

Ekaterina Duntsova and Russian electoral dictatorship. A Thread

Tuesday 26 December 2023, by [MATVEEV Ilya](#) (Date first published: 24 December 2023).

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Ekaterina Duntsova is a local activist and journalist from Rzhev, a small town in central Russia known mostly for the gruesome WW2 battles that happened there.

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A few weeks ago she announced her candidacy for the March 2024 presidential election. Today, she was blocked from participating under some formal pretext.

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This is notable for two reasons. First: the operation of electoral authoritarianism.

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Elections in Russia have long been a joke, completely hollowed out by all kinds of fraud. And yet, the mighty Kremlin is afraid of a 40-year old local activist with zero national visibility. Afraid enough to block her from participating.

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This is very typical of electoral authoritarianism: extreme vulnerability to any kind of challenge, despite the weight of propaganda and repression.

If Putin is so popular, why is he so afraid of ANY competition not directly sanctioned by his presidential administration?

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The second thing: despite the decades of intensifying dictatorship and the departure of close to 1 million people since Feb 24, there are still people capable of participating in democratic politics - and willing to do so.

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Russian society has long been ready for democracy. It is very easy for me to imagine a vibrant democratic process in Russia, in the absence of the artificial handicap pulling everyone back.

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This is precisely why any kind of challenge, no matter how small, is met with crushing force by the Kremlin. Force is increasingly the only thing they can rely on.

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This is also why Putin is not interested in ending the war. His regime currently survives through de facto martial law introduced because of it.

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The failure and bankruptcy of Putinism have been glaringly obvious for a long time. It's a concrete block dragging the country down, forcing it to drown.

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Of course, as Charles Tilly once remarked, "violence works". The completely artificial nature of Putinism at this point does not mean that it is any easier to get rid of it.

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Moreover, Putin's chief objective now is to re-mold the Russian society, closing the gap between the public and the regime. The aggressive injection of propaganda in the school education is a case in point.

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Despite the broad (but shallow and superficial) support for the war, Putin is disappointed in the Russian society and wants to re-educate it in an essentially fascist gesture.

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I recognize that each of us can only make small steps to resist this tendency, but if tens of millions of people will take these steps, the process can be reversed and Putinism can be finally defeated.

Ilya Matveev

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