

Enlightenment of Praetorianism on Modern Organization and Management: A Case Study of the Former Soviet Union

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Abstract: The disintegration of the Soviet Union was, to some extent, the result of Gorbachev's advocacy of "openness", "All People's Party", and "pluralism" in governance. This was compounded by the repeated adjustments in the ruling strategies of the CPSU over 70 years and the rapid implementation of political participation policies such as "democracy" and "All People's Party" in a context of low political institutionalization. Before its dissolution, the political organization of the Soviet Union was a typical example of praetorianism. In modern organizational management, when institutional development is lacking, promoting governance concepts like "openness", "democracy", and "diversification" can similarly lead to organizational dissolution.

Keywords: Organization management; Praetorianism; Soviet disintegration

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1. The basic principle of praetorianism

Political systems can be distinguished based on the levels of political institutionalization and political participation. The stability of any regime relies on the relationship between the degree of political participation and the level of political institutionalization. In a political system where institutionalization is low and participation is high, social forces will engage in the political arena in their ways. This regime is known as praetorianism^[1]. In contrast, a regime with a high ratio of political institutionalization to citizen participation is termed a civic regime. In a civic regime, the level of political institutionalization exceeds that of citizen participation. Samuel Huntington described praetorianism as follows: "In praetorian society, not only are political activists heroes from all walks of life, but the methods used to allocate official positions and determine policies are also varied. All groups display their unique tactics: the rich pay bribes, students rebel, workers strike, people riot, and soldiers stage coups..."^[1]. Pastors use sermons, teachers use platforms to incite politics, and poets,

writers, and artists use their works as daggers and spears, tools for political struggle. It is a political system that oscillates between absolute monarchy and chaotic democracy, marked by a lack of political community and an excessive degree of political participation relative to political institutionalization.

In a praetorian structure, the political system is not robust enough to provide a foundation for legitimate political order and an effective political community. Various groups participate in politics before the political system is sufficiently socialized. In contrast, in a civic society, authority comes with costs, such as the ability to impose procedural limits on power and restrict the behavior of those in authority. The relationship between political institutionalization and political participation can be illustrated as follows in **Figure 1** ^[1].

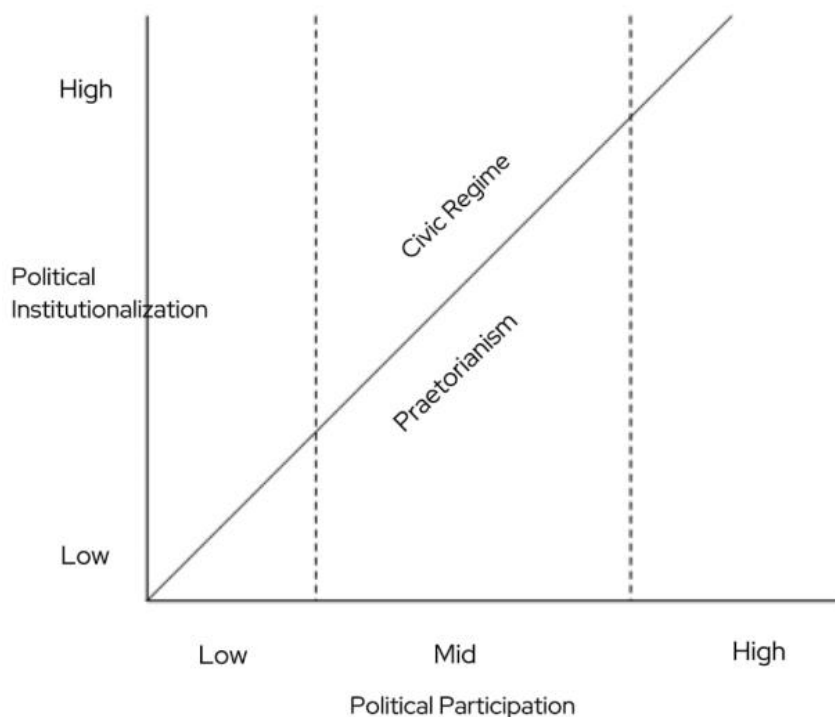


Figure 1. Relationship between the level of political institutionalization and political participation

2. An overview of the former Soviet Union’s ruling style of praetorianism

To better demonstrate the mode of action of praetorian regimes, the ruling styles of previous leaders of the former Soviet Union are reviewed as follows.

In 1917, the Russian Bolshevik Party, led by Lenin, launched the October Revolution and seized state power. After three years of civil war and post-war recovery, adjustment, and reform, the centralized and unified leadership of the Communist Party was initially established.

In 1924, Stalin successively defeated Trotsky and Bukharin’s opposition and launched three major movements: overall collectivization of agriculture, high-speed industrialization, and the Great Purge. Through these movements, state power was comprehensively transferred to the party organization, forming centralization, and ultimately consolidating in Stalin himself, leading to a highly centralized regime and the development of a personality cult.

In 1953, after taking over from Stalin, Khrushchev fundamentally repudiated Stalin. He attributed

the social problems of the Soviet Union and the plight of the CPSU to the personality cult and Stalin's personal qualities. Khrushchev promoted a ruling style that opposed the personality cult and strengthened collective leadership. He attempted to reform and adjust the highly centralized ruling style but failed. His repeated campaigns against the personality cult eventually replaced Stalin's personality cult with his own. This was because he did not break free from the constraints of highly centralized governance, which inherently fosters a personality cult.

After coming to power, Brezhnev made repeated adjustments to the ruling style. He abolished some of Khrushchev's chaotic reforms but largely regressed to the highly centralized governance of Stalin's era, excluding the extreme elements such as the expansion of class struggle and the absolute power of leaders.

After Gorbachev took office, he made a "fundamental innovation" in the way of governance. In July 1987, Gorbachev first used the concept of "pluralism." The concept of "socialist pluralism" was formally introduced at the 19th National Congress of the Soviet Union in 1988. In March 1990, the People's Congress of the Soviet Union adopted a decision to amend the Constitution, abolishing the provisions on the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party and announcing that all political parties were given "equal opportunities to actively participate in the formulation of state policies and the management of state and social affairs." Subsequently, the 28th National Congress of the CPSU formally incorporated humane and democratic socialism into the CPSU program, declaring that "the goal of the CPSU is to establish humane and democratic socialism" instead of communism. Gorbachev advocated a party for all people, abandoning the class stance that opposed the values of all people and humanity, the fundamental organizational principle of democratic centralism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and Marxism. He advocated that "Soviet citizens have the right to form political parties, social organizations, and mass movements that will help to give full play to their political enthusiasm and initiative and meet their various interests." Essentially, Gorbachev's ruling line was to take the road of democratic socialism, which rapidly expanded the political participation of the masses.

3. The dissolution of the Soviet Union viewed from the principle of praetorianism

Any regime can be divided into three levels according to the degree of political participation: at the lowest level, participation is limited to a few traditional nobles and bureaucratic elites; at the middle level, the middle class is involved in politics; in a highly participatory regime, the upper class, middle class, and general public share political activities. The stability of any given regime depends on the relationship between the degree of political participation and the degree of political institutionalization. Generally speaking, a society with a low degree of political institutionalization and a high degree of political participation is politically unstable. Conversely, if the level of political institutionalization is high and the degree of social-political participation is low, politics is relatively stable. By applying the principle of praetorianism to the political order, the political system of previous Soviet leaders can be illustrated as follows in **Figure 2** ^[2].

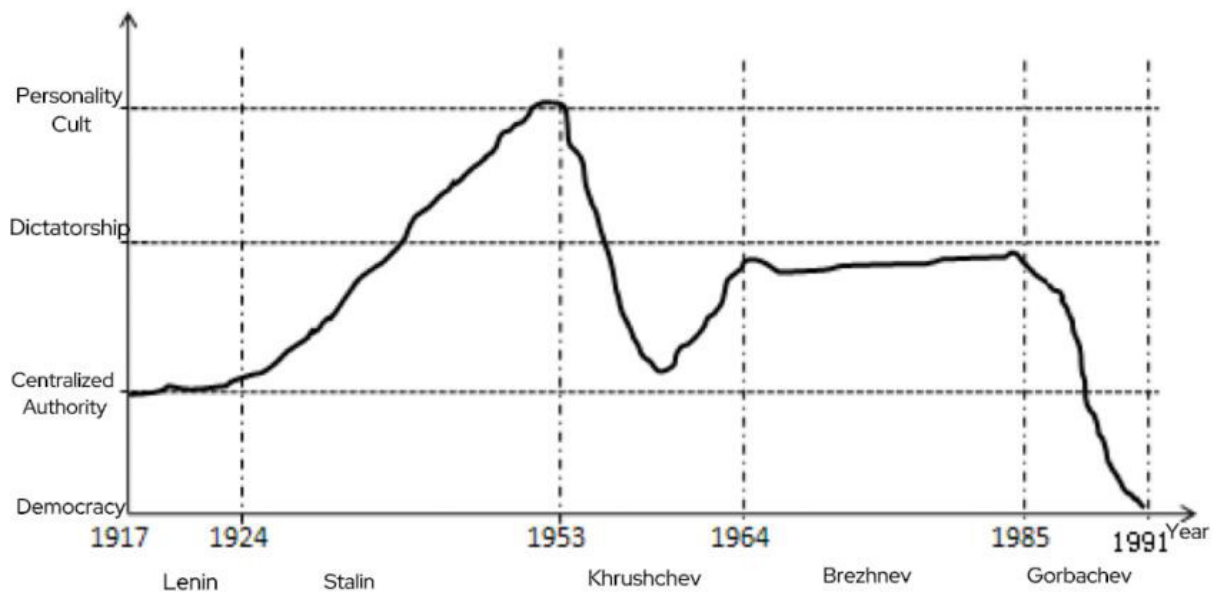


Figure 2. Ruling road map of previous leaders of CPSU

Reflecting on seventy turbulent years of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, two conclusions can be drawn. First, the institutionalization level of the Soviet political system was not high; second, political participation in the Soviet Union outpaced political institutionalization. During the major reforms and adjustments of political guiding ideology and ruling policies, the CPSU, led by Gorbachev, advocated policies of “All People’s Party”, “openness”, and “liberalization”, which expanded political participation and ultimately formed a typical praetorian regime. It was this low level of political institutionalization combined with high political participation that led the former Soviet Union down the road of political and national dissolution.

4. The misunderstanding of modern organization and management

The concept of a praetorian regime highlights the issues related to democracy and institutionalization. In modern organizational management, similar phenomena can be observed where democratization and institutionalization intersect. This involves the balance between the institutionalization of an organization and the participation ratio of its members. A high ratio of institutionalization to member participation can be seen as a model for well-structured organizations, while a low ratio can be described as a praetorian organization.

Managers often misunderstand that the leadership system of modern organizational management should transition from centralization to decentralization, embrace democratic management, and involve everyone in decision-making. They tend to overlook whether the level of organizational system construction can handle the order issues arising from high member participation. When every faction within the organization tries to assert its authority without a mature and effective mediation and mitigation system, and when all members strive to share management rights and gain benefits, the energy dedicated to organizational development shifts towards power struggles and conflict over the distribution of benefits. This leads to internal chaos and results in a praetorian phenomenon within the organization.

Even with strong institutional forces that can suppress or ensure organizational stability to a certain extent, upward mobility within the organization is an objective reality. As the organization continues to develop and expand, its system must continuously evolve and improve to integrate new organizational forces. The democratization and institutionalization of an organization are a dynamic, bidirectional process. An organization without adaptive measures cannot sustain itself.

5. Conclusion

Management remains an enduring theme for political parties, organizations, and groups. The lesson from the former Soviet Union's path towards a praetorian regime, ultimately leading to the demise of the party and the nation, holds significant implications for modern organizational management. As we establish organizational structures, define management roles, clarify the relationships between responsibilities and rights, and strive to achieve organizational goals, we can draw at least two key insights.

First, democratization requires institutionalization. Democratization must be grounded in institutionalization. If the level of democratization surpasses that of institutionalization, democracy risks spiraling out of control, descending into chaos, and escalating into a struggle for interests.

Second, institutionalization must accompany organizational development. Institutionalization should evolve alongside organizational development. Continuously integrating new forces into the organization's management team is crucial. Without this, existing forces stagnate, leading to conflicts and despair.

In essence, robust institutional safeguards form the cornerstone of organizational stability. However, when members of a praetorian organization exceed the institutionalized level of participation and engage in organizational management on their terms, or when they bypass institutional constraints to pursue personal interests, the organization inevitably veers towards dissolution.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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