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Abstract

New survey research, sensitive to local understandings of key terms, helps resolve a longstanding debate on whether Russian public opinion generally supports democracy or authoritarianism. The central conclusion is that while Russians differ among themselves, they are best understood not as autocratic but as supportive of a particular form of democracy that social scientists have dubbed "delegative democracy". This logically consistent preference structure reconciles diverse arguments and findings in the literature, sheds light on Putin's puzzling decision to cede the presidency to Medvedev in Russia's 2008 presidential election, and lends insight into the public opinion foundations of "hybrid regimes".