



Language

In this bibliography, the Russian government figures primarily as a supporter of authoritarian regimes in former Soviet states. Now it also warrants its own sub-section on the potential of internal resistance. After an uncertain political course under Boris Yeltsin from 1991-2000, Vladimir Putin (first elected President in March 2000) has promoted greater economic and political stability and an efficient form of authoritarianism, which allows degrees of individual and social freedom but represses significant dissent from individuals and from organized groups. Opposition parties are allowed to contest elections, but on unequal terms. Putin has served two terms as President, one four year term as Prime Minister (with an obviously subordinate ally as President) and was re-elected President (this time for six years) in May 2012. Putin undoubtedly has had widespread popular support for restoring stability, clamping down on some of the individuals who amassed fortunes in the 1990s by seizing the assets of the Soviet state, and appealing to Russian nationalism.

In general there was more protest, including strikes, under Yeltsin, whereas Putin has been more effective in repressing opposition demonstrations, mobilizing expressions of popular support for himself, and in channeling dissent. Key sources of opposition have been some investigative journalists – more than 20 of whom have been murdered – human rights defenders and ecological activists. It was not until the run-up to the elections of May 2012, and in their aftermath, that major protests erupted claiming the process was rigged. Hundreds were arrested. In the west considerable publicity has also been given to the feminist punk band Pussy Riot: their brief controversial protest before an altar in the Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Moscow (to oppose the political support given to Putin by the Russian Orthodox) has earned two members two years in prison. The regime in the latter part of 2012 initiated measures to tighten control of the internet and undermine civil society groups. The references listed below include assessments of the nature of Putin's authoritarianism as well as a few articles on the May 2012 protests.

Political Developments: 2012-2020

Vladimir Putin took a number of steps after 2012 to pursue his personal goals and consolidate his power and prominence within the Russian state. After the 2008-9 financial crisis, and a fall in the price of the oil and gas Russia exported, the regime's ability to win widespread popular support through its economic policies was weakened. The 2011-12 protests against the handling of the parliamentary and presidential elections also revealed the dangers of liberal opposition. Putin responded by adopting a more unequivocally anti-liberal, anti-western and nationalistic policy and ideology internally and externally. His foreign policy reasserted Russian political and military power internationally, for example through military intervention on the side of the Assad regime in the Syrian civil war in September 2015. It also cemented internal popular backing for his government. The 2014 annexation of Crimea (for long a part of Russia) from the Ukraine appeared in particular to have widespread public support.

The regime also continued to use official measures to weaken internal dissent. For example, Putin's United Russia Party in the Duma (parliament) passed a law in June 2016 that made it a crime for individuals not to give the authorities 'reliable' information about terror attacks and a range of other crimes, and undermined individual privacy by obliging telephone and internet companies to store personal information and assist intelligence agencies to decode them. The regime also continued to imprison and harass intellectuals and artists, arresting for example a prominent avant garde theatre director, Kiril Serebrennikov, whose productions raised sexual and political issues, on suspicion of fraud in March 2017.

Some of the most vocal opposition to Putin is conducted from abroad, by defecting intelligence agents like Alexander Litvinov, and exiled oligarchs like Mikhail Khodorkovsky. The latter, an extremely rich former energy company executive (jailed in Russia in 2005 and allowed to leave prison in 2014), set up a Dossier Centre which leaks secret information about Russian government activities to the media.

Putin is frequently accused of unofficially sanctioning (though not necessarily initiating) the murder of key opponents. Russian security officials are apparently designated to kill defecting members of the security services like Litvinov (poisoned with polonium in 2006) or Sergei Kripal (seriously harmed, though not killed, by Russian military intelligence operatives using the Novichok nerve agent in Salisbury, England in 2017). Other political killings may be carried out by members of the Russian criminal underworld with links to the regime (see Galleotti, *The Vory*, referenced below) or ordered by the brutal ruler of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, who has been backed by Putin since the crushing of the Chechen wars for independence from Russia. Investigative journalists have been



a primary target: the shooting in 2006 of Anna Politkovskaya (who had publicized Russian military atrocities in Chechnya) is the best known, but the Committee to Protect Journalists recorded in 2016 that since then 20 Russian journalists had been killed. Many more suffered violent attacks. Prominent political opponents of the regime who have died are Boris Nemstov and Sergei Magnitsky. Nemstov was a former deputy prime minister, and leader of the 2011-12 protests and presidential electoral challenge, who was shot in 2015, 100 metres from the Kremlin. Magnitsky was a lawyer, who died - apparently from beatings in jail - in November 2009, days before he was due to be either released or put on trial, whose name was used to promote sanctions against prominent Russian officials, legislated for by the US and other western government.

Between 2013 and 2017 there was little evidence of widespread discontent with Putin's rule or policies. Among the intelligentsia only a small minority, for example human rights campaigners and opposition activists, risked serious dissent. The regime allowed enough personal freedoms (for example to travel or to use social media) to defuse general dissatisfaction. Even some forms of media independence and electoral political opposition were tolerated if they did not go too far: they in fact provided a degree of legitimacy to the regime and the electoral process. Many among the general population also seemed to support Putin's promotion of Russian nationalist identity and pride.

Putin's decision in 2013 to target the small Russian LGBT community through hostile media portrayals, local bans on 'gay propaganda' succeeded by a national law against gay propaganda at the end of 2013, meshed with an anti-liberal and anti-European assertion of Russian nationalism. Public reaction appeared to manifest itself through a rise in violence against gays and lesbians. Putin denounced gays as not truly Russian, and during the 2014 Sochi Olympics suggested gays and lesbians from abroad might abuse children in Russia. Linking Russian nationalism to the patriarchal family, and promotion of a rising birth rate, was taken a step further in February 2017, when the government decriminalized domestic abuse of women and children (unless beatings resulted in broken bones), a step approved by an official of the Russian Orthodox Church on the grounds of protecting family privacy.

Evidence of Growing Opposition

Given the regime's stance, the decision in 2019 to arrest a feminist artist, Yulia Tsvetkova, who is also a LGBT activist, for 'distributing pornography' by portraying women's bodies was unsurprising. However, the strong campaign on Tsvetkova's behalf by fellow artists and writers, LGBT groups and feminists, who held rallies and pickets, put on exhibitions and used social media, despite arrests and threats, represented a significant fight back against repression. There was an even more unexpected response by journalists and media figures in June 2019 to the arrest of an investigative reporter, Ivan Golunov, known for exposing corruption, on drug-dealing charges carrying a possible 20-year prison sentence. His arrest was based on evidence planted by the police and he was beaten up by them in custody. This treatment of Golunov was strongly and prominently condemned across a broad range of media, including those that usually supported the Kremlin line, and thousands demonstrated (despite a police ban) against the arrest. The regime rapidly backed down, and the interior minister admitted that there was no convincing evidence for the charge. (Forensic testing revealed no trace of drugs on his person, and photographs published by police of a drug laboratory at his flat were subsequently revealed to have no connection with Golunov)

Since 2018 the regime has also faced growing disillusion and sometimes anger not only among the intelligentsia, some of whom have become more willing to protest openly again, but also among some sections of the broader population. Opposition has also spread from Moscow to different regions of Russia. During 2018-19 Putin's previously very high official popularity ratings had dropped to 64 per cent by the summer of 2019, according to the only independent polling service in Russia. When he conducted a TV phone-in during June 2019, one caller asked him when he was going to leave office. The major popular protests in Armenia in 2018 and in Belarus in 2020 also provide reminders of the potential for mass unrest.

The largest protests by the liberal intelligentsia since 2012 took place in Moscow in the summer of 2019, sparked by handling of elections to the largely powerless, but highly symbolic, Moscow local council. The decision to disqualify not only official opposition candidates, but all independent candidates, led one candidate, who had collected the required thousands of signatures, lawyer Ljubov Sobol, to conduct a hunger strike for weeks. There were major public protests, which were at first tolerated. But after protesters put up a few tents suggesting a long term occupation, the security services reacted by beating up demonstrators, arresting about 1,400, and threatening parents with the removal of their children. Anger at the security services resulted in the protest broadening into a demand for basic rights and a rise in support for the small human rights groups. University staff and students also mobilized to sign open letters of protest and picket police stations, when 21 year old Moscow student Egor Zhukov was arrested for his 1 August blog, which claimed that the secret services response to protests showed they had



seized power in Russia. About 50,000 people joined the next political demonstration on 10th August. In early September Zhukov was moved to house arrest.

Commentators and journalists suggest potential disaffection among a number of social groups. One is the well-educated younger generation in their twenties or thirties frustrated by the corruption, political style and lack of competence of the existing regime. Some may desire a more open and rule governed system in which to pursue their careers; others are angry at blatant manipulation of the electoral system and regime violence. Reportedly young people were much more prominent in the summer 2019 Moscow protests than in 2012. The rise of the internet as a source of alternative news has also weakened the previously key role of major TV channels under Putin's control to slant the information received by the public, especially those under 50. There has also been a rise in Internet activism on a range of social issue across Russia. On the other hand, access to the net, whilst it may promote scepticism about the official line does not necessarily translate into a desire to change the regime, as interviews conducted by the *Economist* with mostly contented 18 year-olds across Russia before the 2018 presidential election revealed ('The Puteens'. *Economist*, 17 March, pp.31-2).

Evidence of social and economic discontent in parts of Russia distant from the capital suggests a potential weakening of The control exerted by Putin and his United Russia party. Regional and local elections provide an opportunity to register anger at corruption, opposition to cutbacks in social services and proposed raising of the retirement age, and disillusion with the ruling United Russia party. The potential for local protest has also been created by the regime's weakening of regional power and the ability of regional governments to control their own resources. In the 2018 regional election for governors, four United Russia candidates were defeated. One candidate in the local elections of 2019 who managed to capitalize on these sentiments was Sardana Avksentieva, elected mayor of Yakutsk in Siberia, who immediately cut back on the number of official cars, international travel and expensive hospitality of previous mayors, and stressed her personal frugal lifestyle and affinity with the local people. The most dramatic example of resistance to the Putin regime occurred in the city of Khabarovsk in the Far East (bordering China), when about 30,000 marched through the streets in July 2020 in defence of their governor, Sergei Furgal, who had been seized by security services and flown to Moscow to face charges linked to a 15 year old murder. Fugal was one of the opposition candidates elected in 2018 and his arrest aroused regional pride and anger at Moscow, with protesters waving regional flags. The protests continued for weeks.

Some of this opposition has been prompted, or intensified, by the tireless campaigning of Alexei Navalny, who since the death of Nemstov has been the leading figure in the political opposition. He trained as a lawyer, but has played an active role in electoral politics since the 2000s, and in organizing protests against electoral fraud. In his early years in politics he espoused right wing nationalist views (for example supporting the 2008 war against Georgia), but has since worked closely with liberals and also embraced social justice issues. He has long focused on exposing corruption, waging a vigorous campaign through You Tube video blogs against the endemic corruption of top figures in business and politics. This theme strikes a chord both with the general public and with some younger tech savvy entrepreneurs who want opportunities for fair competition. When, for example, Fedor Ovchinnikov, who ran a pizza business, was accused of drug dealing after criminals (protected by the police) planted drugs in one of his Moscow outlets, Navalny took up the case on You Tube and the prosecution dropped charges.

Navalny tried to stand in the 2018 presidential elections but was disqualified in December 2017 by fraud charges brought by the regime. He then urged a boycott of the poll. But he had already, while continuing to investigate and expose corruption, started to highlight social and economic concerns, for example assisting independent unionization, especially in the medical profession and among teachers. (The official trade union bodies are linked to the Putin regime) He has also pursued a strategy of challenging the regime in local and regional elections throughout Russia, setting up local organizations and travelling widely to publicize corruption and support candidates opposing United Russia.

Navalny has frequently been arrested and detained on bogus charges; he partially lost sight in one eye after green liquid was thrown at him in 2017, and believes he was poisoned whilst in custody in 2019. Nevertheless, his collapse into a coma on an aircraft at the end of August 2020, when returning from Siberia where he had been supporting local opposition candidates, indicated the regime's decision to move from intimidation to assassination. In response to internal and external pressure, the government eventually allowed Navalny to be moved from a Russian hospital to Germany for treatment. German scientists identified that Navalny had been poisoned with a new version of the Novichok military nerve agent. Navalny himself has suggested the reason for this attempt to kill him is his role in promoting opposition in regions like Siberia. Two of his associates were elected to city councils in Tomsk and Novosibirsk in September 2020.



Putin's Strategy to Remain in Power

The assassination attempt against Navalny suggests nervousness about the future of the regime. Putin's strategy for remaining in power has evolved over time with changing circumstances. Since 2017 he has emulated earlier tsars and portrayed himself as guardian of the people, ready to strike down subordinates who exceed their powers. One platform for doing this is periodic TV phone-ins when people can complain to him direct. A favoured tactic is to dismiss and bring proceedings against individual officials on charges of corruption and to publicize the individual's downfall. For example, Mikhail Abyzov, a former minister, was arrested in March 2019 accused of embezzling 4 billion roubles. In 2020 the regime also tried to modernize and update its political elite, launching a training programme 'Leaders of Russia' to promote a younger and more expert, but loyal, new political elite. New tame opposition groups were also promoted to create a semblance of electoral competition. But this latter tactic could backfire. In the 2020 local elections in a village about 300 miles from Moscow the United Russia official asked a cleaner, Marina Udgodskaya, to run against him; although she did not try to campaign, she won 62 per cent of the vote and replaced him.

Putin was due under the constitutional rules to retire from the presidency in 2024, when he would have served two more consecutive six-year terms as president since 2012 (when Dimitri Medvedev, who had swapped roles for four years, reverted to being prime minister). By January 2020, however, Putin publicly indicated that he was considering his future, mooted various possible changes to Russia's constitution which might redistribute power to the prime minister and the Duma. Medvedev then 'resigned' from his long running post as prime minister, and was demoted to a more minor role. The impact of Covid-19, however, enabled Putin to abandon complex constitutional redrafting. Instead he held a referendum in June 2020 (extending voting over seven days and to a wide range of venues, such as playgrounds, which made checking impossible) on a range of proposals, which included a constitutional amendment nullifying the limit of two consecutive terms as president, and authorizing Putin to stand for two more six year terms from 2024. The referendum result announced was that almost 78 per cent of Russians supported this proposal. By the end of 2020, therefore, Putin appeared to have secured the presidency for life, but faced potential resistance in the provinces and a revived liberal political opposition.

Navalny's Return and Major Russian Protests

Alexei Navalny returned to Moscow, after recuperating in Germany for five months from being poisoned by Novichok, on 17 January 2021. He was arrested at the airport and temporarily sentenced the next day to 30 days for violating parole (while in Germany), until further charges were brought. Immediately after Navalny's sentence his supporters made public a two-hour video about Putin's financial affairs. The most arresting revelations were pictures secured by a camera on a drone, which showed the extensive grounds and luxury palace (including a casino) in a secret estate on the Black Sea, which it was alleged belong to Putin. (He subsequently denied ownership and a close associate claimed the property was his, but Navalny maintains Putin is the real owner). The film, unlike earlier revelations of economic corruption and excess, which focused on Putin's circle, directly attacked the president himself. It immediately attracted millions of viewers, intrigued by details of the palace furnishings, such as the gold-plated lavatory brushes. By early February the video had apparently been watched by 100 million people and a poll by the Levada Centre found that trust in the president had dropped to 29 per cent of those questioned.

Navalny in his first court appearance called for people to lose their fear and for demonstrations across Russia on 23 January to demand better political future. This call met with an impressive response with thousands taking to the streets not only in Moscow and St Petersburg, but in Vladivostok on the Pacific and Yakutsk, where demonstrators turned out despite the - 50 centigrade temperature. A total of 180 cities and towns, including in Crimea, had protesters out on the streets and the range of social groups involved appeared much wider than in 2011-12. Many of the demonstrators called on Putin to resign. Students at Moscow university had been warned not to protest, but some did so. Police carrying truncheons forced protesters out of squares in several cities, and in both Moscow and St Petersburg marchers broke through police lines and fought back. The demonstrations were repeated on 31 January, some protesters waving gilded lavatory brushes. Demonstrators took part again on 7th February in further rallies across Russia demanding Putin's resignation. In Moscow protesters, some shouting 'Putin is a thief', tried to reach the prison where Navalny was held. The police were filmed using stun guns and beating women with batons, and in St Petersburg a policeman was revealed pulling his pistol. There were 5,100 arrests - Navalny's wife and brother, and many of his associates, had been arrested earlier.

The regime engaged in a barrage of hostile propaganda against Navalny, accusing him of criminal behaviour and



acting as an agent of the West, pointing to official condemnation by the US, EU and UK governments of the treatment of Navalny. He was also described as a Nazi in the media. The authorities have brought him to trial on a series of charges. On 2 February he was sentenced to two years and eight months incarceration on the same charges that had led to a suspended sentence in 2014. His court appearance was marked by 350 further arrests in Moscow, not only of protesters but also journalists, who were targeted by the riot police. Navalny was in court again on 5 February, charged with insulting a war veteran. Western reporters suggested that more serious charges might be pending. By late February it was estimated a total of 10,000 protesters had been arrested - in Moscow the courts and detention centres were swamped and many had to be kept in police vans overnight.

[The Kremlin Emboldened](#) [1], Journal of Democracy, Vol. 28, issue 4, 2017, pp. 60-116

This supplement contains a number of articles exploring the nature of 'Putinism', the degree of regime stability, the extent of genuine popular support, and the implications of Putin's post 2014 international policy for Russia internally. Authors provide varied perspectives, including an assessment of increasing popular frustration, especially among young people.

Anderson, Perry, [Incommensurate Russia](#) [2], New Left Review, Vol. July-August 2015, issue 94, 2015

Anderson discusses the nature of Putin's regime, starting from two opposing assessments of it. The first, promoted by western journalists, stressed lack of legality, kleptocracy, thuggery and authoritarianism. The second, elaborated by some academic studies, suggested a more nuanced picture of gradual progress towards greater legal stability. Anderson then considers in some detail the implications of Russian policy in relation to the Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and situates Putin's rule in the wider context of Russian and Soviet history. He concludes by noting the tension created by trying to combine traditional Russian emphasis on military power and regional domination with the logic of financial capitalism.

Democracy, Journal of, [Putin under Siege](#) [3], special section, Journal of Democracy, Vol. 23, issue 3 (July), 2012, pp. 19-70

Comprises 5 articles: Shevtsova, Lilia, 'Putin Under Siege; Implosion, Atrophy or Revolution?'; Krastev, Ivan and Stephen Holmes, 'An Autopsy of Managed Democracy'; Popescu, Nicu, 'The Strange Alliance of Nationalists and Democrats'; Volvkov, Denis, 'The Protesters and the Public'; Wolchick, Sharon, 'Can There be a Color Revolution?'

Dobson, William J., [The Dictator's Learning Curve: Inside the Global Battle for Democracy](#) [4], New York, Harvill Secker, 2012, pp. 341

Former editor of [Foreign Affairs](#) [5] and [Foreign Policy](#) [6] assesses the nature of various contemporary authoritarian regimes and discusses unarmed resistance. Chapter 1 'The Czar' analyses the Putin regime including its control over the media; Chapter 2 'Enemies of the State' gives prominence to a campaign to preserve the Khimki forest and the effectiveness of tactics used.

Enikolopov, Reuben, [Social Media and Protest Participation: Evidence from Russia](#) [7], Econometrica, Vol. 28, issue 4, 2020

The article assesses the impact of the main Russian online social network, VK, on the likelihood of protest with a focus on 2011. It argues that increased use of the network did have some impact on the likelihood of protest, but did so through simplifying coordination rather than increasing the availability of criticism of the regime. The authors also suggest that wider social use of the network actually increased support for the government.

Galleotti, Mark, [The Vory: Russia's Super Mafia](#) [8], New Haven, Connecticut, Yale University Press, 2018, pp. 344



Galleotti, a Russian expert at the Institute of International Relations in Prague, explores how the Russian underworld has evolved under Putin, and how the regime has both exerted control over it and also used it for semi-covert operations, which the government can distance itself from in public. Although the underworld can be used when violence and ruthlessness are required, Galleotti stresses that many criminals now have sophisticated financial and technological skills.

Greene, Samuel ; Robertson, Graeme, [Putin v the People: The Perilous Politics of a Divided Russia](#) [9], New Haven, Connecticut, Yale University Press, 2019, pp. 296

The authors, academic experts on Russian politics, draw on surveys, social media, interviews and leaked documents to examine why there has been such long term popular support for Putin. They examine his changing tactics, his handling of the 2012 protests against electoral manipulation, and the role of the annexation of Crimea in 2014 that made pride in Russia the main pillar of his support. The authors argue that attempts to secure change are undermined by belief that it is impossible, but suggest there are limits to public acquiescence and Putin's power. The potential fragility of his rule is revealed for example by demonstrations by thousands of pensioners against pension reforms that raised the retirement age.

Robertson, Graeme B., [The Politics of Protest in Hybrid Regimes: Managing Dissent in Post-Communist Russia](#) [10], New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 303

Thorough study, with substantial chapter on strikes and workers' mobilization.

Ross, Cameron, [Regional Elections in Russia: Instruments of Authoritarian Legitimacy or Instability?](#) [11], Humanities and Social Science Communications, 2018

This survey of regional elections for governors and assemblies in 2015, 2016 and 2017 finds that the regime has switched from a strategy primarily reliant on manipulating election results (liable to cause criticism and protest) to focus on manipulating the registration of candidates, so preventing serious opposition candidates from standing. Whilst this approach has strengthened Putin's United Russia party in regional elections up to 2017, it has also resulted in widespread apathy and low turn- out, which could undermine the regime.

Roxburgh, Angus, [The Strongman: Vladimir Putin and the Struggle for Russia](#) [12], London, I.B. Taurus, 2011, pp. 338

By BBC and *Sunday Times* journalist.

Saradzhyan, Simon ; Abdullaev, Nabi, [Putin, the protest movement and political change in Russia](#) [13], [17 Feb 2012], Paris, EU Institute for Security Studies, 2012

Shevtsova, Lilia, [Russian under Putin: Titanic Looking for its Iceberg?](#) [14], Communist and Post-Communist Studies, Vol. 45, issue 3-4 (September), 2012, pp. 209-216

Smyth, Regina, [How Alexei Navalny Revolutionized Opposition Politics in Russia, before his Apparent Poisoning](#) [15], The Conversation, 21/08/2020,

An assessment, by a US academic, of Navalny's role and impact in the immediate aftermath of his poisoning.

See also: Nikitin, Vadim, 'As Alexei Navalny's Life Hangs in the Balance, So Does the Fate of the Russian Opposition', The Nation, 2 September, 2020.

Analysis of Navalny's changing political stance that discerns 'an unexpected but unmistakable left turn' in recent



years.

See also: Gorokhovskaia, Yana, 'The Navalny Case may Weaken the Idea that Putin is in Total Control', *Guardian Weekly*, 4 September 2020, p. 47.

Stoner-Weiss, Kathryn, [Comparing Oranges and Apples: The Internal and External Dimensions of Russia's Turn Away from Democracy](#) [16], In Bunce; McFaul; Stoner-Weiss, [Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Postcommunist World](#) [17] ([D. II.1. Comparative Assessments](#) [18]), New York, Cambridge University Press, pp. 253-273

Wilson, Kenneth, [Is Vladimir Putin a Strong Leader?](#) [19], *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 07/10/2020,

Examines Putin's strength both in terms of his personal power and the effectiveness of his policies measured by economic growth, social stability and international standing. The article compares Putin's record with that of governments in other former Soviet states, and concludes that his achievements are not especially impressive.

See also: White, David, 'State Capacity and Regime Resilience in Putin's Russia', *International Political Science Review*, 2018.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512117694481> [20]

White argues that although state capacity in Russia is 'relatively weak', the Putin regime has achieved relative stability through enriching elites, controlling civil society and opposition, and promoting public support through 'economic benefits and national-patriotic appeal'.

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- [18] <https://civilresistance.info/section/d-resisting-authoritarianism-post-communist-and-post-soviet-regimes/d-ii-electoral-0>



[19] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2020/vladimir-putin-strong-leader>

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