Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World

By Andrew Wilson

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States like Russia and Ukraine may not have gone back to totalitarianism or the traditional authoritarian formula of stuffing the ballot box, cowing the population and imprisoning the opposition–or not obviously. But a whole industry of "political technology" has developed instead, with shadowy private firms and government "fixers" on lucrative contracts dedicated to the black arts of organizing electoral success.

This book uncovers the sophisticated techniques of the "virtual" political system used to legitimize post-Soviet regimes: entire fake parties, phantom political rivals and "scarecrow" opponents. And it exposes the paramount role of the mass media in projecting these creations and in falsifying the entire political process.

Wilson argues that it is not primarily economic problems that have made it so difficult to develop meaningful democracy in the former Soviet world. Although the West also has its "spin doctors," dirty tricks, and aggressive ad campaigns, it is the unique post-Bolshevik culture of "political technology" that is the main obstacle to better governance in the region, to real popular participation in public affairs, and to the modernization of the political economy in the longer term.

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Review

"This is a splendid study that captures the essence of post-Soviet politics, getting to the core of Putin's Russia and showing the author's unmatched command of Ukrainian political life. It is a book to be read by anyone with an interest in the machinations of contemporary politics."—James Gow, King's College London

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". . . .a systematic and intelligent discussion of a generally neglected or misunderstood part of the post-Soviet political process."

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About the Author

Andrew Wilson is senior lecturer in Ukrainian studies at the School of Slavonic & East European Studies, University of London. He is the author of *The Ukrainians*, published by Yale University Press.

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