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Theoretical and methodological dimensions of studying politico-administrative transformations in the state

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Abstract. Throughout human history, the developmental trajectories of states have repeatedly followed recognizable phases and cycles identified by scholars. Political regimes, power structures, and state institutions operate according to specific “rules of the game” shaped by the interplay of politics and public administration. The dichotomy between politics and administration — first articulated by political scientists in the second half of the 20th century — has revealed a foundational theoretical and conceptual tension: which domain is primary? The underlying premise of this distinction is that state activity is bifurcated into two functions — policy formulation and policy implementation. Transformations in states — evident in shifts across multiple policy domains, administrative-territorial reconfigurations, and institutional operational frameworks — can thus be legitimately conceptualized as politico-administrative transformations. These transformations, driven by dynamic interactions between political decision-making and administrative execution, constitute a critical subject of scholarly inquiry for forecasting the future trajectory of political systems and clarifying the roles of governance actors, subjects, and objects. Drawing upon established politico-economic schools of thought and synthesizing contemporary Russian experience, this study offers a conceptual overview of the theoretical foundations and methodological challenges involved in analyzing politico-administrative processes and systemic transformations, with a focus on modern Russia.

Keywords: power, politics, management, state and municipal administration, political and administrative sphere, society, public policy, institutions, institutionalism, management philosophy, management psychology

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Теоретико-методологические аспекты изучения политико-административных трансформаций в государстве

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Аннотация. Траектории развития государств в истории человечества повторяют знакомые ученым этапы и циклы. Властные структуры, политические режимы и государственные институты стран управляются по определенным «правилам игры», обусловленным политической и административной целесообразностью. Обозначенная во второй половине XX в. политическими исследователями формула «политика — администрация» приоткрыла ширму смыслового и теоретического истока проблемы — дихотомии политика/управление. Вопрос: что или кто первичен. Смысл формулы состоит в том, что деятельность государства разделена на две части — решение и исполнение. События в жизни государств, за которыми следуют изменения в нескольких направлениях государственных политик, административно-территориальных делениях, порядках работы институтов, позволительно называть трансформациями. Трансформации, вызванные политико-административными процессами, представляют научный предмет по дальнейшему определению перспектив развития политической системы, роли акторов, субъектов и объектов управления. Обращаясь к известным политэкономическим школам и обобщая современный российский опыт, представляется достижимым обзорно описать теоретическую природу и проблему подходов к описанию политико-административных процессов и трансформаций в государстве на примере современной России.

Ключевые слова: власть, политика, управление, государственное и муниципальное управление, сфера власти и управления, общество, государственная политика, институты, институционализм, философия управления, психология управления

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Introduction

Recent years have witnessed both external and internal socio-political events that contribute to conferring institutional [1] diversity upon the politico-administrative landscape of the Russian state. These events flash by as bright “noise” in the information space, leaving behind changes that affect the structures of the state, government, society, and nation. Many episodes, which will be discussed below, await their research, substantive analysis, and assessments.

In this review article, we will touch upon certain aspects of the theory of politico-administrative transformations within a state’s political system. We will consider methodological prerequisites for studying the influence of state decisions [2] on various spheres of life: political, educational, socio-economic, communicative, etc.

Changes typically initiated by the state and political institutions are not novel in their axiology within the history of states, societies, and political systems. However, the speed at which they occur, the “noise” as cybernetics would say [3], leaves noticeable marks on the portrait of the state and country far into the future.

In their work “Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector”, D. Osborne and T. Gaebler [4] formulated a modern theory of market-based transformation of the public sector and the main principles for renewing public administration systems. The work presents us with those ten principles upon which public management is based, predominantly Western European and Anglo-Saxon according to the authors’ definition. These principles include: encouraging political pluralism in decision-making, decentralized management at various levels of government, delegation of authority to lower levels of the management hierarchy, a more balanced distribution of power, responsibility and accountability, development and expansion of civic participation, etc. We pose the question: are such updates relevant in the politico-administrative field for Russia?

The results of updates, and hence transformations, can be new procedures in public administration, forms of public political participation and representation, and adopted regulatory-legal orders. The rapidity of change, with which, due

to the scientific-technical revolution, the informational-communicative effect of transformations in politics and management accelerates and quickly fades, is characteristic of Russia as well [5]. Consequently, there is not much time for characterizing, describing, and assessing the subject of our interest in the current moment, which is methodologically relevant for political sciences.

The Politico-Administrative Sphere as a Subject Field in the Humanities

After reviewing sources and literature in the humanities concerning the description of the politico-administrative sphere as part of the political system and public administration, one can draw a cautious preliminary conclusion. The very concept contains the conflict and problematic nature of the subject under study.

Thus, Russian authors V.S. Komarovskiy and L.V. Smorgunov note that initially the science of public administration, mainly American, was under the influence of the politics/administration dichotomy problem, identified in the mid-last century by the 28th President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, at the very beginning of the formation of this branch of knowledge [1]. In other words, management in the public, state sphere is divided between those who make decisions and those who execute them. These are, one way or another, established conditions formed within the Western political science tradition and adopted by many Russian authors in the 1990s.

The problem of the relationship between politics and administration is most vividly expressed in the concept of “**governance**” used by this concept. The English word “governance” is not easily translated unambiguously into Russian. It encompasses “steering”, “management at the highest organizational levels”, “leadership”, “general management”, “political management”, “regulation”. Of course, all meanings of this term are interconnected, but the word also possesses a broader connotation when used, as is often done, alongside other terms, such as market and hierarchy as two ways of coordinating interactions. We use this word in the sense of general political management, i.e., leadership that includes many other interpretations of the term. In turn, we note: “*upravlenie*” (management) is the equivalent of the Latin term *administratio*.

L.V. Smorgunov cites Dwight Waldo’s book “The Administrative State” and subsequently note that the politics/administration dichotomy still remains a significant characteristic of ongoing debates in the United States about the nature of public administration. According to this author, the formula “politics — administration” holds a firm position, the meaning of which is that state activity is divided into two parts — decision and execution; wherein execution

(administration) can be the subject of scientific research based on the search for facts, development of prior knowledge, and pragmatism [1].

We add the definition of the politico-administrative system given by J. Habermas. *The politico-administrative system* is a system of relations between the highest political leadership, branches of state power, state and civil institutions, and other actors shaping political and managerial processes aimed at achieving and satisfying state and public interests and attaining public consensus.

Thus, the relationship between politics and management (administration) coexists within certain institutional frameworks and rules. Let us turn to the main scientific representatives of this direction, explaining the nature of the politico-administrative sphere.

The generally recognized role in comprehending aspects of the politico-administrative sphere in Western political science is played by such a direction as institutionalism. The list of renowned institutionalists includes Americans Seymour Martin Lipset [6] (1922–2006), C. Wright Mills [7] (1916–1962), Frenchman Maurice Duverger [8] (1917–2014), and others, as well as economist Douglas North¹ (1920–2015), a neo-institutionalist. The researchers of this school suggested the dependence of the economy and its processes on cultural, social, legal, and other factors [9, 10. P. 100]. The state and processes within it are viewed as an organization and its rules, structures, and their institutions. Undoubtedly, such an interpretation predetermines the significance for the state of any formal — procedural, administrative, processual — and informal — political, cultural, social — rules, deviation from which imposes certain obligations and new rules of behavior for “players” within the state and institutions.

According to Russian researchers of institutionalism, in the context that interests us within this review article, it is noted that D. North observes [11. P. 113] that if institutions are the rules of the game, then the goal of organizations-players is to win.

Neo-institutionalists study stable forms of organization and regulation of public, including political life. The main category used by this direction is “political institution”, understood as an institution created to fulfill certain political goals and functions, having an internal organizational structure and subject

¹ The approach to understanding the connections between the past and the present, originally formulated by D. North, seems particularly appropriate in this regard, because it emphasizes the obligatory continuity in the institutional evolution of the country throughout its history. The set of options to choose from is gradually narrowing under the influence of previous decisions and events. “The consequences of small events and accidental circumstances can form the basis of decisions that, becoming prevalent, determine the prevailing trend in development, or ‘track’” [9. P. 94].

to established rules and norms of activity. Institutional studies political behavior of people in close connection with the existing system of socio-normative acts and institutions, the necessity of whose emergence and functioning are recognized as a natural-historical pattern. All political phenomena are viewed from this angle.

For example, the aforementioned D. North, Nobel laureate in economics, who received the award for posing the problem of path-dependence, put forward the assumption that adopted rules of public administration, political and economic institutions reproducing certain behavioral patterns lead to an institutional trajectory and politico-administrative transformation, bringing democratic freedoms and economic prosperity to some countries, and stagnation and revolution to others — according to Western researchers. An entire book has been written about this research, gaining popularity worldwide [12]. Its main idea reveals details relevant to our review research. There exist “correct” and “incorrect” models of state development in politics and public administration, which directly depend on the politico-administrative sphere. Transformations entail shifts from given development trajectories.

We can assume that attributing Russia’s institutional standards to “path-dependent” and “undemocratic” according to Western templates is incorrect. Consequently, assessing politico-administrative changes under conditions of moving away from Western schools in social sciences and humanities requires different tools and methodological foundations. For example, deinstitutionalization [13] of political processes and depersonalization of managerial decisions do not fit into the theoretical description of processes so familiar to the Western scientific community.

Distancing oneself from the prescriptive concept of “governance” in the Russian research practice of political processes is insufficient. Its own conceptual thesaurus, theoretical consolidation of tradition is needed. Thus, where everyone sees patterns, one should find details of exceptions².

As confirmation of the impossibility of copying and projecting established English-language terms and concepts onto describing Russian politico-administrative processes, we present the thoughts M.V. Loktionov [14. P. 85] that the Russian words “gubernator” (governor) and “guverner” (tutor) originate from the Greek “Kubernetes” (or “gubernetes”), meaning “manager” or “organizer”. The article also adds about the legacy of A.A. Bogdanov, a Russian scientist-economist, developer of the theory of organizational sciences, which is valuable for our subject field as well. Namely, paraphrasing: the search for patterns of politico-administrative

²The rut effect is all the fun in post-science. *PostNauka*. URL: <https://postnauka.org/longreads/35754> (accessed: 01.09.2025). (In Russ.).

processes reveals an explanation of the organizational principles of management underlying the political system. And we can assume a more systematic approach of Russian research and observational experience at different historical stages to describing processes of the politico-administrative spectrum, suggesting, in our opinion, a more conceptual and substantive understanding of processes in politics and management than what Western scientific interpretations offer us.

Moving away from the traditions of the theoretical and methodological language of Western socio-humanitarian block sciences, established in the 21st century and borrowed by us after the collapse of the USSR, the Russian school of humanitarian disciplines awaits its researcher with a proposal for a distinct modern view and toolkit of a scientific approach to describing politico-administrative transformations shaping a new socio-political reality. The level of consequences from politico-administrative transformations spreads to different levels and orbits: global, federal, regional; external and internal [15].

At the same time, one cannot fail to mention the research of Russian economist A.A. Auzan. In September 2014, the Faculty of Economics at Lomonosov Moscow State University held a scientific symposium “Institutional Problems of Long-Term Socio-Economic Dynamics”, within which A.A. Auzan delivered a report “The Path-Dependence Effect. The problem of dependence on the trajectory of prior development — the evolution of hypotheses”.

In the report, the author noted the types of political-economic development trajectories determined by institutional tracks, political and administrative reforms. According to the Russian scientist, as well as a number of foreign authors we wrote about earlier, negates geographical components, historical predetermination, and dependence on external factors.

Thus, according to the economist, one of the first theoretical assumptions on the issue of transformations following institutional decisions, which we can now note also relate to politico-administrative ones, was the so-called development hypothesis, or modernization hypothesis by S. Lipset, head of the institutional school in US sociology. The American scholar assumed that transition occurs through economic growth, which then leads to social results, the spread of education, the emergence of a middle class, and then to the formation of democracy. Then these conditions interconnect, and stable, powerful growth emerges, leading to a good trajectory. However, the political aspect, besides the economic, emphasized in the research of the famous sociologist. Yet, in the context of Russia, it is proposed to consider a number of current socio-political events, from which one can assume the possibility of future formation of social transformations and a given economic course. So it's not the economy that determines the transit, but state policy.

We pose the question: is the Russian Federation a model of a political system, as compiled by D. Easton [16], that has not only a socio-systemic, structural-functional, but also a cybernetic character, and thus represents a managing, complex, open socio-political system with flexible feedback?

Studying the works of Russian and foreign authors, one can come to preliminary conclusions that the politico-administrative system is structurally described by Western, primarily American, political and economic academicians due to its natural emergence and popularization in the broad socio-humanitarian field in the early and mid-last century. However, Russian scientists undertake attempts at research and descriptions of socio-political processes based on the historical experience of Russia as a state-civilization³, with a distinctive system of management, falling only under a number of signs into classifications of political systems and types of state structure published by the Western academic community.

Having presented the definition of the politico-administrative system as a subject of research in the humanities, we proceed to the second part of the review article on the structure and role of transformations in modern political and managerial processes.

The Concept of Transformation in Politics and Public Administration

The subject of transformations, as processes of change in various spheres of human and organizational activity, is represented immediately in several directions and groups of humanities that interest us in this review.

As authors note [15], the concept of “political transformations” in political science is often substituted by the categories “political changes”, “political development”, “political modernization”.

The systems approach to understanding the life of a social organism as a system showed more possibilities for analyzing socio-political transformations, thanks to the work of specialists in the field of synergetics. This approach in political science provided an opportunity to view the state of the political system through the prism of balance between systemic, general, and particular homeostasis, and to view changes leading to system transformation as a transition to a new state.

Thus, in political science and, so to speak, the philosophy of management in the public sphere, one cannot pass by the ideas of the German philosopher and sociologist, author of the theory of communicative action, J. Habermas.

³ Russia as a civilization of civilizations. *Russia in global politics*. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/czivilizacziya-czivilizaczij/> (accessed: 15.09.2025). (In Russ.).

In particular, in his work “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere” [17], dedicated to the central role of the public sphere for Western political life, J. Habermas traces significant changes it has undergone under the influence of digital media and social networks. In the presented work, the author’s idea of the public sphere as a concentration of discursive practices in specific physical spaces where their development is linked with the process of the formation of liberal democracies in Europe and the USA in the 17th–18th centuries is noticeable. But as we already see from the third decade of the 21st century, transformational processes of globalization and liberal unification of states different from Western democracies are experiencing a value-worldview decline [18].

J. Habermas saw his task as deriving an “ideal type” of the bourgeois public sphere, tracing its formation from its origins in English coffeehouses and clubs, French salons, and German reading societies of the 17th–18th centuries to its full embodiment in the mass press and parliamentary activity of the 19th century.

In public administration and management, at the current stage of scientific reviews, a binary position of approaches and definitions has developed. As we emphasized earlier in comparing approaches to the etymological and conceptual interpretation of the term “governance”, let us give as an example the theses of the theory of New Public Management (one of the most popular on this issue is the book by D. Osborne and T. Gaebler [4] “Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector”). On the contrary, it highlights the role of high-level administrative leaders — such political appointees as ministers, heads of agencies, committees, and departments. In the movement to reinvent government, “elected executive leaders and authorized civil servants are involved in ‘steering’, in setting ‘missionary goals’, and in obtaining ‘results’” [4].

In the mentioned work, managerialist doctrines act as the subject of public activity. This may suggest to us that the essence of the concept of public management lies in the penetration of management, as business management in a market economy (the “entrepreneurial spirit”), into the sphere of public administration [18]. Can we, given this interpretation, separate politics and administration, as decision-making (politics) and its execution (management-administration)? J. Anderson’s point of view boils down to the fact that “public policy is whatever governments choose to do or not to do” [19. P. 32].

Modern concepts of New Public Management and Governance concentrate on high effectiveness of public administration, political pluralism in the decision-making process, delegation of authority to lower levels of the management

hierarchy, a more balanced distribution of *power, responsibility and accountability, development and expansion of civic participation*.

Such transformations indicate a partial transfer of power into the hands of elected or politically appointed managers. Can the above indicate a blending of research interpretation boundaries between politics and administration, an erasure of boundaries between decision-making by supreme authority and administration? And are such transformational properties characteristic of politico-administrative processes in the Russian state?

On the contrary, in political psychology, the phenomenon of transformational processes concerning such a specific sphere⁴ as politics and public administration is outlined in the theory of transformational leadership proposed by the American researcher James MacGregor Burns. According to the interpretation of his student B. Bass, transformational leaders must be able to formulate and present a vision of the organization, and subordinates must trust their leader [20].

The concept of transformational leadership is largely identical to the definition of effective leadership — the ability to direct organizational behavior in a team in the right direction, achieve a high level of productivity, commitment, motivation, organizational citizenship behavior, and so on. This, in turn, allows for the acceptable projection of the main provisions of the transformational approach in studying political leadership onto the study of institutions and administrative bodies, political decisions made, including by leaders and top executives. What politico-administrative decisions can be made by the top leadership of the state without clear conviction in their execution and, importantly, acceptance and execution by the political system and society?

Drawing a preliminary line under the ideas of various schools and currents in the humanities, we can summarize that “transformations” in the politico-administrative sphere depend on their attribution to the parameters of power, the theories, and finally on the personalities of leaders who can procedurally, substantively, or symbolically give color to ongoing or initiated events.

Let us give a definition: the totality of radical changes, including those that alter the structure of a system, add new objects and subjects of activity to it, form new processes, endow the system with new properties, are fair to call **transformations**.

⁴ Thus, according to several authors: M. Ilyin, A. Melville, Y. Fedorov, politics is interpreted as a specific type of activity of social actors associated with the struggle for power, the distribution of values, and the management of state and public affairs. *Politika kak sotsial'nyy fenomen. Portal ZINREF — uchebno-metodicheskiy resurs*. URL: https://www.zinref.ru/000_uchebniki/02800_logika/011_lekcii_raznie_59/766.htm?ysclid=lwp0zxr68g390744310 (accessed: 15.09.2025). (In Russ.).

Transformational processes in the public sphere affect both the change in the mission of the state and the structure, functions, and technologies of its politics and management in modern society, as well as the content of the activities of public associations and structures. Transformational processes in the public sphere simultaneously led to an increased role of state and non-state actors in the production and implementation of public policy and change the system of their relations with civil associations towards cooperation. At the same time, a transition occurs from an administrative state to a coordinative state, and in the sphere of non-state activity, the importance of “involvement in public affairs” increases. The ideological content of the term “state” also changes, when the autonomy of the state is relative and limited by structures of social power.

Often, state processes become not subjects of transformations, but objects. Global processes have a direct or indirect influence on the political system, which in the future acquires irreversible properties. Thus, the main feature of coordinated capitalism is that the state’s abilities change: the state ceases to simply own property and in this sense be a direct economic agent of action, and moves to so-called “transformative capacities” [20], i.e., abilities to provide assistance by coordinating economic relations and thereby increasing the competitiveness of the economy as a whole. The competitiveness of the economic development of a new market is associated not with the state taking on purely economic tasks; it increases under conditions of strengthening the state’s managerial function, at the center of which lies coordination and public values.

Let us turn to politico-administrative transformations in Russia, indicating a hybrid form of decision-making and execution in politico-administrative management.

Current Managerial Transformations in the Russian State

Over the last decade, politico-administrative processes, stages, and procedures have started and completed in Russia, provoking political researchers and historians to scientifically describe the subject from the position of established theoretical approaches. If such exist.

We present a number of events that occurred in the administrative-political sphere of the Russian state, which can be classified as transformations according to the signs we attempted to describe.

Establishment of a unified system of public power with amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation. Since June 1, 2022, the main chapters of the law on public power have come into force — on state bodies formed

in a subject of the Russian Federation, on their interaction, as well as on the highest official of the subject. The changes enshrine the principle of unity of the system of public power in the Russian Federation, the implementation of which is designed to increase the effectiveness of interaction between all levels of public power (federal, regional, and local) for higher-quality resolution of tasks facing public authorities, as well as to strengthen control over the activities and increase the accountability of these bodies. Thus, the Federal Law establishes the principles of activity of bodies included in the unified system of public power in a subject of the Russian Federation.

On February 21, 2022, Russia recognized the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, and on February 24, President Vladimir Putin announced the start of a special military operation (SMO) in Ukraine in response to a request for help from Donbas.

Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated November 9, 2022, No. 809 "On the Approval of the Fundamentals of State Policy for the Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values".

Starting September 1 2023, the subject "Fundamentals of Russian Statehood" is taught in the first year of undergraduate and specialist educational programs regardless of students' fields of study. The new discipline was developed and included in university curricula in accordance with the instruction of President Vladimir Putin following a meeting of the State Council on December 22, 2022.

The highlighted series of events as consequences of politico-administrative decisions allows us to examine the features of the modern political organization of Russian society, the causal nature and specifics of its current transformation [21; 22], the value-based support of traditional institutional decisions, and the particular polyvariability of relations between the Russian state and society in a federal dimension, to allow an objective representation of Russian state and public institutions. Also to highlight the features of the modern Russian political class, levels of power organization, the genealogy of leading political institutions, their history, causes, and consequences of their transformation.

Conclusion

Thus, the politico-administrative system in Russia is composed of the politics of decisions by the leadership and the relations between institutions ensuring their execution. Politics, in the person of the highest leadership, forms goals, the achievement of which directly depends on the tasks assigned to the

administrative sector of state power. The structure of given relations, often conflictual within a single political system, is determined by institutions and decisions aimed at them by the top leadership or initiated by them, to pass through the stages of the political black box, representing a complex subsystem of the social system.

Changing administrative frameworks and political reforms in Russia at the current historical stage may suggest that, from the point of view of predominantly the American school of political science and management, Russia goes beyond the interpretation of politics-administration/decision-execution, representing a hybrid variant, designated by some authors as “sovereign democracy”.

Furthermore, the increasing public role of the Government of the Russian Federation, accountability to public control, filtration in appointments through presentation in the legislative body indicates the acquisition of its own developed politico-administrative tradition of Russian politics, commensurate with external global challenges and threats, and meeting internal tasks.

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