

Why Trump's Victory Has Closed Russia's Road to Change

America Has Sneezed. Now Russia Will Catch A Cold.

By [Mikhail Fishman](#)

November 09, 2016



The United States of America, the most powerful nation on earth, has just made its choice and voted for an unpredictable future. Never before in its 240 years history has America known so little of what will happen next.

What will Donald Trump's presidency look like? What policies will he implement? Will he repeal Obamacare? Will he try to put Hillary Clinton in jail as he said he would? Will America deport ten millions of undocumented immigrants or ban Muslims from entering the country? What will the U.S. policy be in Syria? So far, these questions have no answers.

But the message that Donald Trump's sudden triumph sends is very clear: the U.S. political system has failed at its core. The bulwark of liberal democracy is sinking. The West is divided, full of resentment, and weak. The rules are changing. Like a shockwave, this simple message has blasted through national borders, encouraging autocracies across the

world.

When Russian parliamentarians [stood and applauded](#) the news of the Trump's victory, this was the exact sentiment they were cheering. They, along with President Vladimir Putin, didn't see it coming.

They viewed the U.S. presidential election as a zero-sum game with the West that Russia had played during the last several years. They were expecting a defeat which suddenly turned into a victory.

Trump's unpredictability makes it difficult to predict how U.S.-Russia relations will now evolve and how his administration will address the major issues that Moscow has put on the table — especially Ukraine and Syria.

But Trump's victory also delivers clarity to Russia's own political future. Putin is now heaving a sigh of relief; help came, *deus ex machina*, at a precious moment.

These have been difficult times for Putin as a leader. Russians are finally beginning to feel the effects of its international isolation. And a fair degree of Western unity ensured that this status quo was unlikely to change. In 2003, during War in Iraq, Putin had been able to play upon differences and disagreements among Western powers. With the annexation of Crimea, the war in Ukraine's Donbass region and now the Syrian conflict, Putin lost his ability to maneuver.

[According to polls](#), Russians are growing tired of wars that largely dominated the national political agenda for the last two years. The Russian economy is in decline. And, what's more, the latest parliamentary election has demonstrated growing political apathy — a serious problem during the upcoming 2018 presidential election.

Should Putin decide to run, he will have to deal with all these internal challenges and — were it not for Trump's victory — serious pressure from Western capitals, particularly from Washington. Facing such challenges, being labeled as an outcast by the Western world, would he be able to remain Russia's beloved and successful leader for eight more years?

Whatever plans Putin might have contemplated for his future, he has laid some clear preparations for change at home.

Sergey Kiriyyenko, the [newly appointed overseer of Russia's domestic politics](#), maintains a reputation as a reformer and a progressive. The Kremlin has also begun snubbing ultra-conservative activists, and the [reported torture](#) of the jailed activist Ildar Dadin has become an issue at the very highest levels of government.

In short, there was a fresh sense in the air that the regime might start loosening its grip. Political and business circles in Moscow had shyly begun anticipating a new "thaw."

Now, with Donald Trump as the new president of the United States, this is no longer the case. This new Trumpworld is a global mess, and taking advantage of the disorder looks much more rational as a strategy. An outcast yesterday, Vladimir Putin might even start seeing himself as the first among equals on the global scene. If he ever had doubts about running for another presidential term, now he will not hesitate.

The hope for change in Russia has just been buried in the voting booths of Florida, Michigan, and North Carolina.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/11/09/why-trumps-victory-has-closed-russias-road-to-change-a56063>