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

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 legitimation 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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