

Russia's Constitutional reforms - responsibility, not power

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Introduction

- What the constitutional reforms do (and do not) suggest about Putin's plans
- How the amendments may boost the importance of the regional government
- Unpacking other important decision-making structures - the All-Russia People's Front (ONF)

Constitutional Amendments – a summary

- Putin announces proposed amendments to the constitution
- Planned changes include allowing the State Duma (parliament) to approve a prime minister's candidacy
- Preventing the president and senior government members from holding foreign citizenship
- Enshrining the State Council's responsibilities in law
- Resetting the President's term of office to allow Putin to run in future elections
- Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev resigns

Putin's plans

- The amendments came at a time when many Russians are calling for change
- These amendments give the veneer of action, when many of them are inconsequential
- Putin could technically remain in his post after 2024, but all these amendments have done is maintain ambiguity about his future

Responsibility Vs Power – Regional government

- The amendments also refer to enshrining the State Council in law – a body that includes representatives from all regions, which could become more important in future
- Putin is preoccupied with his legacy - his National Projects, designed to improve the economy
- It seems that regional governors will bear responsibility for implementing the projects, and will be blamed if they fail

Russia's regional governors – who's who

- Governors used to be appointed because of their military/intelligence backgrounds - this is changing
- September 2018 regional elections – many interesting new appointments of governors suggesting the kind of system Putin is putting in place
- Common themes for many of the new governors: business backgrounds, experience in a mayor's office, and age

Business background

- Vasily Orlov (Amur region) - speaks Chinese
- Aisen Nikolayev (Yakutia) - former career in banking and financial planning
- Sergei Nosov (Magnitogorsk) - metallurgy
- Andrey Travnikov (Novosibirsk) – metallurgy

Moscow's strategy: to turn the Far East into an economic hub and gain investment from Asian partners such as China and Japan

- Therefore many regional governors in Siberia and the Far East appointed in 2018 have backgrounds that can help to achieve this

Mayoral experience

- A high number of governors have experience in a mayor's office
 - Andrey Travnikov (Novosibirsk)
 - Aisen Nikolayev (Yakutia)
 - Sergei Nosov (Nizhny Tagil)
 - Vasily Orlov (Blagoveshchensk)
- This could help develop personal networks needed for future governorships

Age

- Many of the new governors are young for the Russian political administration – under 45
- An attempt to bring in new blood, promote technological initiatives, and ensure loyalty from governors who owe their careers to Putin

Two challenges ahead: COVID and rebranding

- Responses to COVID-19 - the virus is delaying an important vote on the constitutional amendments, widely seen as a litmus test of people's confidence in Putin's system
- Regional governors who are not able to ensure high turnout when the vote does take place may be rotated out

Rebranding United Russia

- State Duma elections scheduled for 2021, but the incumbent United Russia party is extremely unpopular - many protest votes against the party in the September 2018 elections
- The party needs to rebrand, and it could merge with the All-Russia People's Front (ONF), to inject new policy ideas and suggest a change of image
- New head of ONF Executive Committee Mikhail Kuznetsov – likely to be reaching out to regions ahead of the elections

Conclusion: the importance of regions

- There are political processes going on beyond Moscow that are often sidelined
- Examining changes to the regional government can help us determine who might be increasingly influential in future
- All of this helps us to understand the Kremlin's strategic decision-making processes