

Taylor, Brian D.:

THE CODE OF PUTINISM.

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In recent years, given the increase in the power struggle between Russia and the West, interest in the regime built by Vladimir Putin has gradually grown. This issue has become the subject of several recently published books with varying approaches, areas of interest and (arguably) quality. The book *The Code of Putinism* by Brian D. Taylor, described in the following review, fits into this overall trend. The author himself states that the book 'is not a work of academic political science' and aims to 'provide clear and accessible discussions of the key features of Putinism' (p. 8). Therefore, the reader should be ready to encounter a book which is intended for the general public, even though Taylor's book follows the standards of academic objectivity, contains an extensive list of references, and uses relevant theoretical concepts.

Brian D. Taylor is currently a Professor and the Chair of Political Science of the Maxwell School at Syracuse University. His academic work is focused mainly on the role of coercive state organizations, such as the military and the police, in domestic politics. Taylor's research area is the post-Soviet space and his previous publications were mainly focused on the role of coercive forces on the development of the Russian political environment. Such a specialization seems to naturally present a perfect starting point for his analysis of this so-called Putinism.

His book aims to describe the nature of the political regime created by Vladimir Pu-

tin and its impact on the Russian state. In the beginning, Taylor defines the code of Putinism, which he considers to be the main factor influencing the decisions made by the current Russian political elite. The term code is understood in the book as being similar to the concept of mentality – 'ways of thinking and feeling, more emotional and rational' – introduced by Juan J. Linz (p. 10). Based on academic literature and other sources (such as expert analysis and opinion pieces), statements made by various members of the Russian elite, and illustrative examples from current history books Taylor argues that the code of Putinism is comprised of eleven elements which can be further divided into categories labeled as ideas, habits, and emotions (according to Weber, 1987). The ideas shaping the thinking of the current Russian elite are statism, anti-Westernism, and conservatism. The inherent habits of Putinism are control, order, unity, loyalty, and hyper-masculinity. The emotions influencing the thinking of the Russian elite are respect, resentment and fear. Taylor argues that these are the elements that are shaping the decision-making in Russia today (p. 40).

Taylor's interpretation of the behavior of Vladimir Putin and the Russian regime is of course only one of many possible approaches, and this is reflected in the book itself. Other authors may put more emphasis on structural factors – such as the state of the economy, history or culture – that are (according to their assessment) significantly more important than individual actors such as Vladimir Putin (for example, Fish, 2005; Pop-Eleches, 2007; Gaddy & Ickes, 2013). Taylor refuses this approach and argues that individual actors matter. However, he does not see them as completely independent from context, as would the authors depicting them simply as rational actors (such as Gel'man, 2015; Dawisha, 2015). By focusing on the mentality of

Putinism, his book counters the notion that the behavior of Putin's regime is guided by certain (and in some variants, fascist) ideology (suggested by Van Herpen, 2013; Eltchaninoff, 2018). As was presented above, Taylor instead argues that the mentality of the regime is significantly dependent on the formulating experience of the ruling elite from the 1980s and 1990s. This line of thinking is quite similar to the arguments presented by historians writing Putin's biographies (Myers, 2015). While formulating his idea of the code, Taylor applied concepts and findings from authors from various fields (among others, Sperling, 2014; Laquere, 2015; Malinova, 2015).

The chapters are structured similarly; Taylor presents an overview of the development in a particular area of the Russian state and suggests an explanation for such based on his code. The book focuses on the following areas: state institutions, clans within the elite in power, the functioning of the Russian economy, the manner in which the state is ruled, and foreign policy. The final chapter summarizes the arguments presented in the book, and suggests scenarios for future development.

The book aims to be complex, which might be seen as positive, since it could then be used as a comprehensive introduction into the functioning of Russia under Putin. However, this ambition leads to an unequal quality in the individual chapters. While some chapters present a quite detailed description based on complex argumentation (which also take into account other possible approaches and interpretations), others lag behind, and an informed reader might get the feeling that the reality being presented is somewhat oversimplified.

The claims made in the book are based on a significant amount of sources (including the author's personal conversations). It should be highlighted that Taylor often introduces the positions and arguments from Russian sources, which does not happen as often it should

in the debate about Putinism (especially in the public debate). Unfortunately the book lacks transparent argumentation in the form of a literature review that might explain the reasons for which the sources are chosen. Also, Taylor usually does not mention an author's name when quoting him, and describes him indirectly (such as 'a well-known journalist said...'). This approach makes it a bit difficult to follow the argumentation and forces the reader to browse quite often to the final pages of the book where the list of sources are located.

The main problem of the book, however, is that in some aspects, it fails to properly elaborate on its main goal and to evaluate the impact of the code of Putinism on the functioning of the Russian state. Even though individual features of the code are defined quite clearly at the very beginning, their application on the areas described remains too general, inconsistent, and not always based on the arguments. And so, only in some cases are the conclusions on the impact of the code as straightforward as author suggests, and others would needed further clarification.

For the aforementioned reasons, the overall impressions of the book remain mixed. It certainly provides an informed, balanced, and comprehensive overview of the current Russian regime. The simplistic language and use of examples and illustrative stories (in some cases based on the author's personal experience) help to make the text accessible, also to the non-expert community. However, the book fails to transparently and consistently apply the concept of the code of Putinism on certain topics, which one could argue is the main added scientific value of Taylor's work. Therefore, it would not matter if the author limited the scope of his book and would deeply examine only a limited number of areas.

Since Putinism is currently facing significant challenges that are leading to its trans-

formation (as is also reflected in the book), it would be interesting to assess the extent to which the occurring changes will follow the patterns based on the code conceptualized by Taylor. Hopefully the author will stick to this subject and provide us with more limited but equally knowledgeable and intellectually stimulating assessment in the future.

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Polese, Abel:

THE SCOPUS DIARIES AND THE (IL)LOGICS OF ACADEMIC SURVIVAL: A SHORT GUIDE TO DESIGN YOUR OWN STRATEGY AND SURVIVE BIBLIOMETRICS, CONFERENCES, AND UNREAL EXPECTATIONS IN ACADEMIA.

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The topic of 'surviving' in the academic environment has received only limited space within scholarly publications. This comes as a surprise, considering the numerous discussions among academicians on various blogs and websites, in social network groups and at conferences. The increasing pressure on publication outcomes has gradually turned attention to the less glamorous aspects of academic life, including searching for flaws in evaluation systems, reduced time for teaching preparation as well as the increase in mental illnesses and the suicide rate among academics. Academic publishers have released only a few books that discuss this subject. *A Guide to Academia: Getting into and Surviving Grad School, Post-docs, and a Research Job* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) by Prosanta Chakrabarty and *Survive and Thrive in Academia: The New Academic's Pocket Mentor* (Routledge, 2018) by Kate Woodthorpe are rare exceptions. Thus, *The SCOPUS Diaries* by Abel Polese has come on the market at the right time.

The author works as a senior research fellow at Dublin City University's Institute for International Conflict Resolution and Reconstruction and at Tallinn University. He is well known as a development worker, writer