



## Sex, Politics, and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia (Oxford Studies in Culture and Politics)

By Valerie Sperling

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Is Vladimir Putin macho, or is he a "fag"? *Sex, Politics, and Putin* investigates how gender stereotypes and sexualization have been used as tools of political legitimization in contemporary Russia. Despite their enmity, regime allies and detractors alike have wielded traditional concepts of masculinity, femininity, and homophobia as a means of symbolic endorsement or disparagement of political leaders and policies.

By repeatedly using machismo as a means of legitimation, Putin's regime (unlike that of Gorbachev or Yeltsin) opened the door to the concerted use of gendered rhetoric and imagery as a means to challenge regime authority. *Sex, Politics, and Putin* analyzes the political uses of gender norms and sexualization in Russia through three case studies: pro- and anti-regime groups' activism aimed at supporting or undermining the political leaders on their respective sides; activism regarding military conscription and patriotism; and feminist activism. Arguing that gender norms are most easily invoked as tools of authority-building when there exists widespread popular acceptance of misogyny and homophobia, Sperling also examines the ways in which sexism and homophobia are reflected in Russia's public sphere.

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## **Editorial Review**

### Review

"Valerie Sperling provides a valuable and comprehensive examination of the use of gender norms in Russian politics. Sperling goes well beyond the ubiquitous imagery of a half-naked Putin on horseback or the scantily clad 'Medvedev Girls' in arguing that gendered structures of legitimation affect regime and opposition in equal measures...Sperling's careful analysis and lively prose should serve as a valuable introduction for students of gender politics, as well as a helpful corrective for seasoned observers of Russian politics who downplay the significance of gendered norms as an interesting sideshow."

--*The Russian Review*

"*Sex, Politics, and Putin* is not only one of the most important books on gender politics in Russia, but on Russian politics more generally. It makes the case that norms of masculinity and patriarchy constitute an important element in the legitimation of Vladimir Putin's rule in Russia and that opposition forces employ the very same set of norms in their efforts to undercut the regime's dominance. Anyone who wants to understand Russian politics should read this book." --Henry E. Hale, George Washington University

"Accessibly, even humorously written, this account of recent Russian politics offers vivid insights into the broader domain of manipulating perceptions of sexuality and gender difference to secure political legitimacy. As a result, American readers will not only gain a better understanding of Putin's posturing and Pussy Riot's protests, but also see our own discourses of power and credibility in a new light."

--Myra Marx Ferree, University of Wisconsin-Madison

"I recommend this provocative, innovative feminist analysis of politics in Putin's Russia to all Russia observers, students of scholars of women's and gender studies, and anyone trying to make sense of the Russia/Ukraine crisis. Sperling's insight into the foreign policy implications of misogyny, combined with her interviews with current Russian feminists, makes *Sex, Politics, and Putin* a must-read."

--Cynthia Enloe, author of *Seriously! Investigating Crashes and Crises as If Women Mattered*

"...this important book highlights how gender and power are inextricably linked."

--L.J. Roselle, *CHOICE*

"*Sex, Politics & Putin* is the most comprehensive illustration of the regime's gender-based legitimation strategy to date, and is a must-read for those who strive to understand Putin's Russia."

--Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, *Perspectives on Politics*

"Valerie Sperling's well-researched and well-documented study provides an important and different lens through which to view and analyze the current neo-cold war conflict between Russia and the West. It is a significant addition to the literature about the current Russian leader, his policies, and the future of his country."

--Rochelle Ruthchild, *Women's Review of Books*

"Sex, Politics, and Putin presents a goldmine of examples of how discourses on gender and sexuality are an integral part of contemporary Russian politics. This book is a must read for scholars of Russian politics and an engaging and accessible read for anyone interested in why bare-chested photos of Putin have become so popular."

--Mobilization, Courtney Doucette, Rutgers University

"Sex, Politics, and Putin is a must-read for scholars studying the politics of gender in Slavic studies...Its rich engagement with interdisciplinary studies, anthropology, and cultural studies also makes a substantial contribution to political science. Beyond this, her work raises a series of compelling questions about politics, commodification, political agency, and new protest repertoires that will interest a broad range of readers."

--Julie Hemment, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, *Slavic Review*

#### About the Author

Valerie Sperling is Professor of Political Science at Clark University. She is the author of *Altered States: The Globalization of Accountability* and *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition*.

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