

Television and Presidential Power in Putin's Russia. By Tina Burrett. BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies. London: Routledge, 2011. xx, 295 pp. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Figures. Tables. \$155.00, hard bound.

Tina Burrett's book was written before Vladimir Putin's controversial election to a third term as president and before the unprecedented wave of anti-Putin protests that followed. It is a mark of the extent and durability of the control that Putin exerts over television broadcasters that little of what Burrett says about the Kremlin's influence on them is rendered invalid by the events of 2012. Moreover, Burrett's account of the process by which Putin acquired that influence does much to explain why he persists in attributing such importance to television's role in securing it.

The book charts Putin's relationship with national television during his first two terms. It is structured around news coverage of key elections: the 2000 presidential election, the 2003 State Duma elections, and the 2004 presidential election. There are also chapters on Putin's early struggle with the oligarchs, and on agenda setting and editorial practices on NTV and Channel 1. The book concludes with a chapter treating Putin's second term and centering on coverage of major events (benefits reform; Beslan; the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election; the 2007 Duma and 2008 presidential elections). Conceived within the framework of elite theory, it shows how Putin, having wrested control of national broadcasting from the oligarchs, used television to shape public opinion but also to establish domination over political elites, setting them against one another to his advantage. Methods include interviews with key players in the Moscow media and political elites, and a content analysis of news agendas on Channel 1's *Vremia* and NTV's *Segodnia* bulletins—two approaches rarely found in Russian media studies, and very much to be welcomed. The interviews in particular provide a compelling insight into the constraints and contradictions constraining Russian broadcasters. Burrett is right to stress that the tension between commercial and political imperatives is prime among them.

Burrett's analysis is refreshing in other ways. First, while making no bones about the ruthlessness with which Putin has exploited television to bolster his position, and drawing attention to the public relations disasters to which his heavy-handed manipulation has led, Burrett remains admirably even-handed. She makes judicious use of comparisons with western media systems, showing that, although they are expressed in an extreme form in Russia, many features of the relationships between elites and broadcasters apply elsewhere. She recognizes, too, that Putin's centralizing instincts have never guaranteed mastery of the airwaves and that conceiving of the Russian media as subject to a homogenized "state control" mechanism "risks . . . a false reading of the wider political system that has developed since 2000" (2). She is careful to emphasize the part played by factional conflicts, demonstrating how, rather than suppressing all alternative opinion, Putin permitted limited plurality, "allowing him to co-opt a broad range of political positions, whilst retaining his manoeuvrability between . . . competing elites" (3). Here, the content analysis of subtle differences between NTV and Channel 1 news agendas is of continuing relevance (perceptions of blanket uniformity in Russian broadcasting remain misguided). Burrett argues convincingly that the Kremlin later deployed restricted pluralism in a new context, invoking the "inoculation" principle—admitting dissident voices to the broadcasting peripheries in order to prevent the full-blown "disease."

At its best, then, *Television and Presidential Power* offers a convincing, if not altogether novel, challenge to prevailing models of "transition societies." A few issues of scope and methodological consistency limit the extent of that challenge. The content analysis, although insightful, is based on a two-week sample and would require sustained development to do justice to its explanatory potential. Similarly, the elite

theory model falls away somewhat in the second half of the book which tends to rely on summaries of more traditional secondary source material on Putin's consolidation of control over the media. Moreover, by overplaying the elite dimension, Burrett risks abstracting Russian television's relationship with power away from other salient factors such as the growing influence of transnational and new media sources of influence. Also sidelined is the role of broader sociocultural currents in shaping both the public opinion whose endorsement Putin craves and the output of the television channels that can ill afford to ignore them, including the relatively unconstrained non-news programming that dominates schedules and viewer preferences alike.

Nonetheless, this book will surely establish itself as a major point of reference for scholars and students of Russian media and society, and of the politics of postcommunist transition.

STEPHEN HUTCHINGS
University of Manchester