



Putin's Russia: Life in a Failing Democracy

Anna Politkovskaya , Arch Tait (Translator)

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A searing portrait of a country in disarray, and of the man at its helm, from "the bravest of journalists" (*The New York Times*)

Hailed as "a lone voice crying out in a moral wilderness" (New Statesman), Anna Politkovskaya made her name with her fearless reporting on the war in Chechnya. Now she turns her steely gaze on the multiple threats to Russian stability, among them President Putin himself.

Putin's Russia depicts a far-reaching state of decay. Politkovskaya describes an army in which soldiers die from malnutrition, parents must pay bribes to recover their dead sons' bodies, and conscripts are even hired out as slaves. She exposes rampant corruption in business, government, and the judiciary, where everything from store permits to bus routes to court appointments is for sale. And she offers a scathing condemnation of the ongoing war in Chechnya, where kidnappings, extrajudicial killings, rape, and torture are begetting terrorism rather than fighting it.

Sounding an urgent alarm, *Putin's Russia* is both a gripping portrayal of a country in crisis and the testament of a great and intrepid reporter.

Putin's Russia: Life in a Failing Democracy Details

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From Reader Review Putin's Russia: Life in a Failing Democracy for online ebook

E.P. says

What can I say about Politkovskaya that I haven't already said? Maybe that this book, written specifically for publication abroad, is perhaps the most foreigner-friendly of her works. Unlike "A Dirty War," which is a compilation of her early articles on the second Chechen war, or later books such as "A Russian Diary," which are presented more or less as diary entries, "Putin's Russia" is a collection of essays about different facets of the post-Soviet experience. There are several essays on Chechnya and the army, of course, and a particularly harrowing/tearjerking one about the Nord-Ost crisis, but there are also essays on other social issues, one of the best being "Tanya, Misha, Lena, and Rinat: Where Are They Now?" In it Politkovskaya catches up with old friends whose fortunes have changed significantly under Yeltsin: Tanya was once a miserable engineer from the provinces, looked down on by her husband's Muscovite intelligentsia family, but after the fall of the USSR she took up market-trading and became first the support of the whole family, and then a wealthy New Russian, complete with bribery and a much younger lover; Misha was a rising translation star whose career derailed, sending him to drink, religion, and violent threats against his wife, Lena; and Rinat, a decorated special forces officer who is contemplating becoming a contract killer in order to support his family. In the essay Politkovskaya paints a picture of a society turned upside down, giving opportunities to those who before had few, true, but also wrecking people's lives and forcing people to abandon all considerations of honor and morality in order to survive, as families are torn apart and crime becomes the most common form of earning a living. Politkovskaya was critical of Putin, especially later, but here she also demonstrates an understanding of why people might prefer his brand of authoritarianism to the criminal free-for-all that was the '90s.

These essays are not only full of social interest, but, written as they are as essays or extended pieces of investigative journalism aimed at a Western audience, rather than short newspaper articles or diary entries, they have more of a narrative arc than much of Politkovskaya's other work, and are especially easy to read and follow. Her trademark brand of high moral outrage and blistering invective leveled at the corrupt, callous, or merely incompetent, however, is still in full force, and Western readers who have not read Politkovskaya before are in for a treat of a very definite and mindblowing kind.

I would like to say that, for all the serious issues that Politkovskaya covered, there was some light at the end of the tunnel and the book ends on a happy note, but alas, that is not case. Between when she first wrote the book and when it went to press, the Beslan crisis happened, and the book ends with a Postscript dedicated to that. Ten+ years later, the main resolution to the issue has been, not justice for all the victims whom Politkovskaya wrote about, but the murder of Politkovskaya herself, and while the person who allegedly pulled the trigger is now behind bars, the person who paid him to do so is still at large. Which makes it all the more important for Politkovskaya's words to be read.

Leland says

Anna Politkovskaya, a journalist and the author of Putin's Russia, was gunned down in her apartment elevator in Moscow in 2006, most likely for something she wrote, possibly in this book. Her depiction of Russia is stunning, insightful and passionate. This book is a must for anyone who is interested in global politics, human rights, justice, and good journalism.

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Spencer Willardson says

Politkovskaya's bleak outlook can be a bit hard to take in large doses. I picked up this book to re-read in light of the current situation in Ukraine. Putin's Russia is one that is unseen and virtually unfathomable to western readers - especially those that haven't spent a lot of time on the ground outside of Moscow or St. Petersburg.

One of the quotes that I picked up on during this reading concerns the stability of the Russian state.

Yes, stability has come to Russia. It is a monstrous stability under which nobody seeks justice in courts that flaunt their subservience and partisanship. Nobody in his or her right might seeks protection from the institutions entrusted with maintaining law and order, because they are totally corrupt. Lynch law is the order of the day, both in people's minds and in their actions. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. The president himself has set an example by wrecking our major oil company, Yukos, after having jailed its chief executive....Putin considered Khodorovsky to have slighted him personally, so retaliated.

A country as rich, as beautiful, and with as much history as Russia deserves better governance - but its history is so hard to escape.

Metodi Markov says

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Mikey B. says

Ms. Politkovskaya exposes several layers of corruption and malfeasance in Putin's Russia.

She takes us through the disastrous war in Chechnya where Russian soldiers are underpaid or not paid at all. This would seem to be endemic to the Russian army where during the Afghanistan war the same corruption happened – actual weapons were sold to the Mujahideen in order to make money. The brutality of the Russian towards the Chechen population is almost equal to the cruelty of Russian officers to their own soldiers.

She also exposes the corruption on how the Russian mafia has taken control over vast swaths of the country, as in the Urals for instance. It has taken over industries and controls the police and judiciary – often by violent methods.

Putin is attempting, as per Ms. Politkovskaya to be a mini-Stalin. He abstains from debate and appoints “yes-men” – Russia is regressing to the old Soviet ways.

The Chechen war is now becoming a scapegoat for all other problems and a moral drain on the country, but few overtly protest.

It must always be remembered that Anna Politkovskaya paid with her life for telling the truth.

Chris Steeden says

07-Oct-2006 and the author, Anna Politkovskaya, is murdered in the elevator of the block of flats where she lived. This book is from 2004. At that time the West appeared to have a different view of Putin than we do now. Politkovskaya wants to tell the truth about him.

She goes over the way that Russian soldiers are treated. Putin's handling of the second Chechen war including a terrible incident when a Russian colonel raped and killed an 18-year-old Chechen girl. How a small-time hoodlum can rise to be an Oligarch. As you can probably guess he does not get to where he is using legal means. ‘This is how it is in Russia now: you kill, someone you get respect’. How Judges have to

become corrupt or there will be consequences as one judge will attest as he was crippled after being savagely beaten by his attackers with iron bars. 'Almost nobody in Russia believes the Russian judicial system is fair'. Then there is the terrorist attack on a theatre. Russian troops used gas and stormed the theatre killing all the terrorists. 200 hostages were killed.

Her dislike of Putin is plain to see and she goes on to fully explain why. There were parts in the book that I was struggling to keep up especially where she is explaining the rise of the small-time hoodlum that became an oligarch. It's not a book that I could have just sat and read in one reading. I read it in bite-sized chunks. What was interesting for me is the perception of Putin then by the West compared to now. Politkovskaya appeared to know the truth about him then that was slowly realised over the years by the West. Unfortunately, she paid the price for airing her views.

Mariana Pinheiro says

After finishing this book, I found out that its writer was murdered. There could be no better proof to everything she tells us in this book. As she says in the beginning, she is not a political analyst, she is only telling her accounts of her motherland. That is why this book tends to be regarded as "biased" or too personal. She does express her indignation very clearly and, for some, this took out its objectivity. Not for me.

I really liked the stories she told in order to show the reality in Russia. Particularly, I am shocked to see the situation in the army. I knew that the soldiers weren't well paid, but I thought they were regarded and treated like heroes. I have seen some Putin's speeches and they are always full of praise to the Armed Forces. I thought being in the army was a sign of status. I am saddened that, in one of the most powerful and biggest armies in the world, these beatings seem ceaseless. People who are willing to sacrifice their lives for their country are extremely impoverished and suffer all kinds of moral and physical harm, not from enemies, but from their own superiores. And the thing is that most of them don't mind it, because their love for their Motherland and the sense of duty are bigger than the hatred towards the government and superiores. This sense of duty towards one's country is truly impressive.

The second thing that shocked me the most was the lack of rule of law in Russia. The stories related in this book are hard to believe. Coming from Brazil, one of the most corrupt countries in the world, reading about the Russian judicial system almost makes Brazil a paradise to me. It seems that the Russian Constitution is just for show and the law is only applied when it favors the likes of the oligarchy.

However, something that makes this book be less than 5 stars to me, is that the author seems to believe that all this system is only there because of Putin. That it is all his doing. But, in reality, the corruption and the lack of civil responsibility in Russia have been there for imemorial times. Since the times of the Tsars. Putin is merely a product of this system. In case he doesn't play by it's rules, he will be cast out by the empowered oligarchy just like all the judges and businessmen who try to be honest. Of course everything is taking major proportions now with capitalism: the bribes will grow ever bigger and, therefore, the theft will surpass the Communists' dreams. But that is only because capitalism gathers much more capital than Communism ever could.

AC says

Vignettes, many beautifully written, about the grim reality Putin's Russia. Politkovskaya herself was murdered, 2006, shot in her elevator by a professional hitman

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_...

Bettie? says

Anna Politkovskaya was murdered via contract killer on Putin's birthday 2006

Translated from the Russian by Arch Tait

Opening: **The Army in Russia is a closed system no different from a prison. Nobody gets into the Army or into prison unless the authorities want them there. Once you are in, you live the life of a slave.**

This is definitely THE book to browse before the 9th May extravaganza in Red Square. All those shiny new tanks - all those poor bullied soldiers.

Re criminals (p 30) '[..] **people who are not fighters but who just happen to be Chechens when someone needs to be convicted.**' Look at the poor sods who have been scapegoated for Boris Nemtsov's murder along the Kremlin wall.

Re the Budanov rape case (p 101): *'Lynch law was encouraged from the Kremlin itself - an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. We discovered that we were moving backwards, from stagnation under Brezhnev to the out and out arbitrariness of Stalin. It was terrifying to reflect that we probably had the government we deserved.'* Judge Bukreev's defence claims trial protraction

This book marks an important stepping-stone on the road to where we are now but it does feel dated, so much has happened since Anna's assassination. Well worth a skim through yet it is worth reading word by word from page 269 to the end, it is an impassioned summation.

Named and Shamed:

Sergei Ivanov

Anatoly Cherepnev

Yuri Budanov - On 10 June 2011, Budanov was shot dead in Moscow by an unknown perpetrator

Emmapeel says

Se davvero uno dei principi cardine del buon giornalista è mantenere 'la giusta distanza', Anna Politkovskaja non era brava. Aveva troppo cuore e troppo fegato per tenersi a distanza di sicurezza da quello che vedeva intorno a sé. Troppo forte l'urgenza di denunciare lo sfascio delle istituzioni nella Russia di Putin, la

magistratura corrotta, i militari al collasso, la sciatteria spietata dei burocrati, il servilismo dei media, l'uso strumentale della guerra cecena per consolidare lo status quo. Che le cose laggiù non andassero un granché democraticamente lo si intuiva anche prima, ma leggere queste storie una dopo l'altra, essere sbattuti di fronte alla violenza feroce e sistematica contro chi si oppone, all'impunità sfacciata dei poteri forti, allo strazio di persone comuni private del minimo diritto, all'eroismo anonimo dei pochi servitori dello Stato che resistono, ecco, è diverso quanto lo è il leggere di boxe stravaccati in poltrona dal sanguinare a bordo ring tempestati da nomi e fatti. Già, solo quelli importavano ad Anna Politkovskaja, che di tutto il resto non si curava: di tornire le frasi, di essere commovente o brillante, di analizzare, di accattivarsi il lettore, di apparire equilibrata e imparziale. Non ne aveva voglia né tempo, probabilmente intuiva di averne poco davanti a sé. Libro appassionato e durissimo, si piange di rabbia.

zumurrdu says

La Politkovskaja racconta storie di persone che vivono (in certi casi vivere è una parola grossa) nella Russia di Putin, nello specifico dei primi anni duemila, in piena lotta internazionale al terrorismo, con una guerra criminale in Cecenia, in un paese dove all'incancrenito regime comunista si è sostituito un "capitalismo sfrenato gestito da cupole mafiose", con l'appoggio di forze dell'ordine e funzionari corrotti e di un sistema giudiziario "da telefono", nel senso che il verdetto dipende da quale potente di turno ha espresso i suoi desideri con un'opportuna telefonata. Fra le tragedie del teatro Dubrovka e della scuola di Beslan. Le storie che racconta vanno a comporre un quadro che non vorremmo guardare, vorremmo girare la testa e pensare ad altro, alla nostra vita tranquilla e sicura... ma quanto sicura? Siamo certi che queste storie non riguardino anche noi?

"Non possiamo tollerare altri decenni di glaciazione politica. Vorrei essermeli lasciati alle spalle. Vorrei davvero che i nostri figli potessero essere liberi. E che i nostri nipoti ci nascessero liberi. Per questo invoco il disgelo. Gli unici a poter cambiare il clima, però, siamo noi. E nessun altro"

Il 7 ottobre 2006 Anna Politkovskaja è stata assassinata nell'ascensore della sua abitazione. Le circostanze dell'omicidio non sono ancora state chiarite.

Martine says

I have to admit I don't care overly much for Anna Politkovskaya's writing style. An objective reporter she is not (or rather was not -- she was murdered a few years after publishing this book); her indignation at the social ills she exposes comes across loud and clear, and she frequently goes so far as to tell her reader to share her indignation, occasionally to the point of being rather insistent. Personally, I would have appreciated a slightly more objective, less cynical approach. That said, there is no denying that Politkovskaya had good cause to be indignant, and her writing succeeds in making the reader share that indignation, or rather pessimism. It's hard to remain optimistic about Russia's future after reading this book. The present doesn't seem to offer much scope for hope.

In *Putin's Russia* Politkovskaya describes in seven chapters what has happened since Vladimir Putin assumed power in the Kremlin. She starts out by charting abuses in the army, more specifically in parts of the army stationed in Chechnya. This turns into a lengthy and fairly shocking expose of corruption in

Russia's legal system, where high-ranking army officers are exonerated from terrible crimes and where the rich and well-connected get away with absolutely outrageous business practices. She then describes poverty in the navy (apparently the commanders working on the world's most expensive submarines are nearly starving to death), the terrible position of Chechen citizens in Russia and the aftermath of the Nord-Ost and Beslan disasters. It all adds up to a rather dreary conclusion: Putin's Russia is an utterly callous and corrupt place which in many regards seems to be regressing into Soviet-style politics and situations. In fact, some things now seem to be worse than they were during the worst years of the Soviet era. I already knew that from the news, but reading Politkovskaya's stories really drove the fact home for me.

As I said, I don't care much for Politkovskaya's writing style, but there's no doubt that she has come up with a convincing, well-researched document here. She quotes many interesting people from all walks of life, has unearthed many legal documents to illustrate her stories and comes up with some wry observations about why certain changes for the better took place at a certain time (usually coinciding with the visit of some foreign dignitary Putin wished to impress) and about the Russian national character in general. It's a bit heavy-going at times, and some of the army stuff drags, but even so it's a powerful indictment of Putin's Russia, always shocking and occasionally quite mind-boggling.

Naomi says

What I loved about Anna Politiskya's commentary is that she gave details, names and effects of terrible acts not abstracted in any way. For this reason her book was disturbing in the extreme but I felt it was necessary to my studies into contemporary Russia. She was an amazingly brave person who despite great personal danger persisted in exposing 'the truth'. I hope her courage is not overlooked or her mission forgotten.

Daniel Simmons says

"There is not much wrong with our laws in Russia," writes Ms. Politkovskaya. "It is just that not many people want to obey them." This unsparing indictment of the new Russia targets businessmen, mafiosos, judges, police and politicians alike. A depressing and eye-opening read.

Orsodimondo says

LA COLPA È DELLA NOSTRA INDIFFERENZA PER I DESTINI ALTRUI

Io non so se *i particolari contano più del quadro in sé. Le parti valgono più dell'intero*, come pensa Anna Politkovskaja: di certo c'è che i 'particolari' e le 'parti' che lei racconta sono dannatamente illuminanti sul quadro intero.

Dio li fa e poi li accoppia.

Ne viene fuori una Russia che ha perfezionato lo stile delle storiche dittature sudamericane o africane, andando ben oltre, ben più su nella scala della corruzione, del sopruso, dell'ingiustizia, della violenza.

Come dice Anna,

Non c'è dubbio che il comunismo sia stato un danno tremendo per il nostro Paese. Ma quel che sta accadendo oggi è ancora peggio.

Anna Politkovskaja è stata uccisa il 7 ottobre 2006. Al funerale era presente un solo uomo politico italiano, Marco Pannella, amico personale di Anna. Nessun membro del governo russo presenziò. Il mandante dell'omicidio è tutt'oggi sconosciuto.

Nonostante esempi così ributtanti e dolorosamente faticosi da immaginare, non credo ci si possa illudere che il racconto di Anna Politkovskaja sia valido solo ed esclusivamente per il suo paese.

Anna Politkovskaja parla una lingua che sa di esperanto.

Quello vero, quello che dice chiaramente che al mondo non ci sono esseri umani di genere e importanza diversa, esseri umani più umani degli altri.

PS

Ho visto il remake di *Non aprite quella porta*, sono un fan di Jessica Biel, non potevo perderlo.

Realtà delirante, violenza all'ennesima potenza, crudeltà, nessun rispetto dell'individuo, sopraffazione, menzogna e inganno...

Poi ho ripreso in mano questo libro e mi sembrava di essere ancora dentro il film...

Ilze says

Two incidents make the reading of this book paramount: The gunning down of Anna Politkovskaya in 2006 and Time magazine's "Person of the Year (2007)": Vladimir Putin. Somehow there must be a link, but somehow the events seem too extreme to link them up. The Russian spy, Alexander Litvinenko, who died of polonium-210 radiation poisoning in the UK (2006), accused Putin of his (and Politkovskaya's) fate. Putin's Russia gives an honest look at what used to be the USSR, except that it doesn't seem as if the Iron Curtain has lifted under Putin's hand. Thanks to this journalist, the truth sneaks into the Western world (even if they choose to ignore it). The accounts move from the way the army is treated and the Chechen War (I & II), to the judiciary, the monopolisation of the trade industry, what happens to war veterans/pensioners and ends with the tragedy surrounding the theatre on the evening it played Nord-Ost (23 Oct.2002). Hundreds of people were taken hostage, almost as many died, but no-one knows who fired the shots and why. In fact, some form of gas was released into the hall, but still no-one knows what its origin was. Again, a hushed-up scenario, but why? "This is unbelievable! I hear my reader cry. This is exactly how, during the Yeltsin years, organized-crime syndicates were born and grew to maturity in Russia. Now, under Putin, they determine what happens in the state" (page 127). It certainly seems a sign of the Times that he was chosen as their "man".

Erik Graff says

Although I spent two years of college as a declared history major with a concentration on Russian history, I am certainly no expert, particularly as regards events since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. A friend from the former Yugoslavia recommended that I read the assassinated Politkovskaya as a window onto what has happened in Russia since the disastrous Yeltsin years. This was the first of two of her books that I read one after another.

Manny says

An open letter to everyone who thinks journalists are enemies of the people

You often hear these days that journalists are generically enemies of the people. Anna Politkovskaya was a journalist, so I guess that made her, specifically, an enemy of the people. But let's try and be more precise. No one can really be an enemy of *all* the people; people have such different agendas that you're almost certain to end up being on *somebody's* side. In practice, you're going to be an enemy of one part of the people, and a friend of another part of the people, and then there will most likely be a third part that doesn't much care one way or the other. So, looking at this book, of which part of the people was Politkovskaya an enemy?

Politkovskaya is mostly writing about the Russia of the early 21st century, during the first four years of Putin's reign, and she certainly seems to be taking sides. If you happened to be one of the people who, according to her account, got extremely rich by bribing judges to rule that your takeovers of former state-owned companies were not fraudulent and that your subsequent asset-stripping of those companies was fully legal, I'm pretty sure you'd consider her your enemy. She names names and provides a lot of details. And it's not just the oligarchs. Many of the judges who are claimed to have been paid off would no doubt also have considered her their enemy. I am not so certain about the people who had worked at the companies that got sold and asset-stripped, and then found they had no job. They wouldn't necessarily think she was their enemy. In fact, they might even think she was their friend. But I guess they're less important: they were just losers.

Perhaps this was the Politkovskaya's big problem, that she liked losers. She seems to have spent a lot of time talking with members of the Russian armed forces. I'm sure that Colonel Budanov, who was convicted of abducting and murdering a young Chechen girl after a lengthy series of trials, considered Politkovskaya his enemy. And I would imagine that the many senior Russian military officers, politicians and psychiatrists who tried to defend Budanov also considered her their enemy. The Chechen family whose daughter was kidnapped, raped and strangled may have thought she was their friend, but they were obviously losers. And as for her description of the special forces veteran who had carried out dozens of insanely dangerous missions, been wounded multiple times, but then got on the wrong side of his commanding officer when he snapped one day and called him a coward who'd just sat behind a desk while he'd been out risking his life... well, I think the commanding officer, who is described in a most unflattering light, must also have decided Politkovskaya was his enemy. The special forces guy may have liked her - another loser. If he'd had any sense, he'd obviously have put his skills at the service of the Russian Mob, who are very happy to recruit that kind of person and pay well. He seems to have been burdened with a ludicrously sensitive conscience.

Politkovskaya was certainly an enemy of the people who decided to end the *Nord-Ost* theater siege by

gassing the entire audience, resulting in over two hundred civilian casualties. She insisted on following up the story in quite unnecessary detail, for example suggesting that many lives might have been saved if only the authorities had made preparations to have adequate medical care available. The judge who presided over the, according to her description, cursory and insulting inquest must also have thought she was an enemy. It's possible that some of the victims' families considered her a friend. For example, the wife of the young musician with the Chechen name, whose husband apparently received no medical attention at all and was left to asphyxiate. I need hardly point out that Chechens are Muslims, and as such are automatically losers. Whose side are you on?

Last but not least, I rather think Vladimir Putin considered Politkovskaya an enemy. She says some very unflattering things about him, and, as usual, backs them up with annoying facts. If you're a friend or admirer of Putin, you may be relieved to hear that this enemy of the people was killed, in a professional-looking hit, on October 7 2006. Some misguided citizens say they're sorry she's no longer with us. But, you know, losers.

Jen says

Incredibly disturbing. And considering the book is a bit dated by now, cannot be overlooked as an important contribution to current Russian politics. Politkovskaya's writing style is sometimes almost too condescending to be read smoothly, but considering who she was, it is perhaps her way staying enough removed from the story to be able to tell the story at all.
