



Gangs of Russia: From the Streets to the Corridors of Power

Svetlana Stephenson

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Since their spectacular rise in the 1990s, Russian gangs have remained entrenched in many parts of the country. Some gang members have perished in gang wars or ended up behind prison bars, while others have made spectacular careers off the streets and joined the Russian elite. But the rank and file of gangs remain substantially incorporated into their communities and society as a whole, with bonds and identities that bridge the worlds of illegal enterprise and legal respectability.

In *Gangs of Russia*, Svetlana Stephenson explores the secretive world of the gangs. Using in-depth interviews with gang members, law enforcers, and residents in the city of Kazan, together with analyses of historical and sociological accounts from across Russia, she presents the history of gangs both before and after the arrival of market capitalism.

Contrary to predominant notions of gangs as collections of maladjusted delinquents or illegal enterprises, Stephenson argues, Russian gangs should be seen as traditional, close-knit male groups with deep links to their communities. Stephenson shows that gangs have long been intricately involved with the police and other state structures in configurations that are both personal and economic. She also explains how the cultural orientations typical of gangs—emphasis on loyalty to one's own, showing toughness to outsiders, exacting revenge for perceived affronts and challenges—are not only found on the streets but are also present in the top echelons of today's Russian state.

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