and established the market economy system which diversifies the ownership structures and forms of

realization. This is all for the sake of making Russia equipped with the foundation for the development of civil society. Civil society in the West is formed gradually in the development of capitalism, while Russian civil society is still very immature because capitalism in Russia has only been developing for more than a decade. So it faces more difficulties than the West and requires the top-down efforts of the state. The modernization of any country is closely related to the formation and development of citizen, and thus it can only be realized and consolidated on the basis of civil society. The process of modernization is also the process of the establishment and maturity of civil society, making the presidential system perfect and more balanced, and keeping the country's political development on track.

In discussing the social conditions required for democracy, Tocqueville believes that autonomy at the grass-roots level and developed civil society are of vital importance to the maintenance of democracy, and citizens should supervise and restrict the government through extensive association and participation in public affairs. In modern society, individual rights have evolved to be civil rights, and only the combination of civil rights can exert influence on the political system. As Taylor notes, "The independent eye of society, including a number of interactive, self-organizing and vigilant citizen associations, is essential to consolidating the achievements of the democratic revolution". Only when a relatively strong and powerful civil society is formed can a country be supervised to run well on the track of democracy.

The development of civil society must be effectively carried out within the scope and under the control of the presidential system. After Russia was founded, the former state-owned enterprises, factory directors, company managers and financial speculators snatched a large fortune, while the middle class, as the main body of civil society, is still weak. Yeltsin had to rely on the oligarchs to maintain his rule and keep the new Russian society stable, having no time to attend to the childish demands of the middle class. After Putin came into power, he actively developed the economy and improved people's living standard and the quality of life, in which the middle class is being nurtured and developed. And the appropriate policies made by the President crack down on financial oligarchs who are hated by ordinary people, and effectively promote the people's confidence in the regime, which enables the country to develop on the right way. With the development of Russia, decisions can be better implemented only if they serve the interests of the majority of the Russian middle class. The cultivation of democratic consciousness makes most of citizens have a healthy political psychology, and forms relatively consistent political beliefs and political ideals, as well as a common value orientation, normative system, code of conduct and value evaluation criteria in the whole society, which gradually forms a more mature civil society and consolidates the political system of the country.

The rise of civil society, on the one hand, strengthens power restriction and democratic participation and supervision, and on the other hand, confirms and promotes the legitimacy of the value of democracy and rule of law. In spite of the imperfect development of civil society, the boundary between state and society, government and market is being clarified gradually, and the development of civil

society is an inevitable requirement for the consolidation and development of the Russian presidential system.

#### ***2.4 The Expansion of Channels of Political Participation***

In modern countries with highly differentiated political structures, their political decision-making bodies are highly specialized as well. Therefore, in order to provide professional advice to the President and make his decision-making more scientific and reasonable, it is supposed to establish a set of mechanisms for interest expression and synthesis, policy formulation and implementation, and analyze the decision by specialized intelligence and advisory agencies. The Russian President also needs to adopt an open attitude and consider the problem from the overall perspective so as to ensure the openness and diversity in political decision-making. Russia is undergoing a transition from electoral democracy to liberal democracy. And competitive election is the election of outstanding representatives with the fundamental prerequisite of individual freedom to be represented by one's own choice. The President and parliament have also become active in expanding the public sphere and protecting the individual freedom of citizens. And the people also enjoy the political freedom of speech, the press, association, assembly and religious belief, which is able to exert a certain degree of restraint on the President more effectively through their statements of intention and behavioral expressions. It also promotes social identity and increases the welfare of individuals, with the individual psychology getting rid of the throes of disintegration, raises and maximizes the potential of the whole society, and safeguards public safety and public interests. In recent years, the subjects of political participation in Russia has become extensive, the content of participation has been multi-layered, the channels for citizens' political participation diversified, and the incentives for political participation clearer.

It should be pointed out that a good power structure does not mean the equality and balance of power of each subject, but depends on whether it maintains the relationship of effective constraints. A strong presidential system is not necessarily undemocratic, but only a set of systems, including legal environment, supervision system, participation mechanism, civil society, etc., can ensure the Russian presidential system run effectively on the track of democratization, prevent dictatorship and political incompetence, and realize political development of the country.

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