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### **Putinism. Key Definitions, Elements and Origins of the Russian Federation Political Regime**

This article presents a comprehensive analysis of the nature, origins, and systemic evolution of the political regime of the Russian Federation. Drawing on political systems theory and psychological models of state formation, the study demonstrates that traditional democratic-authoritarian dichotomies cannot fully classify contemporary Russia. Tracing the historical continuum from imperial and Bolshevik despotism, the study conceptualizes “Putinism” as a conservative, personalistic autocracy supported by a rent-oriented economy, total propaganda, and society’s psychological dependence on a strong leader. Additionally the increased radicalization following the 2022 full scale invasion of Ukraine demonstrates how Putinism has shed its imitative democratic facade to institutionalize “Rashism” – an aggressive, neo-totalitarian quasi-ideology driven by imperial expansionism, great-power chauvinism, and revanchism, posing a serious threat to international relations and global security.

**Keywords:** putinism, rashism, political system, political regime, democracy, authoritarianism.

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### **Путінізм. Ключові поняття, елементи та походження політичного режиму Російської Федерації**

Дослідження вирішує наукову проблему концептуалізації політичного режиму Російської Федерації. На основі структурно-неоінституційного підходу та психологічної теорії державотворення у статті розмежовано фасадну політичну систему РФ та її реальне нормативне ядро – режим путінізму. Аналіз генези сучасного режиму вказує на його безперервний зв’язок із російським імперіалізмом та більшовицьким деспотизмом. Відкинувши імітаційні ліберальні реформи 1990-х років, владна еліта реставрувала патерни тотального контролю. У роботі операционалізовано поняття «путінізм» як специфічну форму консервативної, персоналістської автократії та клептократії. Доводиться, що замість ідеологічного прогресу цей режим використовує стратегію утримання статус-кво та широкомасштабну пропаганду, що призводить до інтелектуального паралічу та атомізації суспільства Росії.

Також представлено докорінну системну трансформацію режиму, каталізатором якої стало повномасштабне вторгнення Російської Федерації в Україну 24 лютого 2022 року. Аргументовано, що російська держава остаточно перейшла від консолідованого авторитаризму до відкритої неототалітарної диктатури. Цей етап концептуалізовано через категорію «рашизм» – агресивну квазіідеологію, що синтезує елементи фашизму, сталінізму, великодержавного шовінізму та ксенофобії.

Зроблено висновок, що базовим інструментом рашизму є радикальний експансіонізм,

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імперський реваншизм та концепт «збирання руських земель». Відповідно, сучасний російський політичний режим розглядається не як локальна геополітична аномалія, а як екзистенційна загроза глобальній архітектурі безпеки. Це вимагає від міжнародної спільноти відмови від застарілих дипломатичних парадигм і визнання факту протистояння з фашизуючою диктатурою, існування якої базується на внутрішньому терорі та зовнішній дестабілізації.

**Ключові слова:** путінізм, рашизм, політична система, політичний режим, демократія, авторитаризм.

**Problem statement and relevance of the study.** The main research problem addressed in this article stems from the difficulty of precisely defining and classifying the contemporary political regime of the Russian Federation using the traditional conceptual framework of political science. In the 21st century, political systems increasingly defy the classic dichotomies of democracy and authoritarianism; however, the Russian case presents an unprecedented challenge in terms of definition and explanation. For years, Western discourse has been dominated by a flawed and oversimplified perception of the Russian system of power, often defined merely as a hybrid authoritarian regime or a kleptocratic state. However, these frameworks are insufficient to describe a system that drawing on long-standing imperial traditions and the legacy of Bolshevik totalitarianism – has evolved into a specific phenomenon of personalist autocracy, defined as “Putinism”. The research problem is compounded by the fact that this regime is not merely a collection of state institutions, but is based on a deep psychological mechanism of social obedience and a peculiar intellectual paralysis of society, in which “ideology” has been replaced by a brutal apparatus of coercion, total control, and widespread propaganda.

**The relevance and importance of this issue** stems from the fact that the phenomenon of Putinism is no longer merely an internal matter for the Russian state, but has become one of the most serious existential threats to the global security architecture. A critical turning point in this long-term evolution was the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This moment exposed a radical intensification of the processes described – the Russian system finally discarded the mask of imitative democracy, transitioning into a phase of open dictatorship with distinct totalitarian features. As demonstrated in the study, this regime has institutionalized a new, aggressive quasi-ideology referred to in discourse as “Rashism”. It constitutes a synthesis of fascism, Russian chauvinism, xenophobia, and expansionism motivated by the desire to rebuild the former empire (“gathering lands”). An in-depth, scientific analysis of these mechanisms – their origins, nature, and current extreme form – is highly relevant today.

**The main objective of this study** is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the nature, origins, and systemic evolution of the political regime of the Russian Federation, with a particular focus on defining and conceptualizing the phenomenon of “Putinism” and its transformation into an extreme, totalitarian form known as “Rashism”. To achieve this objective, the following goals must be completed:

1. To create a theoretical and methodological framework by defining the basic categories of political systems, political regimes, and the dichotomy between democracy and authoritarianism, which are essential for the accurate classification and explanation of the Russian political regime under V. Putin.

2. Tracing the historical evolution of the Russian state apparatus and conceptualizing “Putinism” as a unique authoritarian regime based on historical continuity and extreme centralization of power in modern Russian Federation.

3. To analyze the systemic transformation of the Russian political regime after 2022 and define its evolution toward “rashism” -an aggressive, neototalitarian quasi-ideology driven by expansionism and revanchism.

**Research methodology and theoretical framework.** The theoretical framework is based on classical political systems theory, drawing on structural-neo-institutional and functional approaches (referencing the work of D. Easton (1957), A. Antoszewski (1999a and 1999b), M. Podolak and M. Żmigrodzki (2007), among others). These approaches served as the foundation for distinguishing and defining the key research categories: the political system and the political regime. Furthermore, the study draws on the achievements of social psychology, in particular the sociological and psychological theories of state formation (L. Petrażycki (1959 and 1968), G. Tosti (1897), M. Davis

(1909), etc.) and the concept of the “authoritarian personality” T.W. Adorno et al. (1950), which allowed for a deeper explanation of the mechanisms of Russian society’s adaptation to dictatorship and its pathological dependence on the leader’s power.

Furthermore, an analysis and explanation of the elements and origins of the political regime of the Russian Federation, known in the literature as Putinism is being studied by Ukrainian and foreign scientists and experts in the field, as: I. Hurak and I. Tsependa (2021 and 2022), I. Hurak, S. Derevianko, and O. Boichuk (2023), B. Demianenko ta V. Demianenko (2018), I. Koval and L. Kysliak (2022), W. Laqueur (2015), Ya. Syniak and I. Kritsak (2017), O. Skrypniuk (2022), C. Fish (2017), and others.

Consequently, the subsequent radicalization of this regime into its extreme, neo-totalitarian form, widely conceptualized as “Rashism”, has also garnered significant academic attention. The ideological roots, fascist tendencies, and expansionist nature of Rashism have been critically analyzed by numerous prominent scholars, including: L. Gudkov (2009), L. Yakubova (2023), O. Kondratenko, and V. Lytovchenko (2023), M. Komin (2024), O. Zaitsev, and A. Pavlyshyn (2022), M. Buchyn (2025b), O. Wasiuta and S.Wasiuta (2022), and others.

To achieve the set goal and address the research problem, a comprehensive set of general scientific and specialized research methods was applied. The system approach used to analyze the political regime of the Russian Federation as a complex phenomenon, enabling the study of interactions between the central government and society, and treating “Putinism” and “Rashism” as coherent political regimes. Historical-retrospective method (historical approach) played a key role in tracing the evolution of the formation of the modern Russian regime. It allowed for the identification of a historical continuum between Russian imperial traditions, Bolshevik and Stalinist totalitarianism, and the system shaped by V. Putin in the 21st century. Conceptual (terminological) analysis method used to precisely explain the etymology and meaning of key concepts in the article, such as political system, democracy, Putinism, Rashism etc. The combination of these research approaches and scientific methods enabled a comprehensive, objective, and multifaceted examination of Putinism not only as a formal structure of power but also as a socio-psychological phenomenon and an aggressive, totalitarian state practice.

### **Presentation of the main material.**

#### **1. Theoretical and methodological framework**

**1.1. Definition of a political system and political regime.** This subsection is devoted to defining two fundamental research categories: the political system and the political regime. The etymology of these terms will be analyzed, and classical systems theory – including the structural-neo-institutional and functional approaches – will be discussed to provide an in-depth analysis of the political system. The remainder of this subsection will focus on explaining the concept of a political regime, which constitutes the normative core of every political system.

The American scholar D. Easton was one of the first political scientists to study the phenomenon of the “political system” itself (Syzdykov *et al.*, pp. 2188-2191). He defined the political system as a set of interrelated activities that, to a greater or lesser extent, influence the way in which normative decisions are formulated and implemented in society. Building on D. Easton’s line of thought, in an attempt to formulate a detailed definition based on the existing understanding of the phenomenon of the “political system”, A. Antoszewski states that the political system is treated as a set of normative and factual relationships that operate within the sphere of political power. It encompasses such issues as the manner of acquiring power, the organization and actual course of political competition, the structure of state authorities, the distribution of power among decision-making centers and levels of the system, the manner of making binding decisions regarding the distribution of benefits and burdens, and the enforcement of political accountability (Antoszewski, 1999b, pp. 73-86).

As the most widespread and popular definition used to explain and describe the political system in European academic discourse, the definition presented in the book "*Współczesne systemy polityczne*", edited by Professor M. Żmigrodzki and Professor B. Dziemidok-Olszewska, should be cited. The definition of a political system reads as follows: “... a political system as the totality of state bodies, political parties, and social organizations and groups – both formal and informal – participating in political activities within a given state, as well as the general principles and norms regulating the mutual relations between them” (Podolak and Żmigrodzki, 2007, p. 12).

Defining the concept of a political system as a broad institutional framework leads to the need to move on to an analysis of its normative core. For while the system presents and describes the general structure and encompasses all actors operating within the state, it is the political regime that determines how the system functions. It explains and clarifies the mechanisms for acquiring, maintaining, and controlling power within the system. Therefore, the next essential step in the analysis is to examine and clarify the concept of the political regime.

We should begin by presenting the definition of a political regime found in the article by L. Cianetti, G. Del Panta, and C. Owen in their work titled “What is a ‘regime’? Three definitions and their implications for the future of regime studies”, because, as their analysis shows, this is one of the most common ways of understanding the phenomenon under examination. In this work, a political regime is defined as a set of formal (and sometimes informal) rules that determine how political power – understood as control over state political institutions – can be acquired and exercised. They argue that the most important and enduring definition of “political regime” states that a political regime is a set of patterns that determine the methods of gaining access to key public offices; the characteristics of actors granted such access or excluded from it; the strategies that actors may employ to gain access; and the rules followed in making decisions that are binding on the public (Cianetti *et al.*, 2025, pp. 1977-1979).

However, based on the aforementioned book “*Współczesne systemy polityczne*”, a political regime should be understood as a system of formal (legal) and informal rules and mechanisms governing the functioning of the center of political power and the nature of its relationship with society. From the nature of a political regime, one can infer who has access to decision-making centers, through what procedures, and how political decision-makers seek to shape relations with the rest of the political community. A political regime is thus a specific form of political organization that plays a special role in the process of stabilizing the political system (including democratic stabilization) (Podolak, M. and Żmigrodzki, 2007, p. 14).

On the other hand, Professor A. Antoszewski defines a political regime as a normative political subsystem. In the broadest sense, it consists of all systemic values and principles (such as freedom, equality, national sovereignty, representation, and the separation of powers), the structure of authorities, the formal and informal rules of the political game, and the resulting relationships between political actors. A political regime consists of both the rules of the political game and actual political actions aimed at establishing such rules (e.g., legislative measures) or at ensuring compliance with them (e.g., the activities of the Constitutional Court) – in short, everything that serves as an instrument for organizing collective and individual political activity (Antoszewski, A. 1999a, pp. 89-91).

In summary, the distinctions and definitions of the political system and political regime presented here allow for a precise analysis of the mechanisms of governance. As the analysis shows, the political system encompasses all state actors and structures, while the political regime defines the limits of their activities and the extent of civil liberties. Depending on how these boundaries are defined and how the center of political power relates to society, diverse models of state organization emerge. In contemporary literature on the subject, the most common dividing line runs along the democracy-non-democracy axis. For this reason, the next stage of this article will be to explain and define two fundamental political systems: democracy and authoritarianism.

**1.2. Democracy and Authoritarianism.** In the mid 1980s, and especially in the early 1990s, humanity underwent enormous social changes that, to this day, necessitate a reevaluation of many ideas, achievements, and values. At the same time, alongside the spread and consolidation of democracy, processes took place that clearly revealed a certain fragility and instability of democracy in the new post-totalitarian and post-authoritarian countries. Unfortunately, one of the clearest examples is the “democracy” of the Russian Federation. For its society, where democracy is proclaimed merely as demagoguery, pushed by mass propaganda, and where citizens have no real opportunities or are unable to exercise it in their own and society’s interest. Consequently, there is a great need to realize and clarify what the phenomenon of “democracy” is (Domoroslyi, 2021, pp. 5-6).

In the book entitled “*Demokratiia: istoriia, teoriia, praktyka*” Professor M. Holovatyi begins his explanation of the concept with its etymology, noting that the term “democracy” was first used by the ancient Greek historian Thucydides (c. 460-400 B.C.), explaining that *demos* means “the people” and *kratos* means “power”: thus, the exact translation of this term from Greek means “rule by the people”,

which emphasizes that it concerns sovereignty, the supremacy of the people over state authorities (Holovaty, 2011, pp. 28-32).

On the other hand, Professors A. Antoszewski and R. Herbut, provided a highly concise explanation of the concept of democracy, presenting it as a system that meets five fundamental and inviolable requirements: elections serve simultaneously as a mechanism enabling access to power and the enforcement of political accountability of those in power; they are competitive, periodic, and ensure equal treatment of all participants by state authorities; no actions are taken by those in power that would directly limit the possibility of a change in government; freedom of association for political purposes, as well as the freedom to express political views and criticize the government, is guaranteed in law and in practice (political opponents of the government are not subject to repression); every adult citizen has the opportunity to run for a seat in parliament, and the only exception to this rule is a prohibition resulting from a law and a court ruling based on it (Antoszewski and Herbut, 2001, pp. 19-22).

To summarize this issue, it can certainly be stated that the essence of a democratic system lies both in the regular holding of elections and in the existence of mechanisms for genuine representation, accountability of those in power, and opportunities for citizen cooperation. Assuming that the main premise of democracy is the recognition of the individual's agency and the subjection of the state apparatus to strict legal constraints, it can certainly be stated that the opposite of democracy is authoritarianism, the analysis of which will constitute the remainder of this subsection.

Any analysis of the concept of authoritarianism must begin by noting that the term has been in use for a long time. However, the sociometric study conducted by T. W. Adorno, E. Frenkel-Brunswik, D. J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford, in collaboration with B. Aron, M. Hertz Levinson, and W. Morrow, and published in the book titled "The Authoritarian Personality" published in 1950 (Adorno et al., 1950), provided a scientific basis for this phenomenon, although he did not describe authoritarianism as a political system, but rather as a specific type of human psyche and personality that can lead to the emergence and evolution of undemocratic regimes. T. W. Adorno's main argument was that an individual's political, economic, and social views form a coherent mental structure that is an expression of the underlying, hidden structure of personality (Hadjar and Boehnke, 2017, pp. 1-3).

Expanding upon and supplementing the reasoning described above, Professor J. Duckitt (2020), based on the analysis by T. W. Adorno et al. (1950) and the subsequent work by B. Altemeyer (1981) emphasized that the list of these dimensions, which are used to measure anti-democratic personality structures, should be expanded and can generally be divided into personality factors (i.e., genetics, personality traits, motivations, values, and cognitive factors), social or situational influences (i.e., the influence of family and parents, personal and social experiences, as well as broader social and cultural factors), and a sense of threat, which is largely situational in nature but also reflects personality differences in the perception of threat. To summarize this author's analysis, it can be stated that authoritarianism is understood as a morally absolutist and intolerant drive to forcibly impose specific beliefs, values, lifestyles, and forms of social organization on society, regardless of people's wishes and the associated human costs (Duckitt, 2020, pp. 177-190).

In conclusion, it is worth noting that Professors A. Antoszewski and R. Herbut, in their analysis of authoritarianism, distinguish between consolidated authoritarianism (which neutralizes all attempts at democratization, blocks the liberalization of civil rights, rejects the possibility of formally recognizing opposition groups, and does not allow for the legitimization of pluralistic competition for power) and non-consolidated forms (which partially allow for the expression of dissent against the government, liberalize information controls, accept the activities of strictly selected opposition groups, and sometimes even permit participation in the electoral process) (Antoszewski and Herbut, 2001, pp. 21-23).

## 2. Putinism

**2.1. Origins of the Russian Federation Political Regime.** After explaining the basic concepts and presenting the way of thinking about the most important concepts, such as the political system, political regime, and the dichotomy between democracy and authoritarianism, it is necessary to apply these concepts to a specific case study. In order to fully understand the complexity of the contemporary threat posed by Russia, it is necessary to examine the systemic evolution of the Russian Federation. In this subsection, by examining the phenomenon of Putinism, it will be shown how

Russia's specific historical trajectory has shaped a unique and aggressive form of government, which in today's reality poses one of the biggest threats to international security.

For several centuries, the Russian imperial tradition has played an important role in European geopolitics. As early as the late 19th century, Bolshevism was emerging in Russia as an opposition party to Russian autocratic rule. And after 1917, unlike other social democratic parties, Bolshevism gradually took on the characteristics of a continuation of Russian monarchical despotism. Russian Bolshevism not only absorbed the worst totalitarian traits of autocratic despotism but transformed into an extreme, misanthropic form of authoritarianism. Taking advantage of the military-political, socio-economic, and spiritual crisis (the destruction of the spiritual essence and the formalization of the Orthodox Church), the Bolsheviks increasingly expanded their sphere of influence over the population of the former Russian Empire. The Bolshevik Party's monopoly on power, the merging of the party and state apparatuses, and the monopolization of political power led to the establishment of a regime of lawlessness and political terror. Violence and total control over every citizen of the state became expressions of the all-encompassing nature of communist totalitarianism; the proximity of its ideological foundations to archaic mythological structures reveals the true essence of this system – the simplification and reduction of all social mechanisms to a primitive state. For many decades, the Bolsheviks and their followers – communists and neo-communist – taught people not to solve problems on their own, not to think, and not to take responsibility. Instead, they were taught that “wise” leadership would solve everything for us. And as a result: despite the active imitation of democratic reforms in the Russian Federation throughout the 1990s, a democratic society was never formed there. Moreover, over the past few decades, the Russian authorities have maintained traditions of despotic authoritarianism and a cynical and contemptuous attitude toward their own people, inherited over centuries. Since the mid-1990s, the idea of the “Russian World” has gained increasing popularity in Russian society and political circles, giving impetus to the process of reincarnating the Russian neo-imperial project (Sytnyk and Zubkovych, 2024, pp. 10-14). The rise of Russia's imperial ambitions was directly proportional to the resurgence of authoritarianism. Consequently, by the early 2000s, with the rise to power of Vladimir Putin, a former KGB officer, Russia had gradually transformed into a corporate state of the authoritarian-kleptocratic type. The imperial narrative of a civilizational confrontation with the West became a defining factor in both the Kremlin's domestic and foreign policy. At the same time, for the V. Putin regime and the consciousness of a significant portion of the Russian population, Ukraine was and remains part of a single political and cultural space, a zone of Moscow's so-called “natural sphere of influence”, and a kind of symbolic foundation of Russian statehood (Kondratenko and Lytovchenko, 2023, p. 28).

With Vladimir Putin's election as president of the Russian Federation, a steady trend emerged toward a gradual departure from the principles of diverse pluralism that had been established during the Boris Yeltsin era. Legislative changes initiated by the Kremlin became manifestations of new approaches to the transformation of the state; these changes restricted the possibilities for legal opposition activity, expanded the president's powers, and intensified the centralization of the state. These processes were complemented by the return of strategic sectors of the Russian economy to state control – achieved through both legal and illegal means – which gradually formed the basis for a new ruling team. At the same time, control over the media landscape was established, and the activities of non-governmental civil society organizations were restricted, creating additional opportunities for the Kremlin to tighten its grip on society. Thus, already during Vladimir Putin's first two presidential terms, the new ruling elite clearly demonstrated a departure not only from the basic principles of development in Europe's developed nations, but even from the limited democracy of the Yeltsin era (Hurak *et al.*, 2023, p. 137).

**2.2. Key Definitions, Elements and the explanation of Putinism.** At the beginning of the 21st century, the definition of “Putinism” gained several interpretations. This term is used to describe: 1) the type of authoritarian political regime that emerged in the Russian Federation in the early 2000s, in the era of globalization and the Internet; 2) the political system of the Russian Federation, which was established at the beginning of the 21st century on the ruins of the last totalitarian empire of the 20th century – the USSR; 3) a certain type of policy classified as regressive, inherent since the 18th century, when the desire to achieve desired results was based on the argument of force and was carried out from a position of strength. The use of the term “Putinism” mainly in a critical sense (as a combination of preventive measures and stagnation in an uncompetitive, economically weakened

Russia) was initiated by the media. One of the first to use it in reference to Russian President Vladimir Putin was New York Times journalist W. Safire in 2000, mainly in a journalistic sense to refer to the cult of personality, censorship and militarism (Safire, 2000). Political scientist A. Piontkovsky was one of the first in Russia to introduce the term “Putinism” into common usage (Piontkovsky, 2000). Russian political scientist A. Migranyan added a positive meaning to the definition of “Putinism”, recognizing it as the restoration of the natural functions of government after a period of oligopoly (Migranyan, 2004; Demianenko and Demianenko, 2018, pp. 241-244).

Putinism can be defined as a conservative, populist, and personalistic form of autocracy. It significantly differs from transformational dictatorships of the past, such as the USSR. Instead of progress, Putinism is obsessed with the status quo. It combines a resource-based economy with a fear of instability, leading to a rigid, conservative style of governance. This conservatism is combined with populism through attacks on “decadent” Western liberalism, particularly with regard to gender and minority rights. Above all, the regime is characterized by the unlimited power of one person. By depriving all other institutions and politicians of real power, the system becomes dependent on a single leader. Although this is intended to demonstrate strength, this dependence on a single person may ultimately prove to be the regime’s downfall, preventing it from functioning as the stable bastion it purports to be (Fish, 2017, pp. 61-73).

Considering current international affairs, it can be assumed that the ultimate goal of “Putinism” is to restore the former power of the USSR on the global political scene, and that the entire arsenal of so-called “Putinism” has become a tool for reclaiming lost territories. This is confirmed by the Russian Federation’s current aggressive imperial foreign policy toward Ukraine and other neighbors within its “sphere of influence”, as well as the rather interesting fact emerging from Putin’s public statement that the collapse of the USSR “was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century” (*Ukrainska pravda*, 2021). Of course, the collapse of the USSR was a personal catastrophe for him, and revenge is a matter of honor for V. Putin, as a former KGB officer. Thus, gathering additional Soviet republics, or at least the so-called “Slavic lands”, under the banner of “Holy Rus” has become the paradigm of contemporary centuries of development and a guarantee of the continued existence of Russian statehood (Syniak and Kritsak, 2017, pp. 29-31).

Currently, there are two prevailing theories explaining the nature of V. Putin’s regime. The first one says that the Russian Federation is trying to return to the times of the USSR, and that the current regime is a kind of fascism (in this case, Putin is identified with Mussolini). The second one defines the current regime as Putin’s authoritarian personalistic rule (Gudkov, 2009, pp. 6-7). However, in analysis of Putinism, L. Gudkov, for example, presented another way of understanding this phenomenon, defining “Putinism” as a conceptually new social phenomenon and type of state-political regime. He argued that “Putinism” is not totalitarianism and is not a known and well-described form of authoritarianism. Although the current regime arose as a result of the collapse of the totalitarian system and the impossibility of its reproduction, this type of power structure and its relationship with society differs from totalitarianism. Despite the fact that many institutional structures (courts, prosecutors’ offices, the military, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, schools, etc.) have remained almost unchanged since Soviet times, the very context of their existence and functioning has become different. The old system has disintegrated, meaning that it has lost the integrity and integration of its parts, which means that the “parts” have become much more subordinate to their own (departmental, corporate, clan) interests. He emphasizes that the head of state in this case is an apparatus worker nominated by secret political groups, called the “media president”; elections are rigged and held only to give the government the appearance of legitimacy; the ideology is revanchism; the division of power is proclaimed only nominally, while most of the power is concentrated in the hands of secret clans; “technical ministers” in the government are in fact controlled by law enforcement agencies; there is complete apathy towards state events, and demonstrations of loyalty to the current government can be sanctioned by the current government if necessary; there is a partially free market system characterized by dependence on government administration and a high degree of monopolization (Gudkov, 2009, pp. 7-8).

It should be noted that the Russian people’s adaptation to political regimes such as monarchy and dictatorship took place as early as during the existence of the Russian Empire. Influenced by S. Uvarov’s famous triad of Russian state building “Orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality”, the Russian people developed a subconscious dependence on the ruler or leader. After replacing the monarchy, the

totalitarian regime of the USSR continued these processes in relation to its population, replacing S. Uvarov's triad with the triad of "socialist construction", which looked like this: "propaganda, education, and violence". Based on the above, it can be stated that the Russian people can represent the psychological theory of state formation, as represented by L. Petrażycki, G. Tard, and S. Freud. These scholars devoted much attention to the specifics of human consciousness, placing the main emphasis on the need of some people to dominate others and the desire of others to obey and imitate those who want to rule. In this regard, the Russian philosopher E. Trubetskoy, referring to G. Spencer, notes that just as "*there is a physiological connection between the parts of a biological organism, so there is a psychological connection between people as elements of a social organism*" (Syniak and Kritsak, 2017, pp. 32-33).

French philosopher F. de Lara rightly called "Putinism" a regime not of "Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country" (Vladimir Lenin's famous phrase), but of "the KGB plus television". "Putinism" is not only an ideology, it is a state of mind in which a person is deprived of their own mind, deprived of the ability to think and analyze. It is support for the rule of the Leader, a willingness to kill brotherly nations for one's leader. "Putinism" is rather overt cynicism, which has retained many of the characteristics and dangers of a totalitarian regime, which are underestimated by those who perceive the Russian regime only as kleptocracy or a rise in nationalism (Lara, 2015, p. 39).

In turn, L. Yakubova notes that Putinism is based on a mix of ideas and concepts that emerged at the dawn of Russian nationalism, somewhat transformed in light of the evolution of fascism and the history of the Soviet system. The vagueness, eclecticism, and sheer absurdity of the foundations of Rashism are offset by the aplomb of a nuclear power, the arrogance of a great power, and the inexhaustible ability to shape mass consciousness through the media (Yakubova, 2023, pp. 157-163).

**2.3. Ruscism/Rashism.** Meanwhile, 24 February 2022 was a breakthrough year for the Russian Federation. This was not, however, due to any fundamental shift in Russian domestic or foreign policy, but rather to a radical intensification of trends that had been observed for years. The Putin regime rapidly transitioned from authoritarianism to a dictatorship with totalitarian traits, and the war provided pretexts and tools to crack down on political opponents or neutralize them. The passivity of the overwhelming majority of Russian society has become apparent; it has adapted to the new situation without offering active resistance to the Kremlin en masse, while the Kremlin has also intimidated the political elite, forcing it into obedience (Menkiszak, 2023, pp. 260-262).

Before the Russian Federation began full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, its political regime was a typical example of post-Soviet authoritarian regimes. The regime of the Russian Federation has not developed into a coherent, comprehensive whole over the past two decades. Recent studies confirm that the Russian regime has demonstrated great flexibility, while also highlighting its core themes, such as statism, anti-Western sentiment, and Russia's "special path" (Komin, 2024, p. 3-5). However, since 2022, the political regime of the Russian Federation has come to be much closer to the classic totalitarianism as of the A. Hitler or I. Stalin model: mass protests have long been banned (participating in them can land you in jail, and holding a solo picket can result in an administrative citation followed by prosecution); the opposition is increasingly being suppressed (only a token opposition remains, such as the CPRF and LDPR), while the ruling party's monopoly, along with the pro-Putin organizations it controls, continues to expand. All of this has led to the fact that, after the full-scale invasion on Ukraine, Putin's regime has evolved into "Ruscism/Rashism" (Zaitsev and Pavlyshyn, 2022).

According to Ukrainian scientist O. Kostenko, "Rashism" should be understood as an ideology based on illusions that permits the use of any form of arbitrariness to advance Russian interests, which are misinterpreted. In his view, Rashism manifests itself both in foreign policy (violations of international law and the imposition of its own version of history) and in domestic policy (human rights violations, pressure on the opposition, and the spread of disinformation). In addition, according to Ukrainian scholar M. Trebin notes that Rashism encompasses a range of ideas (political values): anti-liberalism; expansionism; revanchism; necrophilia; genocide; terrorism; statism; xenophobia; Eurasianism; cult of personality; the divine election of Russians; mobilization for the fight against the enemy; the primacy of force over law. In turn, A. Popov identifies – in addition to those already mentioned – even more core values of thenRashism: an inferiority complex; harshness and cruelty; chauvinism; intolerance of dissent; messianism; former greatness. At the same time, according to A. Popov, the dominant feature of modern Rashism is expansionism. Consequently, all the other

political values listed above are used merely as a cover for expansionism and the “gathering” of all Russian lands. Mykola Buchyn, on the other hand, believes that a distinct radical political regime has emerged in the Russian Federation at this stage, one based on the corresponding political ideology of “Rashism”, which is fundamentally rooted in the concept of the “Russian World”, a concept that has both religious and cultural dimensions. The modern Russian authorities are actively seeking to put the ideas and political values inherent in the Rashism into practice (Buchyn, 2025b, pp. 113-115). He also argues that the factor that gave rise to Rashism was the Russian people’s desire to restore their former greatness and their wish to “rise from their knees”. Therefore, even though Russians do not consider themselves imperialists, they are essentially just that. This is because they view neighboring post-Soviet countries as fragments of the empire, not as sovereign states. Consequently, the Russian army’s attack on Ukraine is not perceived by most Russians as an act of aggression: no sovereign state, no aggression. Therefore, the Russian army in Ukraine is viewed either as the savior of Ukrainians or as a tool in the fight against Ukrainian Nazis. At the same time, most Russians do not feel they have any involvement in the Russian-Ukrainian war, which has become a routine matter akin to the coronavirus pandemic or an economic crisis (Buchyn, 2025a, p. 21).

Rashism is based on a contradictory mix of ideas from fascism and Bolshevism, Nazism and Eurasianism, all disguised as the “spirituality of Orthodoxy” and the “greatness of Russian culture”. Like any modern authoritarianism, Rashism ostensibly accepts democratic institutions, but in reality merely imitates them. In the system of Rashism, democratic institutions are nothing more than a simulated construct, whose primary function is to mask the dictatorship. That is why they never work. Elections are held, but “United Russia” (rus. *Единая Россия*) wins. Everything that actually drives the Russian state and society today has nothing to do with democracy, but only with dictatorship. As M. Maiorov stated – modern Russia is a version of the USSR 2.0. (Maiorov, 2023, pp. 8-29).

To summarize the analysis of Rashism, it can be stated that the term “Rashism” is a neologism created by combining the English word “Russia” with the international term “fascism” – resulting in “Russian fascism”. Rashism is a form of totalitarian, fascist ideology and social practice of the Russian political regime, a symbiosis of the fundamental principles of fascism and Stalinism. The basis of Rashism, lies in its core ideas, such as:

- great-power chauvinism, arrogance, and intolerance toward the cultural elements of other nations;
- a lack of respect for the sovereignty of neighboring countries;
- the “superiority” of the Russian nation over other nations, the so-called “big brother”;
- aggressive hatred toward other people whose views differ from the typical propaganda of the Russian Federation;
- the “peculiar civilizational mission” of Russians (e.g., Moscow as the Third Rome – and the resulting expansionism);
- contempt for the individual, a desire to dissolve the individual into the “majority” while simultaneously suppressing the “minority”;
- disregard for human rights;
- Soviet-style totalitarianism and imperialism;
- geopolitical instruments of influence, primarily – blackmailing European countries regarding energy supplies and prices (gas and oil);
- the exploitation of Russian Orthodoxy and powerful propaganda to influence global politics;
- the threat of use or direct use of military force against countries within the Russian Federation’s sphere of influence (Wasiuta and Wasiuta, 2022, pp. 647-650).

**Conclusion.** The comprehensive analysis conducted in this study fulfills its main research objective, which was to examine the nature, origins, and evolution of the political regime of the Russian Federation, tracing its trajectory from post-Soviet authoritarianism to the totalitarian framework of “Rashism”. By achieving its research objectives, this study provides a multidimensional understanding of the contemporary Russian authoritarian political regime.

First, by establishing a theoretical and methodological foundation based on political systems theory and the dichotomy between democracy and authoritarianism, the study demonstrated that the normative core of the Russian political regime has undergone complete degradation. Although the regime structurally mimics democratic institutions (e.g., elections, a parliament, and a constitution), these serve merely as a camouflaging facade designed to conceal a deeply entrenched dictatorship.

Second, by tracing the historical evolution of the Russian political regime, this analysis has succeeded in defining “Putinism” as a unique authoritarian regime that relies to a significant extent on historical continuity and the legacy of extreme centralization of power. In the modern Russian Federation, Putinism is not based on a genuine political consensus; instead, it exploits society’s deeply rooted, historically conditioned psychological dependence on a single, dominant leader, sustained through mass propaganda and a highly developed apparatus of coercion.

Finally, an analysis of the transformation of the Russian Federation’s political regime following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, reveals its ultimate, radical mutation. By shedding the mask of a pseudo-democracy, Putinism has transformed into “Rashism” – an aggressive, neo-totalitarian quasi-ideology driven by expansionism, imperial revanchism, and great-power chauvinism (often referred to in the literature as “USSR 2.0”).

Consequently, the current political regime of the Russian Federation must be unequivocally classified as an expansionist dictatorship with fascist tendencies. Recognizing this reality is of fundamental importance to the international community. It follows that future relations with the Russian Federation cannot be based on standard diplomatic paradigms, but must be approached with the understanding that the existence of Vladimir Putin’s regime is, by its very nature, founded on internal terror and external geopolitical destabilization.

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