

Would Russia Be Better Off Under a Monarchy?

By [Vladimir Frolov](#)

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Vladimir Zhirinovskiy often speaks truth to power. His recent initiative to dispense with direct presidential elections and anoint Vladimir Putin the country's supreme leader for life is not without merits. It could be an improvement over what we have today.

President Vladimir Putin's power has never seemed more secure. His job approval is at a stratospheric high of 84 percent, while 57 percent would re-elect him to another presidential term today, up from 29 percent in January.

Yet, policies betray a sense of insecurity. A year ago, the strategy was to introduce a degree of genuine competition into Russian politics to boost the system's legitimacy. Competitive mayoral races in Moscow, Yekaterinburg and Petrozavodsk provided voters with a real choice.

In this year's elections all serious alternative candidates, particularly in St.Petersburg gubernatorial and Moscow City Duma elections, were blocked from running. Mayoral elections rules were doctored to prevent the emergence of independent leaders in major

metropolitan areas. Gubernatorial races were largely imitations to endorse the Kremlin favored incumbents. Genuine opposition parties were not registered. Billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov left politics.

Instead of devolving authority to multiply stakeholders in the regime, the strategy is to maximize Putin's personal power. Without Putin, the Russian state is now dysfunctional. "Sans moi — le deluge" is the operating principle. There is no contingency planning for what happens "apres moi."

Putin himself has warned about the dangers of the collapse of the Russian state when power changes hands. He wants his system to continue when he exits the scene. The current course, however, would make his departure from power extremely destabilizing.

That's why Zhirinovsky's plan for an Iran-style political transition is worth considering. In Iran, the supreme leader and the Guardians Council have the ultimate authority, but do not run the country. They prescreen candidates in national elections, but allow for competing visions for the country's future. Unlike in Russia, parliamentary and presidential elections in Iran could lead to a change in policy.

A European way of doing this would be to introduce a constitutional monarchy, where Vladimir Putin would reign, but no longer rule. He would assume the role befitting his legacy — to become an anchoring institution for the Russian state, while giving the country space to develop.

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