



How Russia Really Works: Informal Practices in Politics and Business



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In a famous 1939 broadcast, Winston Churchill told his audience: “I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It’s a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” Communism has long gone but is Russia becoming more transparent? In tackling this question my recent book *How Russia Really Works* presents a novel approach. Rather than looking at what does not work in Russia and why, I focus on what does work and how. By analyzing post-Soviet politics and business from the perspective of informal practices, I discover rarely visible forms of activity and dispel a number of commonly held stereotypes about corruption and illegality.

Prof. Ledeneva received her undergraduate degree in economics at Novosibirsk State University (1986) and her M.Phil. (1992) and Ph.D. (1996) in social and political theory at Cambridge University. She is author of *Russia’s Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange* (Cambridge University Press, 1998) and *How Russia Works: The Informal Practices That Shaped Post-Soviet Politics and Business* (Cornell University Press, 2006) and co-editor of *Bribery and Blat in Russia* (Macmillan, 2000) and *Economic Crime in Russia* (Kluwer Law International, 2000).

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Many works by Russian authors are devoted to the image of the state, its formation, and development. The theoretical approaches to this issue were considered in their writings by A. Krotov, N. Zamyatina, Ye. Petrova, A. Panasyuk, and N. Arbatova. Also, while speaking of historical approaches to the study of such a phenomenon as a country's image, it is necessary to note the comprehensive concept of defining and promoting the image of Russia by Ye. In addition to the mass media, Russian literature and movies are the surveyed respondents' other sources of information about the culture, politics, and lifestyle of Russian society (6.8%). A number of studies by the Pew Research Center confirm that the Internet is becoming an increasingly popular source of information. In *How Russia Really Works*, Alena V. Ledeneva explores practices in politics, business, media, and the legal sphere in Russia in the 1990s—from the hiring of firms to create negative publicity about one's competitors, to inventing novel schemes of tax evasion and engaging in "alternative" techniques of contract and law enforcement. There are also a few quantitative studies on informal practices related to corruption used by domestic and foreign business in Russia (c.f. Denisova-Schmidt 2014, Ledeneva 2006). These researchers have analyzed the business sector in general without clearly distinguishing between domestic and foreign companies. "How Russia Really Works covers a fascinating topic—a cultural analysis of the transformation of economic activity in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet state. Alena V. Ledeneva focuses specifically on the nature and implications of informal practices. This book is important and innovative, providing a unique ethnographic perspective on rarely visible informal economic activity and dispelling a number of commonly held stereotypes about corruption and illegality." "This is an excellent account of informal practices that characterize and shape the political and business spheres of activity in contemporary Russia. an important addition to our understanding of contemporary Russian affairs." (Graeme Gill, *Russian Review*, April 2007). Review.