

Abstract

This research examines the rise and fall of Yevgeny Prigozhin within the context of Vladimir Putin's Russia, illuminating the complex dynamics of Russian patronal politics. Employing Henry Hale's theory of patronal politics and building upon Marlene Laruelle & Kevin Limonier's concept of entrepreneurs of influence, this study explores how hybrid entrepreneurs of influence like Prigozhin navigate the socio-political landscape and impact regime stability. The empirical analysis centres on Prigozhin's control over two key enterprises: the Wagner Group and a vast digital enterprise specializing in disinformation campaigns. By scrutinizing Prigozhin's global influence operations and the Wagner Group's role in the Ukraine conflict from 2022 to 2023, this research seeks to understand how hybrid entrepreneurs of influence manoeuvre within Russia's intricate patronal politics and the broader implications such actors have on regime stability. By contributing to the larger discourse on resiliency of patronal regimes and elucidating the crucial role of hybrid entrepreneurs of influence within such frameworks, this work offering insights into the precarious balance of power in contemporary Russian politics.

Keywords: Patronal politics, hybrid entrepreneurs of influence, Yevgeny Prigozhin, semi state forces, Wagner Group, Internet Research Agency, Patriot Media Group, regime stability