



Unlearning the Soviet Tongue: Discursive Practices of a Democratizing Polity

Natalia Kovalyova

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How do countries democratize? What route does the way out of totalitarianism take? Students of Russian politics have pursued answers to these questions by surveying Russians on a variety of attitudes, beliefs, norms, and practices. This book attends to political discourse to demonstrate how it creates and constraints political opportunities. It examines an important period of Russian political history: from Boris Yeltsin's second presidential election in 1996, when democracy was pronounced victorious, through its gradual slide toward authoritarian practices during Vladimir Putin's initial two terms in office, and to the election of his protégé Dmitry Medvedev in 2008. This analysis challenges the assertions of Russian democracy as doomed by the governing rationalities of the elites. Likewise, it refutes the notion of Russians as an apathetic nation in chronic need of a "strong hand." It argues that if we are to understand how Russia lives, how it endures, and how it can change, we need to pay attention to the discourses that shape Russian political identities and the nation's political future.

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