



## WHY PUTIN STILL NEEDS VOTES

VOTES CAN BE UNCERTAIN TIMES, BUT THE RESULT OF THE JULY 1 ALL-RUSSIA REFERENDUM ON CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS IS UNLIKELY TO SURPRISE ANYONE. DESPITE VLADIMIR PUTIN'S APPROVAL RATINGS SINKING TO HISTORICAL LOWS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, POLLING SUGGESTS MEASURES ALLOWING THE LONG-SERVING RUSSIAN LEADER TO RETAIN THE PRESIDENCY UNTIL 2036 WILL RECEIVE PUBLIC SUPPORT. THE MAIN DRAW IS THE RAFT OF POPULIST MEASURES TIED TO THE 'ZEROING AMENDMENT' RESETTING PRESIDENTIAL TERM LIMITS, FROM INDEX LINKING PENSIONS TO EFFECTIVELY OUTLAWING GAY MARRIAGE. MOSCOW, STILL CONCERNED ABOUT TURNOUT, IS ALSO OFFERING TO RAFFLE PRIZES TO ALL THOSE WHO VOTE.

ON THE SURFACE, THIS IS A POWER-GRAB THAT WILL SEE THE COUNTRY SADDLED TO AN AGING LEADER WELL INTO THE NEXT DECADE. YET THE PRESIDENT HAS STILL NOT COMMITTED TO RUNNING IN 2024, AND THE KREMLIN RARELY TIPS ITS HAND, EVEN TO RUSSIAN ELITES. THIS SECRECY NATURALLY BREEDS A SENSE OF CONSPIRACY, BUT PUTIN IS KNOWN TO BE A TACTICIAN, NOT A STRATEGIST. WHEN HE SAYS HE DOESN'T KNOW IF HE WILL RUN, HE MIGHT BE TELLING THE TRUTH. STILL, IT WOULD BE COURAGEOUS TO BET AGAINST ANOTHER TERM.

THE FACT THAT THE POLL ITSELF IS DEEMED NECESSARY IS INSTRUCTIVE. RUSSIAN INSTITUTIONS ARE SO HOBBLING BY POLITICIZATION THAT EVEN IN THE HALLS OF POWER IT IS UNDERSTOOD THAT A POPULAR VOTE IS NEEDED TO ACHIEVE THE VENEER OF LEGITIMACY SO IMPORTANT TO THE KREMLIN. THE EXTRA TIME GRANTED BY THE AMENDMENTS ALSO GIVES THE PRESIDENT SPACE TO MANAGE A SUCCESSION. YET HEREIN LIES THE PROBLEM: PUTIN HAS BEEN AT THE TOP OF RUSSIAN POLITICS FOR 20 YEARS AND STILL, IT SEEMS, THE SYSTEM CANNOT SURVIVE WITHOUT HIM. IN 2020, HOW VLADIMIR PUTIN CAN LEAVE POWER AND ENSURE NATIONAL STABILITY REMAINS AN UNANSWERED QUESTION. PUTIN IS 67; IN 2036 HE WILL TURN 84. YOU CAN EXTEND PRESIDENTIAL TERMS, BUT TIME KEEPS TICKING.

## THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF BLACK LIVES MATTER

THE STATUS OF THE US AS A CULTURAL SUPERPOWER MEANS THAT RIPPLES IN AMERICAN POLITICS TEND TO MAKE WAVES ELSEWHERE. THE BLACK LIVES MATTER (BLM) MOVEMENT IS NO EXCEPTION. ITS

ROLE IN LEADING AND ORGANISING PROTESTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY IN THE WAKE OF THE GEORGE FLOYD'S DEATH HAS INSPIRED THE EMERGENCE OF SIMILAR MOVEMENTS ACROSS THE WORLD.

WESTERN EUROPE HAS SEEN THE LARGEST PROTESTS OUTSIDE THE US. ITS CORRESPONDING PATTERNS OF RACIALISED INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE, A SHARED HISTORY OF PARTICIPATION THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE, AND THE LEGACY OF COLONIALISM SPURRED SIZEABLE DEMONSTRATIONS FROM LONDON TO LISBON. ELSEWHERE, THE MOVEMENT HAS INSPIRED PROTESTS AGAINST MORE LOCALISED DYNAMICS OF RACIAL INEQUALITY. IN AUSTRALIA, MOST HIGHLIGHTED THE HISTORIC AND CONTEMPORARY MISTREATMENT OF ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES. IN ISRAEL, SYSTEMIC SOCIOECONOMIC DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ETHIOPIAN JEWS WAS THE FOCAL POINT.

PERHAPS THE MOST INTRIGUING MANIFESTATION OF THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF THE BLM MOVEMENT IS ITS TRANSPLANTATION TO MAJORITY-BLACK COUNTRIES. HERE, RACISM WAS NOT THE FOCUS. INSTEAD, THE NARRATIVE OF INJUSTICE WAS TRANSFERRED DIRECTLY TO THE ISSUE OF STATE AND SPECIFICALLY POLICE VIOLENCE. IN COUNTRIES WHERE ACCUSATIONS OF EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS, INDISCRIMINATE ARRESTS, TORTURE AND OTHER FORMS OF MALPRACTICE ARE COMMON, GEORGE FLOYD'S DEATH AT THE HANDS OF THE MINNEAPOLIS POLICE HAS A PARTICULAR RESONANCE. DEMONSTRATIONS WERE HELD IN JAMAICA, WHERE APPROXIMATELY 3,000 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED BY POLICE SINCE 2000. BLM PROTESTS IN SOUTH AFRICA, KENYA AND GHANA CONDEMNED POLICE BRUTALITY IN THE ENFORCEMENT OF COVID-19 CURFEWS. IN ACCRA, DEMONSTRATIONS RESULTED IN VIOLENT CLASHES AND THE INCARCERATION OF LOCAL ORGANISERS.

THE GLOBALISATION OF BLM CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO ITS UBIQUITOUS APPLICABILITY. IN COUNTRIES WITH A HISTORY OF BLACK OPPRESSION IT HAS REOPENED DEEP FISSURES HISTORIC RACIAL INJUSTICE AND INEQUALITY, WHEREAS IN AFRICA AND THE CARIBBEAN THE MOVEMENT HAS CENTRED ON THE PERPETRATION OF STATE VIOLENCE. THE STRENGTH OF THE MOVEMENT IS ROOTED IN ITS NEAR-UNIVERSAL APPEAL. EXPECT ITS MOMENTUM TO PERSIST FOR SOME TIME.

## FACING CHINA, INDIA HAS A MOUNTAIN TO CLIMB

THE DEADLY CLASH BETWEEN CHINESE AND INDIAN TROOPS IN THE HIMALAYAN GALWAN VALLEY MARKED THE CULMINATION OF NEARLY A DECADE OF SPORADIC SKIRMISHES ALONG THE DISPUTED BORDER. HOWEVER, THE FIRST DEATHS IN NEARLY 50 YEARS AND THE OUTBREAK OF SIMULTANEOUS BRAWLS CONFIRMED THAT PROTOCOLS TO DETER CONFLICT HAVE ESSENTIALLY COLLAPSED, REFLECTING INDIA AND CHINA'S INCREASINGLY DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIP.

INDIA'S GOVERNMENT CONSIDERS ITSELF A STRATEGIC COMPETITOR TO CHINA, BUT CHINA DOES NOT SEE A CONTEST OF EQUALS. WHILE INDIA HAS STAGNATED ECONOMICALLY AND DIPLOMATICALLY, CHINA'S RAPID ECONOMIC AND MILITARY GROWTH AND PRESIDENT XI'S ABANDONMENT OF CONSENSUS-DRIVEN DOMESTIC POLITICS HAS REMOVED MANY OF ITS INHIBITIONS. INDIAN POLICYMAKERS ARE ANXIOUS ABOUT ENCIRCLEMENT, WHILE THE BELLICOSE NATIONALIST RHETORIC OF OFFICIALS IN BEIJING AND NEW DELHI HAVE HEIGHTENED PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS OF RETRIBUTION FOR SUCH INCIDENTS.

PRIME MINISTER MODI HAS PREVIOUSLY WELCOMED MILITARY DISTRACTIONS FROM DOMESTIC CONCERNS; A BRIEF AIR WAR WITH PAKISTAN HELPED SECURE HIS RE-ELECTION IN 2019. BUT CHINA'S MILITARY IS NOT PAKISTAN'S, AND INDIA'S SPIRALLING COVID-19 EPIDEMIC IS IMPOSSIBLE TO DISTRACT FROM. ANY CONFLICT COULD RAPIDLY EXCEED INDIA'S CAPACITY TO MANAGE, AND MODI'S NOTABLY CONCILIATORY RESPONSE AND DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO DEESCALATE INDICATE A LIMITED APPETITE FOR A CONFRONTATION.

ONCE THIS CRISIS HAS PASSED, INDIA MIGHT SEEK MORE ARMS-LENGTH AREAS OF COMPETITION TO FORCE CHINA TO RECALCULATE AND MOVE CONFRONTATIONS AWAY FROM ITS BORDERS. BUILDING ON RECENT EFFORTS TO ALIGN MORE CLOSELY WITH THE US, DEEPER COOPERATION WITH ITS JAPANESE AND AUSTRALIAN ALLIES OVER THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE WOULD BE A TEMPTING STARTING POINT. HOWEVER, AN INGRAINED PREFERENCE FOR NON-ALIGNED INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY AND A RETICENCE TO ENGAGE WITH HUMAN RIGHTS AND TRADE ISSUES COULD KEEP THIS PROCESS DISJOINTED. EFFORTS TO REPLICATE THE CHINESE ECONOMIC MIRACLE WOULD ALSO BE MUCH HARDER WITHOUT CHINESE INVESTMENT AND TRADE. A CONTINUATION OF THE DYSFUNCTIONAL STATUS QUO SEEMS LIKELY, SETTING THE STAGE FOR FUTURE FLAREUPS.