



NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY  
HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

*Regina Smyth, Anton Sobolev, Irina Soboleva*

# **A WELL-ORGANIZED PLAY: SYMBOLIC POLITICS AND THE EFFECT OF THE PRO-PUTIN RALLIES**

BASIC RESEARCH PROGRAM

WORKING PAPERS

SERIES: POLITICAL SCIENCE  
WP BRP 05/PS/2012

This Working Paper is an output of a research project implemented as part of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE). Any opinions or claims contained in this Working Paper do not necessarily reflect the views of HSE.

*Regina Smyth*<sup>\*</sup>, *Anton Sobolev*<sup>†</sup>, *Irina Soboleva*<sup>‡</sup>

**A WELL-ORGANIZED PLAY:  
SYMBOLIC POLITICS AND THE EFFECT OF THE PRO-PUTIN  
RALLIES<sup>1</sup>**

The paper illustrates the government's agility in response to opposition protests and the debacle of parliamentary elections. We explore the evolution of Kremlin strategies from a reliance on cooptation to more coercive strategies—a trend that continued after Putin's election in March. These strategies were successful in mobilizing core voters, creating common identity among participants, and containing the electoral effects of the opposition protests. However, the government's strategy also embodied significant costs that are likely to have longer-term influences and did little to build a true movement of regime loyalists. The Kremlin's rigid definition of both the symbols and rhetoric of Putinism left little room for participants to participate in the production of symbols and language. While the narratives imposed from above help Putin's supporters to participate in political life in limited ways, they remain unable to formulate and articulate independent political positions. As a result, supporters remain highly dependent on the state. Deprived of the benefit of hearing supporters' demands, this strategy also leaves the state in peril of further losing touch with its political base.

**Keywords:** elections, mass protests, collective actions, cooptive strategies, hybrid political regimes, Russia.

**JEL Classification:** D72, D74.

---

\* Department of Political Science, Indiana University, e-mail: [rsmyth@indiana.edu](mailto:rsmyth@indiana.edu)

† Laboratory for Political Studies at the Higher School of Economics; e-mail: [asobolev@hse.ru](mailto:asobolev@hse.ru)

‡ Laboratory for Political Studies at the Higher School of Economics; e-mail: [sobolevaiv@gmail.com](mailto:sobolevaiv@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup> The title reflects quote by a Pro-Putin participant, "If we talk about the impression of the rally, in my case it was a sort of delight from a well-organized play, in which people surprisingly participated guided by their own convictions" (Luzhniki, February 23, 2012)." Reported in Amerkhanov et. al. 2012.

In December 2011, state-controlled elections served as a catalyst for opposition mobilization against Russia's electoral authoritarian regime (EAR). In response, the state orchestrated mass rallies throughout the Russian Federation in order to answer opposition protests and ensure Vladimir Putin's re-election in March 2012. Competing street actions became a battleground on which the pro- and anti-Putin activists contested the political narratives that defined both the President and his supporters. Kremlin political advisors forged a link between Pro-Putin rallies and his campaign rhetoric in order to project state power, mobilize core support, and define both the leader's reputation and the dominant political agenda.

Putin, and his United Russia Party (ER), long understood the value of rallies to intimidate opposition forces. The Kremlin adroitly deployed political theater in order to frame an official regime narrative. Much of the theater focused on creating a cult of personality around Putin himself in order to render him the only viable choice of loyal Russians. However, electoral challenges to ER in December 2011, and the resulting anti-regime, anti-Putin, protests throughout the winter, forced the Kremlin to reconfigure the rallies as a more effective countermeasure to regime opposition.

Relying on unique individual-level survey data, we examine the effect of the pro-Putin rallies through the lens of the literatures on electoral authoritarianism and symbolic politics. We argue that while these rallies played a significant role in mobilizing vote support for Putin, their long-term value is less certain as they also revealed the weaknesses in the President's popular support and in the regime's capacity to monopolize the political agenda. As opposition leader, Aleksey Navalny, noted in his blog the pro-Putin events referred to in the popular press as "Putings," created the opportunity for more than a million citizens to see firsthand behind the curtain of the constructed support for the President. Many more citizens viewed blogs, youtube videos, and reports of the constructed nature of the opposition as well as its internal divisions. As a result, the rallies have the potential to erode long-term support for Putin, substituting fear and dissimulation for popular agreement and genuine admiration of the leader.

### **Electoral Authoritarianism and the Importance of Symbolic Politics**

Electoral authoritarianism is a political system that combines electoral competition with elements of coercion and manipulation in order to ensure regime

stability (Schedler 2006, Lust-Okar and Ghandi 2009). All EARs embody interdependent solutions to two collection action problems: fostering intra-elite unity and bolstering mass support for the elite group in the form of votes (Langston 2006, Smyth et. al. 2007). Much of the work on electoral authoritarian regimes focuses on the variation in strategies that elites use to solve these two dilemmas.

Across individual cases, EARs use a wide range of tools to build electoral support, ranging from electoral fraud and controlled candidate entry to subtle forms of redistribution and issue framing designed to ensure voter loyalty (Birch 2011, Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2010, Schedler 2006). A typology of strategies is presented in Table 1.

The table describes electoral interference in terms of the nature of strategies and the degree to which the activity is hidden or open. Coercive strategies involve violence or sanction from the police or military forces. In contrast, cooptive strategies tend to rely on institutional incentives, side payments or inducements to win the tacit support of opposition. These strategies also vary in their observability, providing the state with the means to obscure its actions as a means of precluding a social backlash (Levitsky and Way 2010).

Table 1: Strategies for Securing Mass Support for the Ruling Elite In Electoral Authoritarian Regimes

		Visibility of Strategies	
		Visible	Hidden
State Strategies	Cooptive	<b>Personalist Linkages</b> <b>Reliance on National Symbols</b> <b>Mass Rallies</b> <b>Dominant Campaign Content</b> State Dominant Party National Programs/Populist Politics	Clientelist Linkages Construction of Friendly Opposition Biased Electoral Rules
	Coercive	Military presence Harassment of opposition Voter intimidation Manipulation of Registration and Suffrage	Electoral Falsification Vote Buying Administrative Exclusion of Opposition Restrictive access to media Unequal access to electoral resources Ad hoc Rule by Law

The interaction between these two dimensions defines the range of mechanisms available to the state and the potential costs of its strategic choices. Reliance on violence against voters or opposition protesters is extremely costly, while subtle manipulation of law or tax codes to prosecute opposition leaders is less so. Similarly, blatant fraud is more likely to provoke opposition action than is establishing electoral rules that create a state advantage or the capacity to disallow viable opposition from participation (Magaloni 2006). Strategies of electoral control are also distinguished by when they occur in the electoral process, encompassing manipulation of the ballot itself and the manipulation of the voting process (Birch 2011).

We show that these strategies can also be deployed to counter opposition protests that threaten regime stability by diminishing the capacity of the opposition to organize and attract support. As a whole, these tools combine to thwart the accountability mechanism of elections without appearing to usurp representation. Political leaders are thereby able to maintain control and maintain mass belief in the efficacy of democracy, because of the infrequent use of force and appearance of choice on the ballot.

Far from being just fig leaves of systemic legitimacy, the electoral components of EARs are critical for maintaining systemic equilibrium. Winning elections is not sufficient; system stability demands overwhelming victories in order to remove all incentives for dissatisfied elites to defect and build an independent challenge to the regime (Magaloni 2007; Smyth et. al 2007). If vote support unexpectedly declines, then it provides two strong signals: either elites failed to deliver votes, or voters rejected the notion of inevitability and rebelled by supporting the weak opposition. In either case, the self-reinforcing mechanisms of the system are imperiled.

Vladimir Putin's regime encountered this challenge in December 2011 as the ruling ER party lost its constitutional majority in parliament, securing 49 percent of the vote despite significant fraud. The loss compounded as Putin faced presidential elections just three months later, in March 2012. The regime faced an unexpected critical juncture. Putin needed to shore up electoral support and suppress the growing opposition before the regime frayed. Tried and true strategies failed to suppress opposition protests, forcing the regime to alter its approach. By late December, Putin fired his chief strategist, Vladislav Surkov, who had managed the regime through cooptation, and replaced him

with Viacheslav Volodin, who combined more coercive strategies with symbolic politics devised to create the public dissimulation resonant with the Soviet past.

As we highlight in Table 1, symbolic politics, mass rallies, and even personalism are important instruments for maintaining power relations (Brysk 1995). These strategies fulfill important functions, including mobilizing core support, generating collective identity, and defining the terms of political debate. As Schatz writes, “The cement of soft authoritarian rule is an elite’s ability to frame political debate, thereby defining the political agenda channeling political outcomes (Schatz 2009, 203).” Symbolic politics also play a pernicious role in attacking opposition and tamping down political discourse, demonstrating to citizens how they must act and speak in public arenas (Wedeen 1998, 1999, 2008). Through this discourse, citizens form a collective identity; they may not agree with the regimes’ narrative but nonetheless adopt it (Wedeen 1998, 2002). Such narratives do not activate agreement among its citizens. Rather, they trumpet messages that cannot be challenged, forging a semblance of consensus and unanimity that is difficult to challenge. In the next section, we lay out the evolution of the 2012 pro-Putin rallies, highlighting increased reliance on the symbols and rhetoric as the crisis deepened.

### **Three Models of Collective Action: The Evolution of Pro-Regime Rallies and the Putin Campaign Message**

As with the anti-regime protests that erupted in Russia’s major urban centers in December 2011, the pro-regime actions were extremely complex events. Kremlin strategy evolved from a defensive posture designed to stave off opposition protest, to an offensive strategy designed to define and mobilize Putin’s electoral support and shift public support against the protest movement.

In the wake of the colored revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, pro-Putin rallies served as insurance against potential youth-based opposition (Silitski 2010). Nashi, an organization constructed by the Kremlin to smother street-level opposition, served as the linchpin of this strategy (Schwartz 2007; Wilson 2012). The Kremlin also formed the Young Guard of United Russia, Mestniye, and Stal, to bolster its capacity for preventative counter-revolution (Horvath 2012). Youth rallies also bolstered Putin’s personalist appeal using both rhetoric and symbols, stenciling his face on t-shirts, posters, and balloons, and celebrating his birthday in song and gifts. In the year before elections, as

approval ratings for both ER and Mr. Putin fell, the Kremlin added a new group to its arsenal, the All-Russia People's Front (ONF), that more closely resembled Putin's diverse group of core voters.

Following elections, the Kremlin mobilized its forces to counter potential post election protest. Nashi and Young Guard, joined by ONF, held a celebratory concert in central Moscow on the evening of elections, December 4, and celebrations on December 5. Nashi also responded to the December 6 opposition protest at Triumfalnaya Square in Central Moscow with drums and chants, coupled with a significant police presence that produced a large number of opposition arrests. However, none of these efforts deterred the growing opposition.

This failure provoked the Kremlin's experimentation with the rally strategy, marking a shift from cooptive toward more coercive tactics. By late December, the President's re-election committee within the Presidential Administration devised a second type of rally that was reoriented toward Putin's core supporters. The Kremlin commandeered the organization, *Sut' Vremeni* or Essence of Time, constructed by the political scientist and talk show host, Sergei Kurginyan. Kurginyan's "anti-orange" movement aimed directly at the opposition rallies, highlighting the danger of revolutionary street protests. Their rhetoric walked the line between the opposition and the regime: fair elections and constitutional order that could only be supplied by strong and stable leadership.

Buttressed by the Kremlin, the "anti-orange group" staged a rally at Poklonnaya Hill on February 4 as a counterpoint to the opposition's sanctioned protest action at Bolotnaya Square. Despite the fact that rally attendance exceeded the expectations, the Kremlin's reliance on the anti-orange group was short-lived. On February 23, a second anti-orange event at the All-Russia Exhibition Center (VDNKh) competed directly with the Kremlin's Luzhniki rally that featured Mr. Putin. The VDNKH rally drew only 1,000 participants.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the Luzhniki rally, entitled "We Defend the Nation," was attended by 130,000 participants and included live music, traditional dancers, booths selling state-subsidized food and drink, and short, impassioned speeches by both politicians and celebrities.

---

<sup>2</sup> The anti-orange website can be found at [www.anti-orange.ru](http://www.anti-orange.ru), accessed May 29, 2012.

With this shift, Kremlin tacticians rolled out a third type of rally explicitly tied to vote mobilization and message framing in support of Putin. These actions reflected the catch-all nature of Putin's electorate, not just young people. Rather than articulate a clear and coherent political message, they relied on a combination of familiar national symbols and tried-and-true rhetoric: the danger of revolution, the imminent danger of foreign threats, and the need for strong leadership—Putin—to maintain a strong nation.

*Contesting with Words: The Rally Narrative*

Faced with growing opposition protests, the pro-Putin events became venues of political contestation over the acceptable frame for the discussion of politics. Putin's team clearly recognized this battleground and focused on the opposition in the formulation of its attack (United Russia 2012). Efforts to vilify the opposition defined an "us versus them" boundary that resonated with the core message of Putin's campaign. The common rhetoric created mass solidarity through overlapping narratives of the common enemy, the moral responsiveness of civil society, and the challenges to national unity. The principal foundation for the three narratives was stability resting on Putin's leadership.

Following a common EAR strategy, the leadership supplemented its national narrative with a promise of state support for core constituencies. Putin wrote a series of articles outlining his plans for economic development in his third term that were published in disparate newspapers, targeted critical audiences, including housewives, office workers, businessman, and political pundits. In reality, these appeals were little more than guarantees of tangible benefits for groups that remained loyal in face of internal and external threats.<sup>3</sup>

To complement these promises, the pro-Putin rallies framed an anti-opposition collective identity around shared apprehension—the fear of destabilization—and the belief that Putin would guarantee stability. The slogans chanted at pro-Putin rallies were simple and clear: "We are opposed to the orange plague;" "Vladimir Putin and nobody else;" and "Those who hate Putin have no use for a strong Russia." A fear of return to the 1990s and dominance of Western-leaning liberal politicians united regime supporters

---

<sup>3</sup> The series consisted of five articles that covered: challenges, immigration and nationality, economic development, governance and social policy. The lack of sound economic foundation at the core of the promises was discussed in a number of critical articles cited in our bibliography.



who perceived protest as a destabilizing threat. With some irony, political analysts argued that the “For Fair Elections” movement mobilized Putin's latent electorate by conjuring a new revolution that could only be thwarted by Putin’s reelection.

The discourse around Putin’s role in the causes of the challenges facing Russia reinforced this divide. Just as the anti-regime protests held Putin responsible for the ills in Russia, the pro-regime rallies absolved Putin of all responsibility, blaming a variety of internal and external enemies, including the world financial crisis and the legacy of the 1990s. The opposition alleged to have arisen from a rejection of Russian culture and disloyalty to the motherland. As one pro-Putin activist wrote,

“These so-called young citizens who are actually only a small segment of the youth...are strangers, especially for the people whose interests and values they despise and really just do not know and do not understand. This coven of cosmopolitans is not interested in problems of our suffering motherland. They are eager to fly away to their beloved Europe if they are not allowed to make a European life here (Akopov 2012)”

This narrative combines the themes of Western enemies and the opposition’s lack of patriotism or national pride, with the strong sense that the anti-Putin crowd is not actually anti-Putin but anti-Russian and very ill-mannered.

Nationalist sentiment was reinforced at all of the rallies in rhetoric, paraphernalia, and location. The Luzhniki rally culminated in a short speech by Putin that explicitly defined a voting block that loved Russia. Putin said, “There are tens of thousands and tens of millions of people like us. We want to ensure that there are more of us...(Anti-Orangists 2012).” The candidate thanked supporters for both their moral support and their votes. Posters hammered home the message that a vote for Putin was a vote for a strong Russia, stability, and secure futures. This rhetoric united both types of Putin supporters—the statist and the Russian imperialists—as it relied on a common narrative of the populist story of the great challenges facing the nation.

The pro-Putin, nationalist message was also evident in the trappings of the crowd. Photos and videos of Putin rallies showed professionally made attire, posters, balloons, and flags, as well as refreshments, sound systems, and heat lamps. There was also swag: pro-Putin participants appeared as a sea of blue, red, and white jackets, hats, and scarves,

echoing both the Russian flag and ER's symbols. Alex Khitrov, a photographer, posted a photo essay of the February 18 rally in Vladivostok. Khitrov shows attendees dressed in new jackets emblazoned with "I am for Putin" and large nylon banners in the same colors that read, "My city is Vladivostok. My president is Putin (Dvoynova 2012)."<sup>4</sup> The pro-Putin spin-doctors were careful to meld national, cultural, and political symbols together to invoke a strong emotional response from both rally participants and the broader audience. They also invoked strong national symbols in both the timing and location of the competing street actions.

*Swamps and Heroes: Space and Time as Symbols of State Power*

Officials reinforced the symbolic meaning of both pro- and anti-regime rallies in both their timing and location. While the opposition initially applied for a permit to protest in Revolution Square, officials granted them a permit for Bolotnaya Square, best translated as "Swampy Square," located across the river from the Kremlin. This affront was so blatant that Eduard Limonov, a long-time leader of the non-systemic opposition, called his supporters to Revolution Square in a emblematic rejection of state efforts to "pen the opposition in the swamp (Odynova 2011)."

In contrast, the large pro-Putin rallies took place on the Manezh Square (in the shadow of the Kremlin), a march on Kutuzovsky Prospect to Luzhniki stadium, and Poklonnaya Hill, best translated as Reverence Hill. All these places are symbols of the Russia's greatest war victories. Manezh is full of monuments to Russia's sacrifice and ultimate victory in WWII. Joseph Stalin built the area of Kutuzovsky prospect, named for Marshal Kutuzov, to connect symbols of the Napoleonic War and WWII. Poklonnaya Hill encompasses Victory Park, a memorial to WWII.

The timing of rallies also reinforced the themes of Russian victory and national pride. The Luzhniki rally coincided with the Day of the Defenders of Motherland honoring those who served the nation in war. It also overlapped with "pancake week," a traditional Slavic holiday marking winter's end. The state invoked both holidays in the ceremony of the rally. Putin's fiery speech summoned war poems and songs, while organizers distributed hot pancakes to participants.

---

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the discussion of the event in the cited article, Khitrov's photos can be found on *LiveJournal* at <http://alexhitrov.livejournal.com/131805.html>, accessed June 22, 2012.

As the rallies evolved, they became increasingly successful at forging an identity for Putin's core supporters that was both recognizable and compelling, while simultaneously discrediting the "For Honest Elections/Honest Power" movement. To explore how effectively the intended audience absorbed these messages, we rely on individual-level opinion data of rally participants as well as evidence drawn from national surveys. As the analysis of individual participants reveals, the rallies stimulated high levels of vote support but also revealed the gaps in that support, collective opinion, and ideological cohesion among regime loyalists.

### **Mobilizing Core Voters: Organization, Symbols and Rhetoric in the Pro-Putin Rallies**

Much like the "blue" counterpart to the more studied orange protestors in Ukraine, analysts tend to dismiss participants in pro-Putin rallies as coerced or otherwise forced into attendance. Evidence from youtube, photojournalism of reporters like Khitrov, and a plethora of reports on social media, clearly shows that the state paid, enticed, or coerced many participants into attending. Organizers of the rally on Poklonnaya Hill acknowledged that some participants were forced to participate ("Meeting at Poklonnaya" 2012). Likewise, there were press reports of "rent-a-crowds" being constructed on behalf of rally organizers (Odynova 2012). In our sample, six percent of respondents reported that they were asked by their employer to attend the rally. This finding probably under-reports the true involvement of inducements to attend, but it lends credence to the anecdotal reports of coercion.

State influence in the rally organization was a critical strategy in the effort to shape popular opinion. Echoing EAR electoral strategies, Putin's team combined authoritarian enforcement mechanisms to guarantee attendance with populist policies to attract genuine supporters. The former demonstrated the power of the regime and the latter its attractiveness. Moreover, the resulting ambiguity undermined any universal claims of fraud or manipulation, and focused debate on these ephemera rather than the larger issues of corruption and political manipulation at the core of the opposition movement. This strategy also forced the opposition to undermine regime support by negatively labeling fellow citizens, much as Putin had labeled them.

Rally organizers also highlighted their capacity to mobilize a crowd, both as a

mechanism to demonstrate the power of the state and to reflect Putin's core electorate, which was not based in Moscow. Popular press reports focused on the bus caravans that arrived from Russia's regions at pro-Putin events. Organizers of the Luzhniki Rally in Moscow told a reporter from *Kommersant* that they expected buses from 80 regions within the Federation (Batalov 2012). Published photos of buses themselves reveal that they also served as advertising, since they were covered with banners exclaiming, "We are for Putin," and "Russia's strength is in the Regions." Similarly, the press services of Nashi, the Young Guard and Stal', announced that they had mobilized armies of regional youth to counter potential anti-regime action. Beginning on December 4, regional members of Nashi set up camp at VDNKh and took up residence in university dormitories. In our surveys of protest participants, half of respondents were from Moscow city and 25 percent were from Moscow Oblast. Another 25 percent of the sample came from other regions or oblasts, providing some sense of the scale of the conscription efforts.

There is little doubt that the Kremlin projected state power through these rallies, yet in doing so the rallies demonstrated that state control does not always engender state loyalty. Viewed in aggregate, the rallies defined an "us against them" mentality that defined both the boundaries between movements. However, the theatrical quality of the rallies stood in sharp contrast with the interest-based collective action of the anti-regime protests. While this show of state power may have mobilized vote support, and even reinforced the "stability" mantra of the regime, it did not solve the deeper problems of eroding support for the President and his policies. The analysis of individual-level data underscores these conclusions.

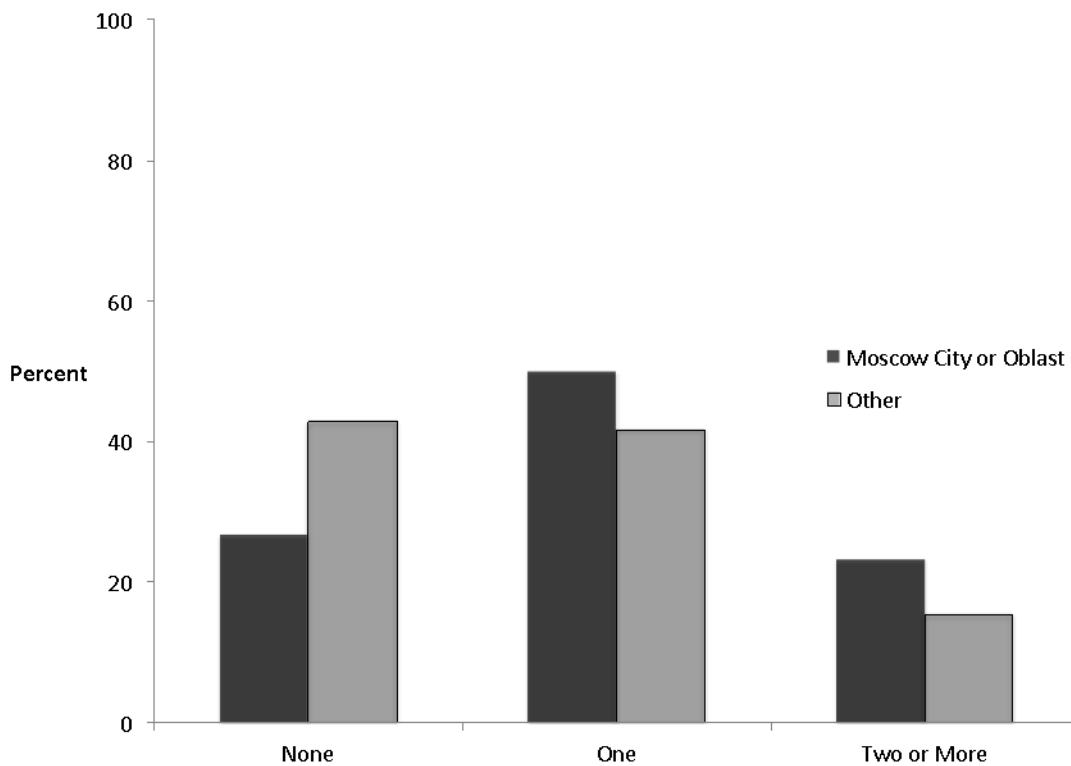
### **The Sample: Describing Pro-Putin Rally Participants**

We were faced with two distinct problems in designing our research strategy: drawing a representative sample from the crowd at each protest, and ensuring that a sample from one meeting accurately represented the movement. It was difficult to determine underlying population of rally protesters since each event was fairly fluid—participants came and went, and many individuals participated in the march but not the meeting. The rallies were also very large, often over 100,000 people, so that it was difficult to get a general sense of the crowd.

Our response to this dilemma was to design a strategy to maximize our ability to compare attitudes and behaviors among groups of participants in order to measure the coherence—or shared identity—of regime supporters.<sup>5</sup> Given the press reports and posted videos of rally attenders refusing to speak with the press, we were also concerned that individuals would be reluctant or deterred from participating.<sup>6</sup> While we did run into some problems, we did get a fairly good response rate of individuals approached by our interviewers.

To determine the degree to which rally populations were stable over time, we asked respondents to identify all the rallies they had attended. Figure 1 reports the frequency of rally attendance, comparing participants who were from Moscow Oblast and those who were from other regions.

Figure 1: Individual Participation in Rallies and Protests



<sup>5</sup> The data presented here are drawn from a sample of protesters at two events: a pilot study of 45 respondents on February 23 at Luzhniki and a full sample of 318 respondents on March 5 in Manezh Square. These events were held toward the end of the initial wave of the protest cycle, in the series of events explicitly organized by pro-Putin organizations such as the ONF, ER, and the youth organizations.

<sup>6</sup> We anticipated problems with response at the rally and were prepared to conduct a snowball sample based on contacts identified in initial face-to-face interviews at the rally. This precaution proved unnecessary as respondents willingly completed their interviews at the rally.

This evidence gives a sense of the overall pattern of participation. The most striking figure in the data is that 80 percent of our sample had participated in two or more rallies. Most of these regulars were Moscow residents—75 percent of city and oblast residents attended at least two rallies. In contrast, only slightly more than half of the participants who were bussed in had been to a previous protest, although a small minority—about 15 percent—were habitual attenders. Closer examination shows that this core was comprised of older workers, supporting claims of workplace coercion or incentives to bolster rally attendance. In contrast to this group, 52 percent of non-Muscovites who were under thirty were first time participants. Substantively, the percentage of first time attenders suggests that these rallies may have played a role in activating core supporters in addition to coercing participation. Methodologically, the overlap in participation from event to event suggests a basis for cautious claims about the generalizability of our findings in assessing the impact of the movement.

Since our goal was to understand the range of opinion and support within the rally, we began our work with a target sample that would maximize variation across social groups. Table 2 reports the demographic structure of our sample.

There are a number of striking features in the data. First, these data reflect the activist role that youth groups played in orchestrating rallies even late in the election cycle, particularly groups organized by ER and ONF. This conclusion is supported by responses to our questions about the role of social capital on the decision to protest. Although most respondents reported very low membership in social organizations, younger participants were twice as likely to be members of political organizations than their older counterparts. Thus, our overrepresentation of youth in the protests may not be a deviation from the population of rally participants.

Participants		
Gender	Male	62.0
	Female	38.0
Age	< 20	25.6
	21 - 30	26.4
	31 - 40	11.6

	41 – 50	15.7
	51 – 60	10.2
	> 60	10.2
Education	Incomplete	2.3
	High School	6.8
	Special Training High School	20.1
	Technical Training Higher Ed.	26.3
	University	41.9
	Graduate School	2.0
Sector	Private	30.4
	State	39.8
	Social	3.1
	Not Employed	24.7

---

Entries are percentage of survey respondents

---

Similarly, despite our emphasis on identifying a targeted sample, our respondents include more men than women. This difference reflects the reality of the meetings. Men were more likely to protest given the police presence at all rallies and the perceived uncertainty of street action. Our data shows that despite their participation in pro-Putin events, 85 percent of respondents perceived the police presence as aggressive. This finding resonates with first-hand reports that note the police presence was more apparent in the pro-Putin events, where police stood in the crowd and directed the flow of participation (Amerkhanov et. al. 2012). In addition, the disproportionate level of men in this survey is largely concentrated in the under-30 demographic, which seems to map to accounts of youth mobilization.

Two other attributes in our sample, employment and education, also show surprising variation. Press reports characterized the differences in the pro- and anti-regime rallies as a face-off between the two Russias: the urban middle class and the

provincial workers. The data suggests that this characterization is simplistic.<sup>7</sup> Our sample was evenly divided among three groups: non-workers, those employed in the private sector, and those employed in the state sector. The pattern is distinct from national patterns of employment. Rosstat reports that approximately 60 percent of the Russian population is employed by the private sector and 30 percent of the population is employed in the public sector (Rosstat 2012). Moreover, of those, working in the private sector, more than a third report holding supervisory positions. In contrast, just over a quarter of those in the state sector held supervisory positions. Thus, while rally participants were more likely to be state employed workers, the crowd was diverse and the private sector was well-represented.

The high level of non-working respondents reflects the significant proportion of students in the crowd; seventy percent of the non-workers in the sample were under 20. One-third of the under-thirty sample were students; and the working contingent was divided evenly between those who worked for the state and those who worked in the private sector. In comparison to participants over 30, the younger cohort was much less likely to be employed by government enterprises. Similar dynamics can be seen in the statistics on education levels. Younger participations had higher levels of technical university training, four-year college degrees, or the potential for those degrees. Older participants were more likely to have had technical training in high school.

Our group-based approach allows us to draw group comparisons as we do in the next discussion of generational change. In the following sections, we also rely on these data to make somewhat more cautious conclusions regarding efficacy of the core functions of mass rallies: mobilization, collective identity, movement boundaries, and agenda setting.

#### *The Generational Divide: Education, Information and Regime Support*

The clear generational divide in our sample affords us an opportunity to explore the dynamic of generational change that has been so crucial to the development of post-Soviet politics. Divergent patterns of education and employment underscore that these data captures very different stages of the lifecycle that we might expect to influence

---

<sup>7</sup> This observation is confirmed by exit poll data from the Levada Center that shows that Putin wins support both among workers and rural residents and among students and white-collar workers (Levada 2012).



attitudes and behavior. In the first instance, we would expect older participants to be more risk averse in the face of uncertainty, and therefore more receptive to the general anti-revolutionary message of the rally.

These basic tendencies are reinforced by life experiences. Predictably, there is a clear division in how these two groups acquire information. Younger attendees were more likely to use the Internet, and in particular, social media: 75 percent of young respondents used *vkontakte*, the Russian equivalent of Facebook, versus 21 percent of older respondents. The same gap was apparent in the use of blogging sites, Twitter and Facebook. Consistent with Winston Churchill's famous dictum, young respondents were more likely to identify themselves as democrats or liberals as opposed to communists, nationalists or conservatives. Yes, despite their access to information and patterns of political self-identification, younger respondents were more conservative on salient issues. They were less likely to see immigration in positive terms and more likely to support government subsidies for failing industries. In addition, rally attendees under age 30 supported increased spending on health care at the expense of the military.

The generational divide is one example of the latent fissures in the collective identity of pro-Putin supporters. The division suggests potential problems for the regime in the near future. Support for the regime appears to rest on its capacity to provide benefits, in the form of side payments for showing up, career advancement, or redistribution in the form of social supports. Perhaps most importantly, these young rally attendees look very much like the aspiring middle class that has been identified as the core group of anti-regime protesters.<sup>8</sup> Below we expand on this analysis and explore the relationship between attitudes and voting behavior among younger rally participants.

### **Mobilizing Support: Voting Behavior and Trust in Leadership**

As Schwartz (2009) argues, a key tool in the soft authoritarian tool kit is a cadre of core supporters, the true believers. An important aim of the pro-Putin rallies was to directly mobilize Putin's core supporters and use their profile to extend electoral support to potential voters who recognized themselves in the faces of the crowd or their issue

---

<sup>8</sup> We adopt Thomas Remington's (2011) definition of the middle class as aspirational: a syndrome of values and behaviors that can serve as the foundation of civil society. A critical question for future research is whether or not these pro-Putin activists remain closely tied to the state and therefore disavow the values of independence and self autonomy that makes the middle class a force of political change.

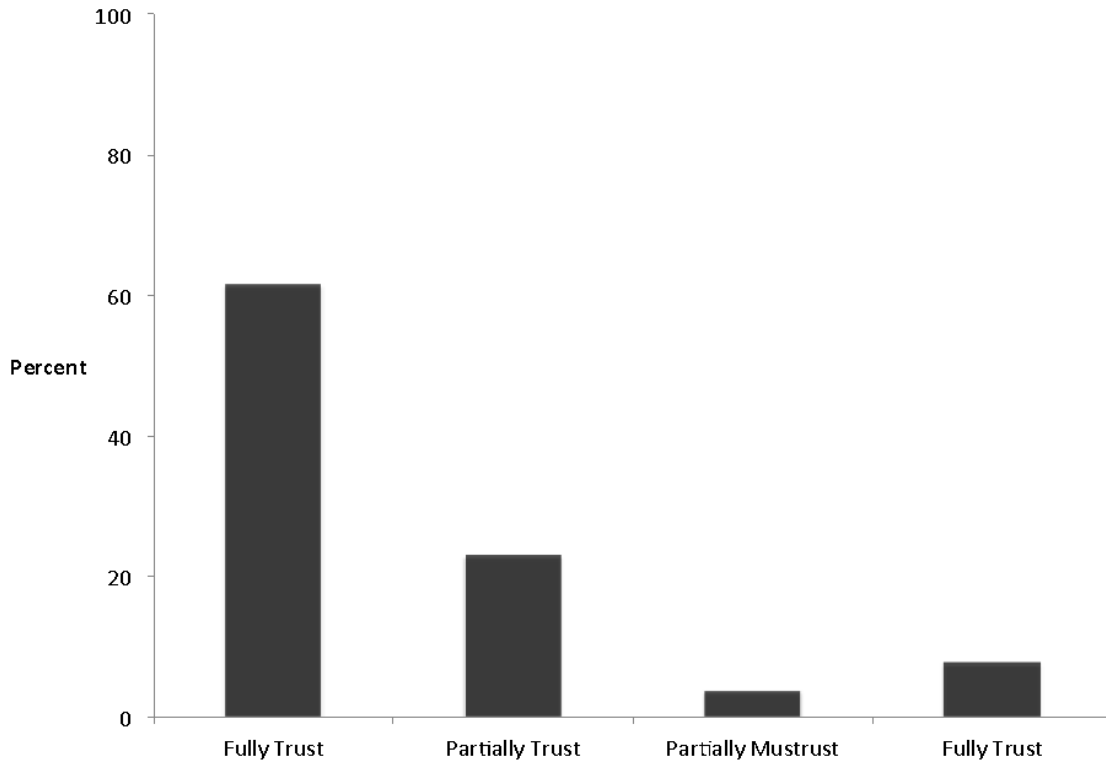
positions. If this effort is successful, we expect near-unanimous vote support for Putin and his party, ER, among rally participants. In fact, this was not the case. Seventy percent of respondents reported voting for (or planning to vote for) Putin, slightly higher than the inflated official support for the President, but not the unity we might expect from core supporters. Of those who did not vote for Putin, most reported not voting (almost nine percent) while others voted for Gennady Zyuganov (three percent) and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (five percent).

The weakness in core support for ER was even less impressive as only 59 percent voted for the party. While this number tops the 49 percent national support reported in the official election statistics, it does not reflect unquestioning support for the regime. Among rally participants who did not vote for ER, the majority simply did not vote (31 percent) while 25 percent supported the LDPR and 15 percent supported the KPRF. The remaining respondents either could not recall their vote or supported alternative parties on the ballot. Importantly, vote support for Putin and ER were highly correlated, suggesting that the factors that drive the vote decision in parliamentary and presidential elections remain linked for these activists.

The demographic breakdown of those who did not support Putin and his party is also interesting. Our findings confirm national statistics that show that women are more likely to vote for Putin than men. Similarly, while defectors could be found across the demographic spectrum, younger, more educated voters were far more likely to defect from both the party and the president than older participants. In contrast, sector of employment did not have a significant effect on the likelihood of defections.

As reported in figure 2, we also find that vote choice was linked to attitudes about the leadership.

Figure 2: Trust in Putin



The figure reports overall level of trust in Putin. Trust is a difficult concept since it often means very different things to different responders in a poll or interview. We know that trust is distinct from performance evaluations because we see distinctions in responses in the Russian data over time. Our best guess is that trust is very particular: the respondent sees Putin as acting in their personal interest, in this case to preclude instability. Putin's trust levels over time have been relatively high, hovering between 45 and 50 percent in the last two years.<sup>9</sup> In comparison, the trust reported in our survey is extremely high: 61 percent expressed full trust in Putin.

A number of authors have suggested that personalism drives the high correlation between the vote for Putin and vote for ER (Gudkov 2009; Ledeneva 2012; Wood 2011; Colton and Hale 2009). We find evidence of this proposition in our data: a high level of trust in the President is a strong predictor of vote support for him and for the government party. Likewise, vote support was also predicted by positive assessments of the regime

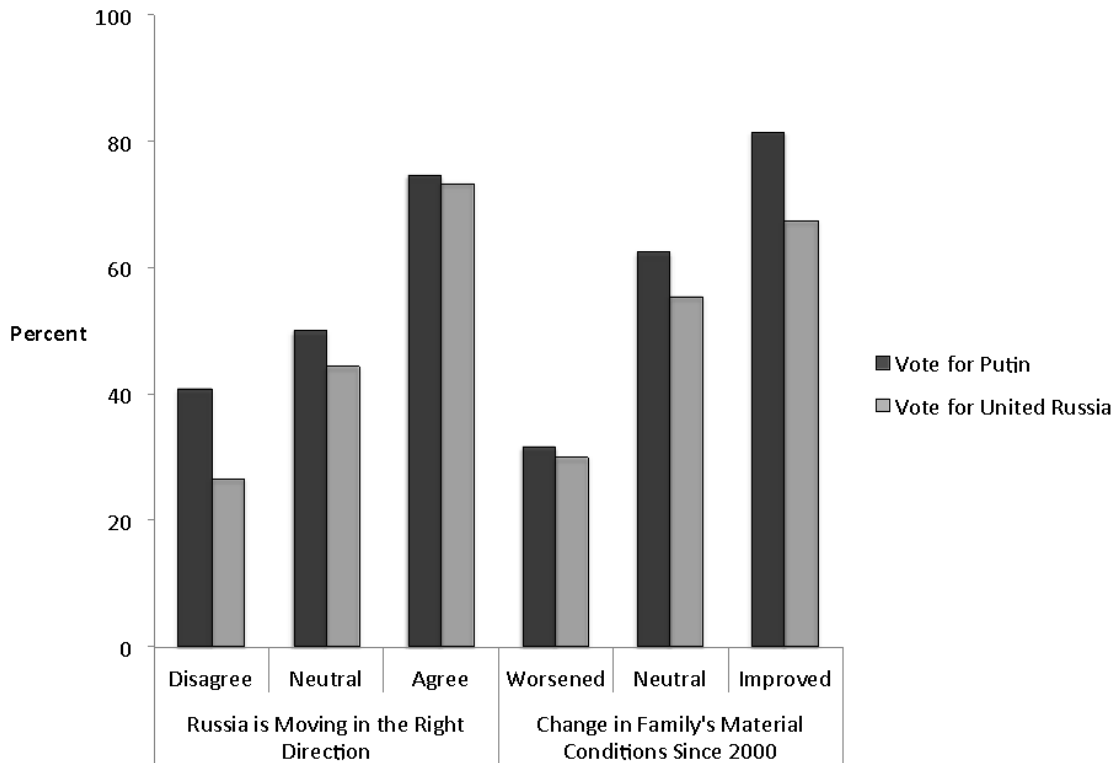
---

<sup>9</sup> This distinction in levels of approval and levels of trust are persistent over time. Levada reports evaluations of trust in Putin on its website, <http://www.levada.ru/indeksy>, accessed July 6, 2012. Russia Votes provides evidence of the gap between approval rating and trust evaluations, [http://www.russiavotes.org/president/presidency\\_performance\\_trends.php#190](http://www.russiavotes.org/president/presidency_performance_trends.php#190), accessed July 6, 2012.

on both economic and political indicators. This finding holds true across the generational divide. In short, Putin personally remains a critical element of regime stability, holding together disparate elements of regime support. This finding underscores the critical role that personalism plays in electoral authoritarian regimes seeking non-violent solutions to collective action dilemmas (Hadenius and Teorell 2007).

Yet, it is also the case that Mr. Putin has a long track record of governing, most recently through a severe economic crisis. To evaluate the impact of events on the support for the president, we examine the relationship between two indicators of regime assessment—economic well-being and regime direction—and vote support for the state party and the president.

Figure 3: Regime Assessments and Vote Choice



The figure illustrates that these two assessments are very highly correlated and have the same effect on voting behavior. Respondents who felt that their material well-being improved over the period of the regime were more likely to vote for both the state party and the president. Likewise, those who felt that the country is moving in the right direction were also more likely to vote for both entities.

We can also see some interesting patterns in regard to the role of personalism.

First, the president is consistently rewarded for positive affect. What is striking in this figure is the relatively high level of support among participants who have negative assessments of the regime. This finding has two important implications for our theory. First, it again underscores the critical role that personalism plays both in protest decisions and in regime support. Putin seems to get a lot of credit and little blame for poor conditions. Secondly, it gives rise to a critical message reflected in the banners at the rally, “If not Putin, then who?” In other words, the rallies were designed to show that Putin was the only logical choice for Russian voters. The unspoken continuation of that sentence might be, the only logical choice given the very artificial and controlled choice presented to voters on the rigged ballot. Below we offer a more extensive discussion of perceptions of vote fraud in both elections, but in relation to voting, participants who perceived higher falsification were much more likely to vote for opposition parties of candidates or abstain compared to those who perceived only minor fraud.

While vote support for Putin and ER was very strong among rally attenders, evidence of lack of unanimity is surprising and created an important opportunity for the opposition. Both the formal and citizen journalist media coverage of rally participants who did not support either Putin or ER confirmed the view of manufactured support and contributed to cynicism about the rallies among those who rely on these sources of information. The photographic and video evidence will remain on the web as the movement grows, providing a historical record. However, in the short term it seems likely that the projection of state power and the message that Putin was the only choice were fairly successful. Polling data provides indirect evidence for this conclusion: a May 2012 a Levada Center poll showed that 60 percent of respondents in a national poll were aware of the pro-Putin rallies, far higher than those who knew about the large opposition protests. We expand on the nature of the press coverage in the next section as we discuss the role of the rallies in forging a common identity.

#### *Recognizing Oneself in the Crowd: Rally Attenders and Putin’s Voters*

The broader impact of the rallies hinged on the responses of Putin voters who did not attend a rally but either watched the live broadcast or followed media reports. That is, could those watching the rallies see themselves in the crowd or be convinced by the core messages? Critically, while Russia’s state media gave surprising but limited

coverage to the anti-Putin rallies, Moscow's rallies were broadcast over RIA-Novosti and NTV, enabling a national audience. The Poklonnaya rally received significant coverage on Channel 1 and *Vesti* (Borodina 2012). It also appears that the Kremlin orchestrated press coverage by issuing written instructions to media sources (Earle 2012). Thus, like the events themselves, the coverage of the events was carefully orchestrated to achieve the regime's goals.

National coverage was essential as a mechanism to create a shared sense of collective identity between rally participants and likely Putin voters. Controlled media was also essential to create a sense that Putin's victory was inevitable and no other choice was viable. Either way, the regime's goal would be met, highlighting the complimentary nature of strategies of power projection and movement framing. Toward the goal of creating a sense of overwhelming support for the regime, official reports systematically underestimated the size of anti-regime protests while inflating pro-regime numbers. In an assessment of press coverage of the December 24 rallies, a report in *Kommersant* noted that Putin himself thanked his supporters and inflated the attendance at the meeting to 190,000 participants, more than 50,000 greater than official estimates (Borodina 2012).

Official exaggeration of rally participants was directed at Putin's core, voters who are concentrated in rural regions and small and medium size cities (Chernyakhovskiy 2012). Analysis shows that they reside in areas of the Federation with limited economic diversification and good but not stellar economic performance. The point of reference for these citizens is their status in the 1990s, not some absolute level of change or comparison with other Russians. This reference is critical to understand the construction and power of the stability message, as Putin's core electorate tends to be among the most vulnerable in Russia: non-mobile, poorly qualified people (Zubarevich 2012).

This description of Putin voters underscores the importance of the evolution of the rallies and the importance of the more representative ONF in mobilization efforts. It also underscores the positive strategy of busing in working-class supporters for the rallies. Rather than reject this mobilization strategy as coercive, the audience in the region is likely to recognize themselves in these workers and identify with their support for Putin, coerced or not. As the polls leading up to the election illustrated, support for Putin rose as elections became closer, providing indirect evidence of the value of the

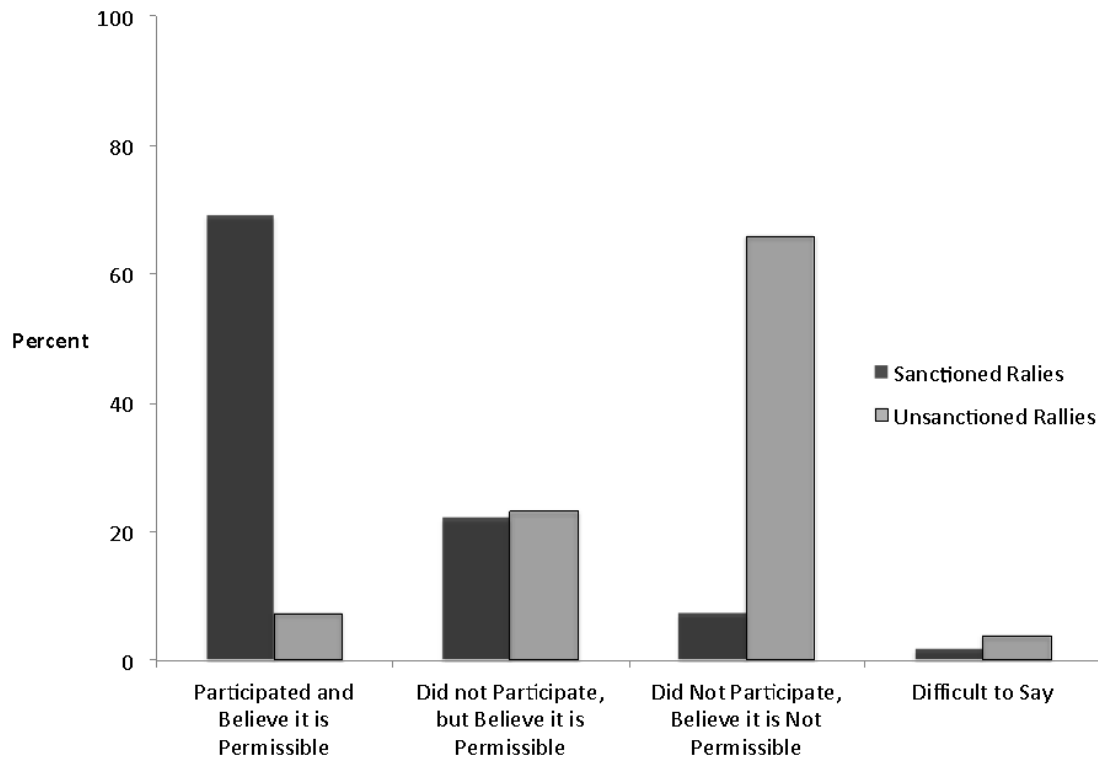
rallies to undermine the opposition and mobilize support for the President.

### **Establishing Boundaries Between Movements: Attitudes about Electoral Falsification and Foreign Involvement**

There is little doubt that a secondary goal of the pro-Putin events was to define the boundaries between anti-regime protests and Putin supporters. Through the pro-Putin rallies, the regime took great care to characterize the anti-regime protests, including the radical nature of the anti-regime actions, the overblown claims of falsification, and the level of foreign involvement in the rallies. Our data shows that while some of these messages clearly shaped the perceptions of participants, they also were not entirely persuasive for all who attended.

Perhaps the most successful message about the “For Honest Elections/Power” movement was that their strategy, street action, was both radical and potentially destabilizing. In contrast, the pro-Putin participants were more conservative in terms of their support for street action. Figure 4 reports participants’ general attitudes toward sanctioned and unsanctioned protest activity.

Figure 4. Attitudes About Protest Activity



Despite the vilification of the anti-regime events by Putin and other speakers at the rallies, participants continued to support citizens' fundamental right of assembly. Almost two-thirds of our respondents not only supported the right to protest but also had participated in protests prior to December 2012. Attitudes concerning unsanctioned protests were less supportive. Our survey revealed that only 19 percent of anti-regime protesters supported the right to unsanctioned protest—a finding that foreshadowed significant support for the May 2012 law that greatly increased penalties against unsanctioned protests (Smyth 2012).

These findings largely reflect national opinions. Polling data showed that Russian society perceived protest as an appropriate mechanism of political participation, but also drew a distinction between legal and illegal actions. National polls showed slightly less support for sanctioned actions. A VTsIOM survey in late May 2012 reported that 60 percent of Russians supported citizens' right to protest, although few respondents were prepared to participate in such events (VTsIOM May 29, 2012). The Levada Center reported that 50 percent of the population was sympathetic to the Moscow protests, while a higher percentage affirmed the abstract right to protest (Samarina 2012).

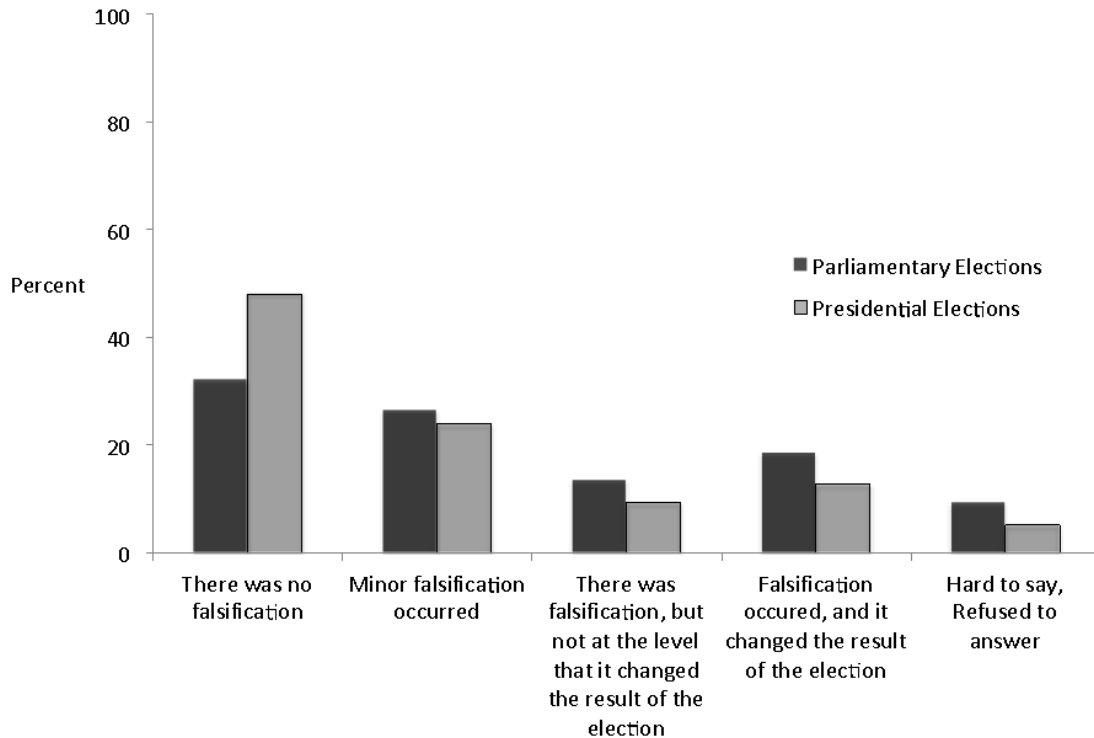
Another important dividing line between pro- and anti-regime attitudes is whether or not they believed reports of fraud, and how they assessed its magnitude. Although the themes of the opposition "For Honest Elections" movement evolved over time, the focus was on the conduct of elections and the regime's responsibility for falsification. After all, post-election protests were sparked by evidence of falsification in the December parliamentary elections. In December, social organizations such as Citizen Observer in Moscow and the NGO Golos, working across the Russian Federation, collected significant evidence of falsification and reporting it both in the mainstream press and through social media. While assessment of the absolute levels of fraud are beyond the scope of this paper, there was undeniable evidence of vote tampering, ballot stuffing, and irregularities in vote counting.

This evidence was so significant that it was impossible for the Central Election Commission (CEC) and government officials to deny it outright. Instead, they admitted non-systematic and minimal fraud that did not influence the outcome. Moreover, officials ascribed the blame for fraud on lower-level officials, and denied any government



directives to fix elections.<sup>10</sup> Figure 5 reports participants' assessment of falsification in both the parliamentary and presidential elections.

Figure 5: Participants' Assessments of Falsification



As the figure shows, participants did not entirely reject evidence of falsification. The most striking finding in the figure is the change in perceptions of falsification between parliamentary and presidential elections. Participants identified much less fraud, with significantly fewer consequences, in the presidential contest. There are two explanations for this finding. The first is that respondents were astute in recognizing that in Moscow the presidential election was relatively free of vote tampering due to a high level of organized observation. However, this explanation obscures the evidence of significant fraud across the Federation and the razor-thin margin with which Putin secured victory in the first round of competition. The second explanation focuses on narratives. Respondents learned to resist claims of major falsification either because state narratives shaped their own opinion or because they were told what to say by rally organizers. The same dynamics are at play in the attribution of blame for falsification.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the importance of blame on opposition protest activity see Javeline 2003 and Tucker 2009.

Figure 6: Blame for Falsification

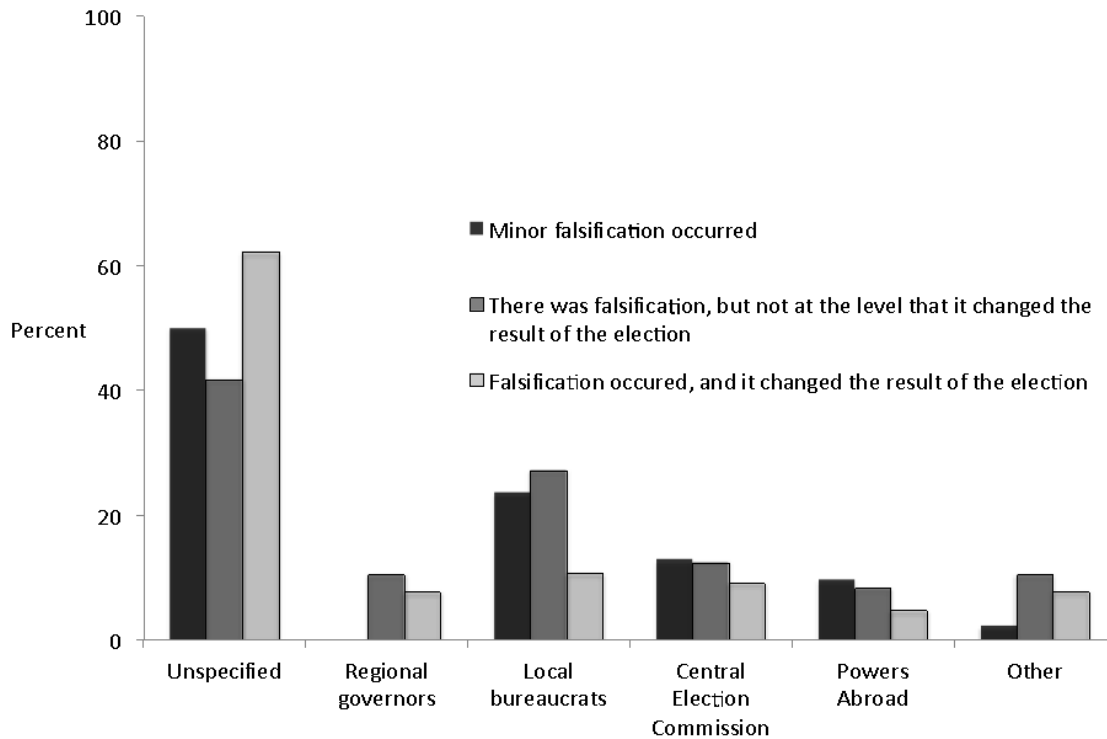
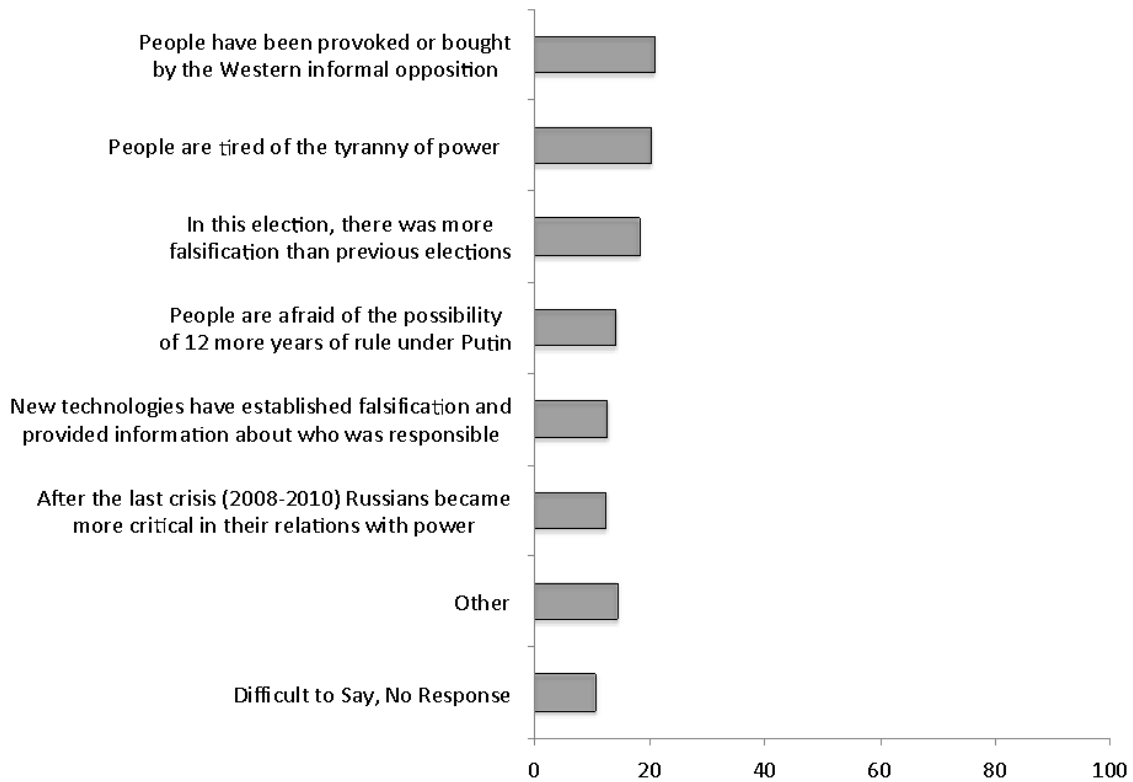


Figure 6 reports the difference in the attribution of blame between those who identified major falsification in the parliamentary election and those who cited minor or no falsification. The figure provides evidence for the Kremlin’s minimal success in convincing supporters of the guilt of their final scapegoat, foreign influences, and in particular interference from the United States. This message was a constant drumbeat from the administration and it took two forms: the attribution of blame for the perception of falsification and the attribution of blame for the anti-regime protests. Despite these efforts, only ten percent of the respondents blamed powers abroad for electoral fraud. This lack of success in framing the unrest in terms of foreign influence can also be seen in respondents’ evaluations of the competing explanations for the emergence of anti-regime protest.

Figure 7: Explanations for Anti-Regime Protest



As figure 7 shows, rally participants were more likely to report that foreign forces shaped the anti-regime protests. On December 7, just days after the first anti-regime protest, Mr. Putin himself gave a press conference in which he held Secretary of State Clinton personally responsible for encouraging the protest. Almost two months later, at the Luzhniki rally, he again spoke of not allowing anyone to interfere in Russian affairs and cautioned citizens not to look abroad or betray the motherland. Yet, only twenty percent of respondents said that the Western informal opposition had sponsored participation. A Pew Charitable Trust survey conducted in Spring 2012 reported that 25 percent of a national sample attributed the protests to interference by Western powers, while 58 percent said that they were a response to Russian dissatisfaction, and the remaining 17 percent was unable to attribute blame (Pew Research Center 2012).

The most striking finding in figure seven is the difficulty that respondents who cited high levels of falsification have in attributing blame. Over sixty percent of these respondents would not specify responsibility for fraud. Of these, twelve percent did not know who was responsible, and the remaining 88 percent refused to answer, creating missing data. Of the respondents who did attribute blame for falsification, very few

blamed governmental authorities in Moscow or in the regions, instead attributing blame to bureaucrats at the CEC and in the regions. This line of reasoning is consistent with statements by the Chair of the CEC, Churov, in his December 6 press conference, illustrating the success the regime had in framing the nature of electoral interference.

The figure also stresses the success of the regime in framing public perceptions of the anti-regime protests. Despite very strong anti-Putin sentiment in the protests, including the omnipresent chants of “Putin-thief” and “Putin Must Go,” state media was artful in avoiding direct references to Putin in its coverage. This depiction of themes of the protest movement is reflected in participants’ responses about the causes of the mass protests. Just 14.2 percent of our sample named Putin as a cause of protest; of these respondents, only 40 percent choose this as their sole response. Another 20.2 percent selected tyranny of power as the major cause of anti-regime protest. The majority of respondents either did not specify a cause or attributed anti-regime action to Western powers, economic conditions, or falsification. National polls confirm this finding. A June 2012 poll conducted by VTsIOM (2012) demonstrated that Russians largely supported this view of the causes of the protests. Only seven percent cited Putin’s policies as the cause of anti-regime protest, while 18 percent cited living standards.

This general perception that street actions were not directly tied to attitudes about Mr. Putin or even dissatisfaction with the regime is the most successful element of the strategy to frame events so that they reflected positively on the former-future President. The rallies and accompanying media coverage created significant distance between Putin and the protest movement despite the strong anti-Putin messages evident in the slogans, posters, and speeches of those events. Given our data, we cannot say if this consensus resulted from framing or simply a clear understanding that tying Putin to the rallies would violate rhetorical boundaries. However, our findings emphasize the success of strategies that framed movement boundaries and drew bright lines around permissible explanations for political behavior and regime responsibility.

### **Assessing the Overall Impact of the Rallies: Regime Responsibility and Successes**

Regime efforts to define the boundaries of protest shaded into a more general effort to dominate political debate and create a singular language to discuss or criticize the regime. As we describe above, the stability-strong leadership theme become the

dominant discourse for Putin supporters, but this focus undermined attempts to forge consensus around shared political values or programmatic issue competition. Moreover, the state’s attempts to dominate loyalist themes left no room for the spontaneous generation of consensus from the supporters themselves. Table 3 presents specific motivations and issue positions, illustrating disagreement in both the salience and positions among rally participants.

Table 3 reports both the percent of respondents who evaluated each item as very important or very positive and the total who gave a positive response. The first column shows some variance in opinion that is largely washed out when we look at total positive responses. In other words, there is some variation in the salience of motivations for joining the rally as well as the intensity of assessment on key issues among Putin supporters. Whether these distinctions widen in the future remains an open question but it points to the potential for future challenges.

Table 3: Opinions of Participants at Pro-Putin Rallies

		% Strong Positive	% Positive
Why Participate in Rally	Demonstrate Support for Putin’s Candidacy	55.7	76.4
	Avoid Orange Revolution	42.7	67.6
	Demonstrate Support for Regime	37.0	66.0
Policy Preferences	State Should Support Declining Industries	39.9	63.1
	Migrants who Come to Moscow Do More Good than Harm	10.2	38.0
	Levels of Government Corruption Have Improved in the Last 12 Years	11.1	34.3
	Favor Increased Spending for both Military and Health Care		39.6

In terms of motivations for attending the pro-Putin rallies, our respondents stressed the important of supporting the president over the regime, underlining the growing role of personalism in regime stability. The gap between Putin and his regime

remains noteworthy for his supporters, enhancing his capacity to avoid blame for government policy and missteps. Likewise, while precluding an “orange revolution” in Russia is an important reason for attending the rallies, it does not rise to the level of support for the president. Perhaps more importantly, these tables show that about a third of the participants at the rally did not ascribe to the Pro-Putin, anti-revolution messages. The lack of unanimity is both striking and potentially exploitable by the opposition.

The data also reveal interesting disagreement over issue positions. By and large, rally participants demanded activist government, but disagreed about the level and priorities of government involvement. These beliefs resonate with the the economic appeals in Putin’s rhetoric and suggest the degree to which government support rests on its capacity to maintain state subsidies and services that may be vulnerable the face of a new economic crisis.

Most importantly, these data point to issues that are likely to provide strong challenges in the President’s current term. The first is corruption, an issue that has plagued the Putin-Medvedev tandem since the early 2000s. Given these findings, it is no surprise that immediately after reelection, Putin announced renewed efforts to curb all types of corruption, and created an ombudsman for business activity. The most notable failure of the President’s campaign rhetoric was his inability to redefine mass perceptions of the role of economic migration in the economy, as rally participants continued to see migration as a drag on the economy and an intrusion in their lives.

## **Conclusions**

Our analysis illustrates the Kremlin’s agility in response to opposition protests and the debacle of parliamentary elections. It also underscores the evolution of Kremlin strategies from a reliance on cooptation to more coercive strategies—a trend that continued after Putin’s election in March.<sup>11</sup> These strategies were successful in mobilizing core voters, creating common identity among participants, and containing the electoral effects of the opposition protests. However, the Kremlin’s strategy also embodied significant costs that are likely to have longer-term influences.

---

<sup>11</sup> Since May 2012, the regime has used police harassment of opposition leaders, manipulation of court procedures, and the passage of new legislation to intimidate the opposition without relying on overt violence.

The lack of unanimous support among rally participants accentuated the coercive elements of the regime and its inability to comfortably rest on stable popular support. In addition, a look at inter-group analysis revealed potential schisms within an electorate that is held together by its fear of crisis rather than its positive support for Putin. If crisis comes during Putin's term, there will be significant consequences.

Similarly, our analysis of generational differences accentuates some of the long-term challenges to the regime. Continued support from the young constituency appears to be tied to the state's capacity to redistribute wealth and preserve the perks and revenue streams associated with state employment. Further work needs to be done to explore whether or not this generation is emerging as a new privileged class, similar to the old Communist Party that protected the ossified regime in order to preserve their personal benefits.

The Kremlin had somewhat more success in defining the boundaries of the anti-regime opposition and enhancing the potency of its message that revolution would be catastrophic. These efforts not only contained the impact of the anti-protests, but also served to mobilize Putin's latent supporters around the message of stability through strong leadership. Yet even here, there was not complete unanimity among protestors about the salience of the challenge and the threat it posed for Russian stability. Likewise, the themes of external enemies did not create even a semblance of popular agreement among either rally participants or the general population.

The mobilization around Putin himself was the most successful element of the effort to frame a common language for discussing politics. Most striking was the success of the "Putin as the only alternative" message. Our respondents reported voting for the president even when they distrusted him, disagreed with his policy positions, or had suffered economic decline. In other words, the data stresses the continued importance of personalism in Russian electoral politics. Similarly, rally participants did not hold Putin responsible for falsification or for the opposition unrest. This points to another potential vulnerability for the regime if Putin's popularity continues to decline or is tarnished by scandal, ill health, or crisis.

Overall, the regime's heavy-handed tactics were most successful in mobilizing

votes, but less successful in forging substantive agenda or policy program. The tactics also did little to build a true movement of regime loyalists. The Kremlin's rigid definition of both the symbols and rhetoric of Putinism left little room for participants to participate in the production of symbols and language. While the narratives imposed from above help Putin's supporters to participate in political life in limited ways, they remain unable to formulate and articulate independent political positions. As a result, supporters remain highly dependent on the state. Deprived of the benefit of hearing supporters' demands, this strategy also leaves the state in peril of further losing touch with its political base.



## Works Cited

- Amerkhanov, Alan, Alexander Ban'ke, Gregori Konovalov and Alexander Fudin. 2012. "Psihogeografiya Mitingov" (The Psycho-choreography of Meetings), *Russian Journal*, at <http://russ.ru/pole/Psihogeografiya-mitingov>, accessed May 25, 2012.
- Akopov, P. Blogpost, *Political Journal*, at [www.petr-akopov.livejournal.com/56658.html](http://www.petr-akopov.livejournal.com/56658.html), accessed May 21, 2012.
- Batalov, Nikita. "Dovol'no mnogo liudy ukhodit iz Luzhnikov", dazhe bol'she, chem prikhodit tuda" (Many people left Luzhniki, even more than arrived There), *Kommersant*, (February 24, 2012), at <http://kommersant.ru/doc/1879073>, accessed March 14, 2012.
- Birch, Sarah. 2011. "Post-Soviet Electoral Practices in Comparative Perspective." *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 4: 703-25.
- Borodina, Arena. "Bolotnaya "Bolotnaya -- ne Poklonnaya, i naoborot" (Poklonnaya and Visa Versa," *Kommersant*, (February 2, 2012), at <http://kommersant.ru/doc/1866809?themeid=366>, accessed May 12, 2012.
- Brysk, Alison. 1995. "Hearts and Minds: Bringing Symbolic Politics Back In." *Polity* 27, no. 4: 559-85.
- Chernyakhovskiy, Sergey. "Not a President for Everybody. Putin Is Loved Most by Housewives and Pensioners and Least by Businessmen," *Gazeta.ru*, (April 6, 2012).
- Colton, Timothy J. and Henry E. Hale. 2009. "The Putin Vote: Presidential Electorates in a Hybrid Regime." *Slavic Review* 68, no. 3: 473-503
- Dvoynova, Tatiana, "Tradeuninoists Caps in the Smoke. The Meeting of Primoriya Supporters of Stability Ends in Scandal," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 20, 2012 at [www.ng.ru/regions/2012-02-20/5\\_profsoyuz.html](http://www.ng.ru/regions/2012-02-20/5_profsoyuz.html), accessed June 22, 2012.
- Earle, Jonathan. "Ministry Branch Advised Journalists on Putin Rally," *The Moscow Times*, February 1, 2012, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/ministry-branch-advised-journalists-on-putin-rally/452097.html>
- "Edinaya Rossia schitaet proputinskie mitingi kontr-protestom protiv Bolotnoi" (United Russia considers pro-Putin's rallies a counter-protest against Bolotnaya), *Polit.ru* (February 18, 2012), at <http://www.polit.ru/news/2012/02/18/contreremonstrance/>, accessed May 12, 2012.
- Gudkov, Lev. Priroda Putinisma (The Nature of Putinism), *Memo* (December 8, 2009), at <http://www.memo.ru/2009/12/12/gudkov.htm>, accessed July 11, 2012.
- Hadenius, Axel and Jan Teorell. 2007. "Pathways from Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 1: 143-57.
- Horvath, Robert. 2011. "Putin's 'Preventive Counter-Revolution': Post-Soviet Authoritarianism and the Spectre of Velvet Revolution." *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 1: 1-25.
- Javeline, Debra. 2003. *Protest and the Politics of Blame: The Russian Response to Unpaid Wages*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Langston, Joy. 2006. "Elite Ruptures: When Do Ruling Parties Split?" in *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, ed. Schedler, 57-75.

- Ledeneva A. 2012. "Cronies, Economic Crime and Capitalism in Putin's Sistema." *International Affairs* 88, no. 1: 149–57.
- Levitsky, Steven and Lucan A. Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism. Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lust-Okar, Ellen and Jennifer Ghandi. 2009. "Elections Under Authoritarianism." *Annual Review of Political Science* 12: 402-22.
- Magaloni, Beatriz. 2006. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- "Miting na Poklonnoi Gore polnost'u paralizoval Kutuzovsky prospect" (The Meeting at Poklonnaya Hills Completely Paralyzed Kutuzovsky Prospect), *Grani.ru*, (February 4, 2012), at [www.grani.ru/Politics/Russia/Election/m.195418.html](http://www.grani.ru/Politics/Russia/Election/m.195418.html), accessed July 10, 2012.
- Petrov, Vitaly. "Razvit Pobedu. Vladimiru Putinu predstoit naiti kontakt c oppozitsiai," (To Develop Victory. Vladimir Putin Has To Make Contact With Opposition) *Rossiskaya Gazeta* (March 6, 2012), at <http://www.rg.ru/2012/03/06/experty.html>, accessed July 12, 2012.
- Pew Research Center, "Russia Backs Protests, Political Freedoms and Putin, Too," *Pew Charitable Trust Global Attitudes Project* (May 23, 2012), at [www.pewglobal.org](http://www.pewglobal.org), accessed May 28, 2012.
- Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM), "Moscow Opposition Rallies in May," Press Release, May 29, 2012, [www.vtsiom.com](http://www.vtsiom.com), accessed July 2, 2012.
- Odynova, Alexandra, "Foes Walk Side by Side to Rally Against the Kremlin," *Moscow Times*, (December 11, 2011), at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/foes-walk-side-by-side-to-rally-against-kremlin/449651.html>, accessed July 3, 2012.
- "Portret Putinista" (Portrait of a Putinist), *The New Times* (April 23, 2012), at <http://newtimes.ru/articles/detail/51234/> accessed May 12, 2012.
- "Putin blagodaren anti-orangistam" (Putin Is Grateful To The Anti-Orangists), *Grani.ru* (January 30, 2012), at <http://grani.ru/Politics/Russia/activism/m.195415.html>, accessed May 12, 2012.
- Remington, Thomas J. 2011. *The Politics of Inequality in Russia*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Samarina, Alexandra. "Kreml' na rasput'e" (The Kremlin at a Crossroads) *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 20, 2012, at [http://www.ng.ru/politics/2012-06-20/1\\_kreml.html](http://www.ng.ru/politics/2012-06-20/1_kreml.html), accessed July 2, 2012.
- Schatz, Edward. 2009. "The Soft Authoritarian Tool Kit: Agenda-Setting Power in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan." *Comparative Politics* 41, no. 2: 203-22.
- Schedler, Andreas, ed. 2006. *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Schwartz, Michael. 2007. "Russia's Political Youths." *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 15, no. 1: 73-85.
- Silitski, Vitali. 2010. "Survival of the Fittest: Domestic and International Dimensions of the Authoritarian Reaction in the Former Soviet Union Following the Colored Revolutions." *Journal of Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 43, no. 4: 339-50.

Smyth, Regina, Anna Lowry and Branden Wilkening. 2007. "Engineering Victory: Institutional Reform, and Formal Institutions and the Formation of a Hegemonic Party Regime in the Russian Federation." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 23, no. 2: 118-37.

Smyth, Regina. 2012. "Welcome to North Korea. Predicting the Effect of Russia's New Law on Protest," *e-International Relations*, at <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/07/04/welcome-to-north-korea-predicting-the-effect-of-russias-new-law-on-meetings-rallies-demonstrations-processions-and-pickets/>, accessed July 4, 2012.

Sulimina, Anna. "How I Recruit Rent-a-Crowds," *Moscow News*, March 26, 2012, at <http://themoscownews.com/politics/20120326/189565910.html>, accessed April 1, 2012.

Tucker, Joshua A. 2007. "Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions." *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 3: 535-51.

Wedeen, Lisa. 1998. "'Acting As If': Symbolic Politics and Social Control in Syria." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, no. 3: 503-23.

Wedeen, Lisa. 1999. *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Wedeen Lisa. 2002. "Conceptualizing Culture: Possibilities for Political Science." *The American Political Science Review* 96, no. 4: 713-28.

Wilson, Kenneth. 2012. "How Russians View Electoral Fairness: A Qualitative Analysis." *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 1: 145-68.

Wood, Elizabeth A. 2011. "The New Façade of Autocracy: Vladimir Putin and Hypermasculinity, 1999 to the Present." unpublished manuscript, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Zubarevich N. "Chetyre Rossii" (Four Russias), *Vedomosti* (December 30, 2011), at [www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/news/1467059/chetyre\\_rossii#ixzz1i5AXIsIj](http://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/news/1467059/chetyre_rossii#ixzz1i5AXIsIj), accessed July 1, 2012.

## Appendix on Data Collection

### Purpose of survey

The central question of our research is to explain individual participation in anti-government protests and pro-governments rallies in Moscow in Winter-Spring 2011-2012. The survey was designed to measure competing theories of protest behavior.

**Target population** Participants involved to the protest activity on both political sides (pro-Putin' protests and anti-Putin' rallies). The groups were surveyed at the place of protest (stadiums, streets and squares) over the course of four different protest events between February 23 and March 5.

**Average time** of one interview was about 15-20 minutes.

### Survey data collection method – clustered sample

As we approached the events, we were uncertain about our response rate. Within the pro-Putin rallies many You-tube videos had shown rally participants unwilling to talk to the press or precluded from doing so by rally captains. In the anti-government rallies, the atmosphere was increasingly tense as the elections became closer and participants feared both violence and retaliation for participation. Finally, it was extremely difficult estimate the popular from which the sample was to be drawn. There were not reports of the composition of the crowds at individual events, indeed there were vastly different estimates of protest attendance at all events.

To ensure success we devised two strategies for data collection. The premise of each was that we would try to maximize the variation across key demographic and social groups in our sample to provide means to compare those groups. Our first plan was to construct a respondent driven sample based on a selection of participants by age and class. Our interviewers approached the respondent in his or her target demographic and then concluded the interview with a request for the contact information of three acquaintances who had also participated in a protest event. We were surprised to find that as they election grew closer, it was the anti-regime protesters who were uncomfortable providing that information. We were also excited to find that surveying within the pro-Regime rallies was not as problematic as we feared and response rates were very high.

To capitalize on participants' willingness to respond to the survey on the spot, we increased our team of interviewers and constructed a research design that would allow us to maximize our comparisons based on gender, wealth and age.

To fit the structure of the protest masses, the interviewers were divided in 9 equal teams. Each team was told to recruit respondents from a key social group and to mix the gender within their subsample. The interviewers determined the age at a glance and the social status by the approximate value of the respondent's clothes, shoes and jewelry.

Age \ Social Strata	Upper class	Middle class	Lower class
18-34	Rich young	Middle class young	Poor young
35-55	Middle-aged rich	Middle-aged middle	Middle-aged poor
55 and over	Rich pensioners	Middle class pensioners	Poor pensioners

Surveying done by the teams reflects the structure of the population and let us to compare the groups' attitudes towards the protest activity.

### **Survey method – random face-to-face interviewing**

Interviewers were randomly distributed across the meeting area. Every interviewer was asked to find randomly (every 5<sup>th</sup> respondent) the person who looks like the representative of the target group (i.e. young middle-class). Approximate response rate was 95% as the respondents stayed for some time at the rallies and were glad to speak with the interviewers while waiting between speeches and events. The interviewing was anonymous and no personal identifying information was recorded.

### **Pilot survey**

Pilot survey was conducted in the end of February on the events of pro- and anti-Putin organizations. We surveyed had 45 respondents at the pro-Putin's rally in the Luzhniki Stadium and 70 respondents at the anti-Putin rally which took place on the Sadovoe Ring around Moscow center (action "Big White Circle"). Pilot team was formed from 12 scientific associates of the Laboratory for Political Studies, HSE.

The survey gave proof that the face-to-face interviews could be done at the protest events so we abandoned the more risky respondent driven sample. The pilot led to minor changes in the survey instrument but also gave us significant confidence in the instrument.

### **Survey**

We implemented data collection on March, 5<sup>th</sup> at the rallies organized to celebrate or protest Putin's victory in the presidential election on March 4<sup>th</sup>. Our team was very big: 28 interviewers worked on pro-Putin rally at Manezhnaya Square, 31 interviewers surveyed the participants of the anti-Putin's meeting at Pushkinskaya Square. Total number of respondents was 318 on the first rally and 414 on the second one.

### **Survey content**

The questionnaire consists of 6 blocks:

- A. Personal Information of the Respondent (10 questions: sex, age, city of living, education, occupation, nationality, position on the job, material condition, participation in the organization and its activeness);
- B. Interest in Politics (11 questions: frequency and interest in discussion political affairs, political preferences, electoral choices, block on the falsifications and electoral frauds, participation in observation, awareness of world affairs and mass protests);
- C. General Relationship to Protest (8 questions: attitude towards sanctioned and unsanctioned protests, attitude towards meeting organizers, past protest action, efficacy of protest as a participation strategy, readiness to participate in the protests, involvement to the social networks, number of people from respondent's circle involved in protests);

- D. Protest Participation (11 questions: frequency of protest, affect toward the police, reasons for participation, size of protest group, source of information on the protest for those who protested);
- E. Issue position and issue salience (7 questions: political attitudes towards migrants, social policy and economic course of government, assessments of electoral fraud)
- F. Sources of Information (2 questions: preferences on social networks in the internet)

### **Field research problems**

While surveying we have faced number of typical field work problems. The response rate of the pro-Putin's protesters was slightly less than the response rate of the opposition. Some attenders of pro-Putin's rallies experienced the problems with the political notions (the words like "libertarianism"), wanted to skip the questions on their political activity and preferences, suspected the survey was not politically neutral and was aimed on the discrimination of the Putin's supporters.

Also we observed some relatively aggressive reaction on the interviewing during our work on Manezhnaya Square. First, the people who were participated in the pro-Putin's rally were usually organized by their supervisors; therefore the latter tried to control their attendance and manage their time at the rally. Second, we faced a resistance to survey from the commanders of the Young Guard of United Russia while we were trying to interview the members of the organization. The commanders were against the interviewing and promised to arrest the interviewers. However, all the thorny issues were solved by our interviewers at the place of the meeting.

Regina Smyth

Indiana University (Bloomington, USA). Department of Political Science, Professor  
Woodburn Hall, 407

Phone: +1(812) 856-2822

Email: [rsmyth@indiana.edu](mailto:rsmyth@indiana.edu)

Anton Sobolev

National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia).  
Laboratory for Political Studies, Research Fellow

E-mail: [asobolev@hse.ru](mailto:asobolev@hse.ru) , Tel. +7 (499) 152-11-91

Irina Soboleva

National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia).  
Laboratory for Political Studies, Research Fellow

E-mail: [sobolevaiv@gmail.com](mailto:sobolevaiv@gmail.com), Tel. +7 (499) 152-11-91

**Any opinions or claims contained in this Working Paper do not necessarily reflect the views of HSE.**