

POCKET PROTESTS

Rhetorical Coercion and the Micropolitics of Collective Action in Semiauthoritarian Regimes

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THE rise of semiauthoritarianism during the post-1991 “fourth wave” of regime transition has drawn increasing attention within comparative politics. Found in contexts as diverse as Africa, postcommunist Eurasia, and Latin America, these so-called hybrid regimes are marked by elite efforts to preserve the façade, while gutting the substance, of democratic institutions. Quasi-pluralistic practices survive precariously in these regimes, as leaders resort to electoral manipulation, media restrictions, and intimidation to deny opponents the tools and opportunities necessary to challenge the regime.¹ Vladimir Putin’s Russia is perhaps the archetype of this new breed of smart authoritarians who restrict political liberties without provoking backlash or undermining economic growth.²

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¹ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and George Downs, “Development and Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs* (September–October 2005); Lucan A. Way, “Authoritarian State Building and the Sources of Regime Competitiveness in the Fourth Wave: The Cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine,” *World Politics* 57 (January 2005); Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Jason Brownlee, “Ruling Parties and Durable Authoritarianism,” Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law Working Paper 23 (Stanford University, 2004); Marina Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism* (Washington, D.C.: CEIP, 2003); Larry Diamond, “Thinking about Hybrid Regimes,” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002); Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002); Michael McFaul, “The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World,” *World Politics* 54 (January 2002).

² M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Lilia Shevtsova, *Putin’s Russia* (Washington, D.C.: CEIP, 2005); Richard Rose, Neil Munro, and William Mishler, “Resigned Acceptance of an Incomplete Democracy: Russia’s Political Equilibrium,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 20 (July–September 2004); Valerie Bunce, “Rethinking Recent

To date, however, most studies have concentrated on the incumbent's capacity, rather than on that of the opposition. While this focus is understandable, it leaves theory silent on the question of how and whether repression actually inhibits collective action in these countries. Indeed, without examining the nature of protest movements under semiauthoritarian conditions, we cannot properly identify how (and whether) repression dampens opposition or simply inflames it. The top-down focus of the existing literature also ignores the question of whether these movements, despite their weakness, can exert influence on policy-making.

As a result, this article asks two related questions: What is the impact of repression on the organization of collective action in semiauthoritarian states? And, if organization is possible, through what mechanisms can weak movements challenge policy? To answer these questions, this article examines the micropolitics of political protest in postcommunist Russia during the first and second Chechen wars (1994–96, 1999–). These “pocket protests”—the Kremlin's dismissive nickname for antiwar protests so small they could fit in one's pocket—offer key evidence of how groups adapt to changes in regime openness (or fail to do so). Offering a natural experiment, these antiwar groups were often organized by the same individuals, held identical types of rallies, and pursued the same antiwar goal during Boris Yeltsin's and Vladimir Putin's tenures. Over time, however, Russia shifted from a mostly free democracy under Yeltsin to a “managed” democracy under Putin. This change allows us to assess the impact of restrictive measures on the ability of these groups to organize, mobilize, and effect policy change.

Several conclusions emerge from this investigation. First, contrary to the expectations of the semiauthoritarian regime literature, antiwar groups organized larger and more frequent protests as Putin's repression deepened. Second, these groups possess the ability to circumvent most of the devices used by Putin to manage civil society. Yet despite this mobilization, the antiwar movement has been unable to match its earlier success in helping to end the first Chechen war. This ineffectiveness is due principally to the movement's internal weaknesses rather than to Putin's creeping authoritarianism. Far more crippling has been the movement's own culture, which dictates the use of tactics and slogans that have little mass appeal. Preferring symbolism to practical politics, and emphasizing strong face-to-face contacts rather

Democratization: Lessons from the Postcommunist Experience,” *World Politics* 55 (January 2003); Timothy Colton and Michael McFaul, *Popular Choice and Managed Democracy: The Russian Elections of 1999 and 2000* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2003); Henry Balzer, “Managed Pluralism: Vladimir Putin's Emerging Regime,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19 (July–September 2003).

than weak ties among potential supporters,³ the antiwar movement has undercut its own ability to “scale-up”⁴ and pressure the regime.

This article proceeds as follows. First, I discuss the need to complement existing studies of semiauthoritarian regimes with a microlevel focus on oppositional capacity and how organizational culture affects patterns of protest. Second, I examine one possible mechanism, *entrapment*, through which opposition movements can influence policy-making in semiauthoritarian regimes. Third, I compare anti-Chechen war protests in Moscow and St. Petersburg during the first and second wars. Data here consist of a protest event data set (N=93), interviews, primary documents, and participant observation.⁵ A fourth section examines how self-defeating activist culture, not state suppression, has hobbled the Putin-era movement. Finally, I propose extensions of this initial test of organizational culture and the entrapment mechanism in a semiauthoritarian environment.

I. THE MISSING MICROPOLITICS OF OPPOSITION CAPACITY: THE VIEW FROM BELOW

While scholars have begun the important work of cataloging the traits of semiauthoritarian regimes, less attention has been paid to the determinants of opposition capacity. It is thought, for example, that the introduction of semirepressive measures, particularly media restrictions and the curtailment of political rights, effectively demobilizes potential opposition. Yet cross-national studies in comparative politics have found no consistent relationship between state repression and collective action by regime critics. Indeed, studies have variously concluded that repression dampens, encourages, or has no discernible impact on either mobilization or the effectiveness of protests.⁶ These findings call

³ Mark Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (May 1973).

⁴ Sidney Tarrow and Doug McAdam, “Scale Shift in Transnational Contention,” in Donatella Porta, ed., *Transnational Protest and Global Activism* (New York: Rowman Littlefield, 2005). On social movements, see, for example: Sidney Tarrow, Charles Tilly, and Doug McAdam, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action, and Politics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and David Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Jr., Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford, “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation,” *American Sociological Review* 51 (August 1986).

⁵ This article also draws upon electronic communications between activists to provide a behind-the-scenes perspective on their organizations. Due to safety and privacy concerns, I will not cite these missives directly and will quote all activists anonymously. Where possible, confirming evidence from published sources is cited.

⁶ See, e.g., Mark Lichbach, *The Rebel's Dilemma* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Gilda Zwerman and Patricia Steinhoff, “When Activists Ask for Trouble,” in Christian Davenport,

into question the implicit assumption found in many semiauthoritarian studies that activists, being rational calculators, eschew protesting if the costs are too high.⁷ Activists may be entirely rational, for example, and yet still choose to engage in protest, suggesting that there is much more collective action occurring in semiauthoritarian regimes than our current theories predict.

We do, in fact, observe a surprising array of collective action around the world in precisely those regimes that have ostensibly choked off avenues of protest. At its most extreme, collective action toppled these regimes, as witnessed during the “color” revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. But collective action need not be instability inducing to attract our attention, since a substantial share of protests in these regimes aims at policy reversal, not regime overthrow. Protests in such diverse locations as China (fifty-seven thousand recorded protests in 2005 alone), Zimbabwe, and Egypt illustrate that groups can carve a niche and survive, even expand, under semiauthoritarian conditions.⁸ Perhaps semiauthoritarian regimes are less autocratic and more vulnerable to pressure from below than previously envisaged.

What we are missing, then, is a microlevel perspective that opens the black box of protest organizations to examine how (and whether) repression inhibits mobilization. Such a move would enable us to disentangle how repression at time t affects patterns of protest activity at time $t+2$ by tracing its impact at the organizational level. It may be that repression diminishes protest activity through a straightforward generation of fear that dissuades activists from participating. It is equally plausible, however, that patterns of protest activity are shaped by processes internal to the movement itself that lead to suboptimal strategies *independent* of state action. Because these two mechanisms yield identical behavioral results, it is imperative to examine the inner workings of these organizations to distinguish between competing explanations of collective action.

Hank Johnston, and Carol Davenport, eds., *Repression and Mobilization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); and Karen Rasler, “Concessions, Repression, and Political Protest in the Iranian Revolution,” *American Sociological Review* 61 (February 1996). For an overview, see Christian Davenport, “Repression and Mobilization,” in Davenport, Johnston, and Davenport.

⁷ This assumption is most explicit in Bueno de Mesquita and Downs (fn. 1). The assumption of rational calculation flows from Olson’s framework of collective action and is widespread in studies of social movements and protests. See Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); and, for an overview of this extensive literature, see Elinor Ostrom, “A Behavioral Approach to the Rational Choice Theory of Collective Action,” *American Political Science Review* 92 (March 1998).

⁸ “Social Unrest in China,” CRS Report for Congress (May 2006); “Zimbabwe: Inflation at 1,000 Percent Stirs ‘Groundswell of Anger’ at Mugabe,” *BBC Monitoring Africa*, May 15, 2006; “Cairo Police Attack Crowd at Rally in Support of Jailed Leader,” *The Independent* (London), May 19, 2006.

In particular, the culture of an organization plays a key role in shaping how activists respond to repression and how they organize to try to force policy change. We might characterize organizational culture as widely shared, though not necessarily monolithic, beliefs and ideas held by an organization's members about its social purpose.⁹ More specifically, culture here refers to four aspects that shape the nature of a movement's collective actions. First, all organizations articulate a group identity and craft standards for membership. Second, every organization prescribes norms of behavior that are deemed appropriate to the organization's social purpose. Here we are interested in the forms that collective action take when challenging state authorities. This can range from violent to nonviolent acts (or some combination thereof). It also extends, however, to the emphasis placed on symbolic acts versus more calculated actions such as labor strikes. Third, every organization seeks to frame a particular issue by drawing on symbols and values. Movements thus vary in the slogans they emphasize—whether to seek to appeal beyond the group or to simply reinforce the group's prior beliefs. And, finally, all organizations develop their own approach to decision making, whether it be consensual or hierarchical.

There are two key implications that flow from an organizational culture approach. First, it raises the possibility that culture may short-circuit the learning assumed by rational choice models of protest. That is, in the face of changing circumstances and great pressure, organizations may retrench, rather than update, their beliefs and strategies of protest. At the very least, organizational responses to repression are contingent on the nature of their cultural attributes. Second, the same attributes that enable organizations to survive and perhaps even expand in semiauthoritarian contexts may also cripple their ability to reach out to new recruits. Indeed, as I detail below, the strong ties that facilitate coordination and group survival can hamper the updating of slogans and tactics, compromising the ability of the movement to create widespread networks and thus create pressure for desired policy change.

II. RHETORICAL COERCION: THE ENTRAPMENT MECHANISM

Even if protest organizations can form, however, it is unclear how they impact policy-making in semiauthoritarian contexts. Indeed, we presently lack studies of the mechanisms through which groups—usually

⁹ J. Richard Harrison and Glenn Carroll, *Culture and Demography in Organizations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

small ones that possess neither coercive power nor access to (subverted) formal institutions—can exert influence. I propose one such mechanism here: entrapment. Strategically minded activists can wield a form of rhetorical coercion by exploiting contradictions within official rhetoric to inflict costs on a regime and its leaders for failing to uphold prior rhetorical commitments.¹⁰ Though semiauthoritarian regimes seek to minimize dissent, they are unable to remove one potential focal point for activist coordination: their own rhetoric.¹¹ Despite the absence of free-and-fair elections or genuine political parties—or, perhaps, because of this absence—semiauthoritarian regimes must rely heavily on creating a reputation for power and effectiveness, since they cannot anchor their legitimacy in their now-subverted institutions. Yet, as we shall see, not all activists can wield this rhetorical weapon effectively, as their ability to do so hinges on the nature of the culture that informs the movement.

I define *entrapment* as the strategic use of inconsistencies in a regime's rhetoric to narrow its choices over time and force a desired policy change.¹² This mechanism is made possible by the fact that all regimes, even semiauthoritarian ones, must legitimate themselves in the eyes of their public. In doing so, they accumulate a paper trail of rhetorical commitments. These rhetorical claims are central to the regime's task of legitimating itself by creating and maintaining a reputation for effectiveness (and power) that cannot be secured by relying solely on often shaky political institutions. In particular, a regime's rhetoric establishes criteria that the public uses to judge its performance, raising popular expectations that must be met to ensure the public's continued loyalty. Reputations are therefore made by honoring past commitments; they are a key tool wielded by a regime to satisfy its supporters and deter the emergence of rivals.

Regimes are thus constrained as much by their shadows of the past as by considerations of the future. Enterprising activists at odds with regime policy can exploit this shadow of the past by mining the regime's own paper trail for glaring contradictions. In effect, the identification and subsequent distribution of information about regime inconsisten-

¹⁰ On "audience costs" in international relations, see Kenneth Schultz, "Domestic Opposition and Signaling in International Crises," *American Political Science Review* 92 (December 1998); and James Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review* 88 (September 1994).

¹¹ On focal points, see Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

¹² On rhetorical entrapment, see also Frank Schimmelfennig, *The EU, NATO, and the Integration of Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003), 222.

cies on a particular issue can be used to coordinate activist mobilization. This is done primarily through harnessing outrage among activists on a certain issue where the regime has reversed course and then scaling up to persuade fence-sitters to join or support the movement. Calling attention to glaring inconsistencies between past rhetoric and current policy is a way of recruiting members while imposing costs on a regime for continuing its (undesirable) policy.

The coercive side of entrapment resides in this threatened scale-up. A regime that openly abandons past commitments or even honors them insufficiently renders vulnerable a key tool of its rule: its reputation. Pain can be inflicted on a wayward regime in a number of ways. First, and most subtly, the mere existence of opposition can impose a loss of policy autonomy on a regime, especially if the movement seems poised to grow over time. A regime may be forced to reverse its course if (1) net losses of reputation are outweighing the benefits of the new policy or (2) the continued existence of opposition is emboldening other opponents in other issue-areas. Criticism may therefore spill over across policy areas if initial opponents are not appeased. Nor is outright destruction of an opposition movement desirable or even possible: doing so may impose costs if it incurs the wrath of the international community.

The implicit threat here, then, is that if left unchecked, the mobilizing movement will erode the leader's (regime's) standing. This is especially so since collective action, even if small, may embolden other movements that are monitoring the initial group to gauge official reaction. In rare cases, entrapment can lead to a spiral of defection among the regime's supporters that might topple the regime itself.¹³ An accumulated legacy of broken promises, combined with latent discontent, can create the appearance of a weak regime, leading key veto players such as internal security forces to stand aside or throw their support behind challengers.

"Cost" is therefore political rather than psychological in nature. Unlike "shaming" arguments, activists do not seek to change the way leaders think about an issue but rather seek to exploit regime weaknesses instrumentally to enact policy reversal.¹⁴ Semiauthoritarian leaders care about these small groups because of their potential for eroding the regime's reputation for effectiveness. Rather than risk a further erosion

¹³ Joshua Tucker, "Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and the '2nd Wave' of Post-Communist Democratic Revolutions" (Manuscript, Princeton University, 2005).

¹⁴ On shaming, see Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998). See also Kevin J. O'Brien, "Rightful Resistance," *World Politics* 49 (October 1996); and James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

of legitimacy, regimes may make concessions to their opponents in the form of a reversed policy course.

Not all activists can seize opportunities for entrapment, however. Indeed, the probability of successfully entrapping a regime hinges on the nature of the organization's own culture, which helps determine both the form and the substance of its collective actions. Two aspects of activist culture are crucial here.

First, whether the group's identity is defined expansively and perceived as reflective of widely shared values is important. All organizations that recruit face a credibility problem: can their members credibly claim to represent a broader segment of opinion, or are they seen as marginal outliers?¹⁵ This is often a function of branding an organization and packaging it so that weak ties with fence-sitters can be created. Unless an organization already possesses a large pool of recruits, the formation and cultivation of weak ties will be essential if the movement is to expand. Insular (strong) networks that are designed to disseminate information among a small set of actors may make a movement more resistant to state intimidation but may also condemn it to marginal status. Weak ties, by contrast, rely heavily on identifying appropriate frames and symbols but hold out the promise of achieving scale-up and thus generating entrapment pressures if such appeals resonate.

Second, groups that embrace rational calculation in terms of the strategies and slogans they adopt will have a higher probability of entrapping regimes than those that privilege symbolism. All prospective entrappers must be willing and able to select messages and protest forms that resonate with the widest audience. Similarly, they must be willing to choose such themes even if they are not the preferred choice of the group itself. The adoption of strategic campaigns of entrapment also hinges on the organization's decision-making norms. Members must welcome new ideas, whether from new members or diffused through transnational actors, rather than shun change.¹⁶ This is especially so with generational turnover. Organizations will die (literally) if they are unable to recruit among new, younger activists or are perceived as hierarchical and resistant to change. Too divided a leadership, however, will factionalize a movement, undercutting its effectiveness.

¹⁵ Bert Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

¹⁶ Transnational contacts can also inhibit organizational change or introduce other suboptimalities into patterns of collective protest. See, for example, Sarah Henderson, *Building Democracy in Contemporary Russia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 2003); and Lisa Sundstrom, "Foreign Assistance, International Norms, and Civil Society Development," *International Organization* 52, no. 2 (2005).

Note that these characteristics of organizational culture are often independent of state repression. This is not to minimize the state's impact, for it is clear that repression will influence a group's calculations, especially about the costs and benefits of particular forms of protest. That said, it is difficult to assess a priori the impact of state repression without first knowing the organization's cultural content. State repression may reinforce an insular group identity, for example, by discouraging all but the most dedicated activists from participating. In turn, this self-identity as a persecuted group will perpetuate the movement's tactical rut, making scale-up more difficult by rendering activists less attractive to prospective members.¹⁷ By contrast, a group that has an open decision-making process or that emphasizes strategic over symbolic action may shift tactics and slogans and consciously pursue scale-up. In other words, repression may facilitate learning, rather than hinder it. Determining the direction of repression's effect thus requires peering into the black box of organizational culture.

While entrapment can occur in any kind of regime, semiauthoritarian regimes are especially good candidates to be its victims. These regimes are vulnerable because they possess overly strong executives with few, if any, substantial legislative checks on their power. Rather than being a source of strength, this concentration of power is dangerous because political institutions tend to be viewed by the public as the executive's playthings. This encourages an emphasis on personalistic rule, creating a dynamic whereby the leader's popularity, rather than institutional performance, becomes the litmus test for a regime's effectiveness. Leaders are therefore especially sensitive to criticism that threatens to undermine their popularity.

Ironically, censorship, a favorite tool of semiauthoritarian leaders, can increase the odds of entrapment. By silencing other voices, censorship spotlights contradictions in official rhetoric, simplifying the task of identifying broken promises or failed policies. Since the public uses official rhetoric to assess regime performance, it is much easier to identify contradictions if the market of ideas is not a crowded, noisy bazaar but a one-stall *ryнок* (market) that hawks a single product. To be sure, censorship does initially remove potentially sensitive information from the public domain, affording the regime a measure of insulation. Over time, however, censorship nets become tattered as informal information channels arise and reality intrudes. In general, the less the political cover afforded to a regime by other voices in the marketplace of ideas,

¹⁷ Zwerman and Steinhoff (fn. 6).

the more specific the blame that can be assigned to the regime itself and thus the greater the severity of entrapment.¹⁸

Censorship also deprives the regime of credible information about public opinion, a process that gradually encourages self-isolation. As such, regimes are often surprised about the size of opposition, resulting in panicked concessions or even, in some cases, violence. Surprise has often been a hallmark of major revolutions such as the French Revolution, as well as of smaller, more routine forms of protest.¹⁹ Commentators have argued, for example, that the Andijan massacre in Uzbekistan (May 2005) was a ham-fisted response by shocked leaders to the surprise emergence of opposition that never intended to topple the regime. In addition, driving competitors from the marketplace of ideas often only pushes them to find quieter, but no less subversive tactics that are harder for the regime (and scholars) to monitor. The result is often a trapped, semiaware regime that clings to its past rhetoric as a guidepost to future action even if this stance encourages activist mobilization.

Regimes are not, of course, passive victims in their own undoing. In fact, they may be active contributors. Aware that their own rhetoric must not be seen as merely cheap talk, leaders will often take steps to avoid entrapment by insulating themselves with rhetoric that paints their critics as unpatriotic or disloyal. Nationalism is perhaps the best example of such rhetoric, which can be very hard for critics to challenge, at least initially. Adjustments in rhetoric are also possible, and there will be instances when change on minor issues can be undertaken relatively painlessly. Yet as time passes, change becomes increasingly more costly and less likely. Public reversals, after all, not only damage one's reputation for effectiveness but also embolden rivals. There is also a limit to concessions that can be made, especially if the issue at stake is central to the regime's reputation.

This strategic interaction between the regime and its opponents imparts a dynamism that is mostly absent from current studies of semi-authoritarian countries. Indeed, the existence of feedback explains why actions designed to create one outcome—regime consolidation—can produce the opposite effect, namely, provoking opposition. The mechanism of entrapment suggests that citizens may be able to enforce responsiveness by exploiting regime vulnerabilities even if formal means of interest aggregation are subverted. This is not to suggest that electoral

¹⁸ Debra Javeline, *Protest and the Politics of Blame* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

¹⁹ Timur Kuran, "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989," *World Politics* 44 (October 1991).

dynamics, even if rigged and halting, are unimportant. Yet even absent genuine electoral dynamics, these leaders are forced to listen to society, if only to be forewarned of potential opposition. These regimes may not be truly accountable to their publics in a democratic sense, but they are responsive—and perhaps vulnerable—to them.

III. EVIDENCE FROM THE STREETS: POCKET PROTESTS IN RUSSIA

RESEARCH DESIGN: A NATURAL EXPERIMENT

An initial test of how repression and organizational culture affect collective action in a semiauthoritarian context is offered by the anti-Chechen war movement in Russia. The Kremlin's repeated efforts to quell a restive Chechnya's desire for independence have sparked two bloody wars since 1994. These wars have consumed some one hundred thousand civilians, along with an estimated twenty-five thousand Russian soldiers and unknown scores of Chechen rebels. Both Yeltsin and Putin viewed Chechnya as the canvas on which to paint their reputations for decisive action and effectiveness. Yet both wars were (and remain) strikingly unpopular with average Russians and, in each case, an antiwar movement emerged to challenge the Kremlin's policy in the Caucasus. Unlike the first war, which "broke the back of the Yeltsin presidency,"²⁰ the current antiwar movement has failed to generate enough pressure to force a policy reversal by Putin's increasingly insulated Kremlin.

It is plausible, then, to assume that Putin's increased suppression of civil society has crippled the antiwar movement. Indeed, the literature on semiauthoritarian regimes points toward this conclusion. Putin's increased reliance on coercive and administrative obstacles may have raised the costs of participation beyond the activists' threshold of acceptable risk, for example. Similarly, the Kremlin's media restrictions, particularly on television, certainly limit coverage of protests and the war itself. In short, perhaps Putin's creeping authoritarianism has simultaneously increased the risks of protesting while diminishing the space available to organize and mobilize.

To evaluate these claims, I draw upon a natural experiment that uses pairwise comparison of protest cycles in Moscow and St. Petersburg during both wars.²¹ One protest cycle (1994–96) led to a successful

²⁰ Dmitri Trenin and Aleksei Malashenko, *Russia's Restless Frontier: The Chechnya Factor in Post-Soviet Russia* (Washington: CEIP Press, 2004), 1.

²¹ Daniel Posner, "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference," *American Political Science Review* 98 (November 2004); Edward Miguel, "Tribe or Nation? Nation Building and Public Goods in Kenya

entrapping of Yeltsin, forcing a retreat from Chechnya. The subsequent protest cycle (1999–2005) has not (yet) enjoyed comparable success in forcing a policy reversal. This comparison enables us to control for potentially confounding variables that might explain variance in outcomes. The same organizations orchestrated these protests in each cycle; in many cases, these groups were actually led by the same individuals and pursued nearly identical strategies in each time period. Both cities are included in each protest cycle, allowing us to control for location-specific patterns. And, of course, these organizations all shared the same goal: a cessation of the Chechen war.

The “treatment” here is Putin’s closing of Russia’s political system. Using Freedom House rankings, Yeltsin’s Russia merited a “partly free” status during the first Chechen war, with a 3 score in political freedoms and a 4 for civil liberties. Putin’s Russia, by contrast, has shifted from “partly free” in 1999 (with a 4,5 ranking) to “not free” in 2005 (a 6,5 ranking).²² Moving first against the Federation Council (2000) and then against independent media, Putin slowly constricted the space available for collective action. By December 2004 he had successfully introduced new legislation restricting protests, revoked the direct election of regional governors, and brought national television into the Kremlin’s fold. The research strategy employed here thus facilitates the comparison of collective action before, during, and after the consolidation of semiauthoritarian measures.

The independent variable is *organizational culture*, defined as beliefs held by an organization’s members about its social purpose and the appropriate strategies to achieve desired change. I use primary documents (including internal records), interviews, and electronic communications on activist listserves to measure the content of the antiwar movement’s culture. The dependent variable is twofold. First, I measure the impact of state repression on *patterns of protest* by antiwar organizations. More specifically, I examine the number of protests held by these organizations, the frequency of protest per standardized unit (a month), and protest size. These measures enable us to gauge the internal effects of repression on these groups independent of their success in changing policy. Second, I examine whether the desired *policy change* was achieved as a result of deliberate action on the part of these organizations. Because policy changes can have multiple causes, I ascribe a “suc-

versus Tanzania,” *World Politics* 56 (April 2004); Leonard Wantchekon, “Clientelism and Voting Behavior: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Benin,” *World Politics* 55 (April 2003).

²² Each total corresponds to a rating of 1–7, with 1 representing the highest level of freedom and 7 the lowest. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World* (New York: Freedom House, various years).

cess” to the movement if (1) its actions were necessary, if not sufficient, for a policy reversal by the government and (2) such a reversal was actually intended by the movement.²³

To examine whether these groups could organize and subsequently entrap regimes, I constructed an event data set of antiwar protests. A *protest* is defined as a peaceful public gathering consisting of at least one hundred participants whose principal focus is rallying against the Chechen war. Data were compiled from multiple sources, including internal records and press releases from various antiwar organizations, newspaper accounts, and participant observation at rallies in Moscow and St. Petersburg. I adopted a strict inclusion rule: each protest must have at least two different sources to be included in the data set. Such a methodology at least reduces, even if it does not eliminate, the problem of underreported events. This danger is less severe for the Yeltsin era, where protests received extensive media coverage, than for the Putin era, where the regime has an incentive to misrepresent the actual size of these protests. For each protest cycle, the same set of records—internal memos and publications, as well as Russian and foreign news sources—were drawn upon to ensure uniform treatment. Field research during the Putin era acts as a check on both underreporting (due to censorship) and overreporting (by activists themselves).²⁴

DESCRIPTIVE EVIDENCE

A longitudinal comparison of antiwar protests during the Yeltsin and Putin eras reveals several surprising findings. Perhaps most counterintuitive is the fact that *more* protests have been held under Putin than under Yeltsin and that protest size and frequency is *increasing*, despite Putin’s turn to “managed” democracy (see Table 1).

This result is not immediately obvious, however. Under Yeltsin, protests occurred at a clip of 1.2 per month; under Putin, nearly one protest has been held each month. Protests during the first war were generally larger, with an average rally attracting 932 individuals during Yeltsin’s tenure and only 564 individuals during Putin’s war. Yet the number of demonstrations attracting more than one thousand activists favors the Putin era, with thirteen protests of this size being held during the second war and only nine during the first war. The cumulative attendance

²³ Charles Tilly, “From Interactions to Outcomes in Social Movements,” in Marco Giugni, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly, eds., *How Social Movements Matter* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minneapolis Press, 1999).

²⁴ These research visits occurred during September–December 2001, September 2002–February 2003, and August 2005.

TABLE 1
COMPARATIVE RATES OF ANTIWAR PROTEST
(1994–2005)^a

<i>City</i>	<i>First Chechen War (1994–96)</i>	<i>Second Chechen War (1999–2005)</i>	<i>N</i>
Moscow	14	50	64
St. Petersburg	11	18	29
N	25	68	93

^aRecords protests with greater than one hundred participants.

at these rallies was also higher in the Putin era: at least 23,300 participated during the first protest cycle, while at least 38,340 did so during the second cycle of protests.

As Figures 1 and 2 illustrate, each protest cycle has had its own particular dynamic. The first protest cycle, which occurred between December 1994 and August 1996, consisted of twenty-five protests split nearly evenly between Moscow and St. Petersburg. These protests were clustered in the opening months of the war, with 83 percent occurring between December 1994 and March 1995. During this phase protests took place nearly once a week, helping to create the appearance of a dynamic movement that threatened to scale up quickly. Yet after March, when Yeltsin publicly declared the need to exit the war, the movement virtually ceased holding large-scale rallies. As a consequence, protests were held in only 31 percent of the months of the war (8/21).

By contrast, the Putin-era movement has gathered strength across time, with sixty-eight rallies organized between January 2000 and December 2005. As Figure 2 reveals, 45 of the 68 protests were held after January 2004, a clip of 1.88 per month that clearly exceeds the height of the Yeltsin-era movement and represents a doubling of the rate for the initial 2000–2003 phase of activism. Moreover, protests were recorded in half of the months during Putin's war (35/72), a number that climbs to 67 percent (16/24) since January 2004. And while only one demonstration of one thousand or more activists occurred during 2000–2003, a dozen have taken place since January 2004. Yet this mobilization, however unexpected, has so far failed to match the success of the earlier period and bring about a policy reversal.

The antiwar movement is now engaging in collective action at a rate higher than in either the Yeltsin era or the early Putin era. This is an impressive achievement in light of the seemingly formidable barriers

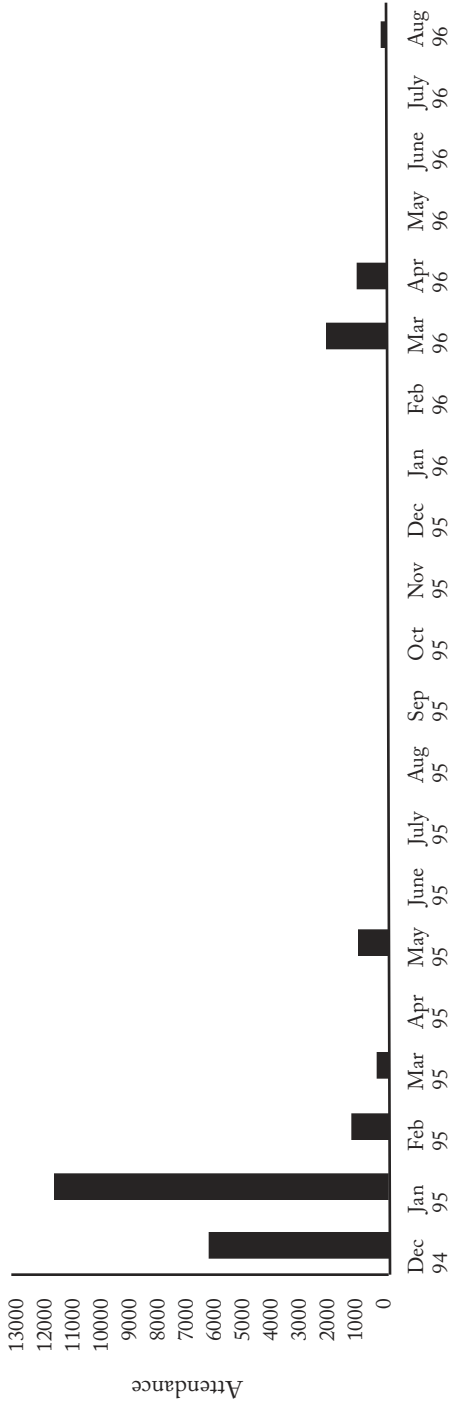


FIGURE 1
 MONTHLY ANTI-CHECHEN WAR PROTEST ATTENDANCE
 (DECEMBER 1994–AUGUST 1996)

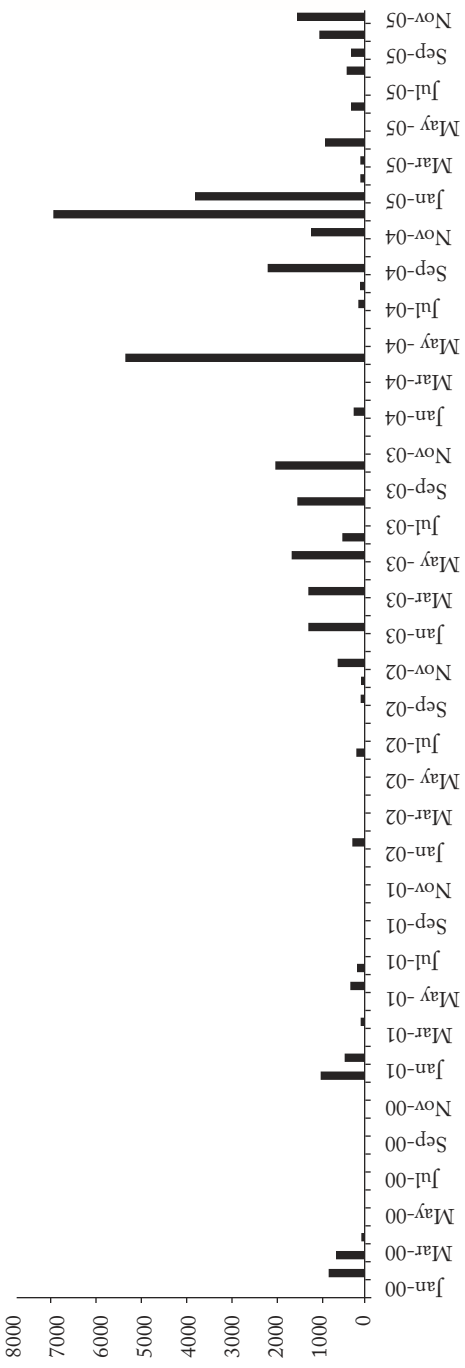


FIGURE 2
 MONTHLY ANTI-CHECHEN WAR PROTEST ATTENDANCE
 (JANUARY 2000–DECEMBER 2005)

that have been erected by an autocratizing Putin. Given this surprising result, we need to turn to the nature of the organizations themselves to explain both this continued mobilization and the failure to entrap Putin into ending the war.

THE FIRST CHECHEN WAR, 1994–96

The first Chechen war began in December 1994 as Yeltsin, seeking a “small, victorious war” to bolster his flagging popularity, ordered Russian forces into the restive republic.²⁵ Far from a victory, however, Yeltsin would reap only disaster as the war quickly became the most serious crisis of his still-young presidency. The emergence of protests in response to the war and its brutalities forced his weak regime to reverse its policies. Though the path to peace was winding, if not tortuous, these small movements played a key role in entrapping Yeltsin. Using his own language of democracy and civil liberties, antiwar groups raised the specter of electoral defeat that led Yeltsin to abandon his policy in Chechnya.²⁶

Antiwar opposition emerged swiftly after the failed December intervention. In Moscow an umbrella organization, Common Action, was cobbled together. Its purpose was to coordinate the actions of at least a dozen sizable groups, including the Committee for Anti-War Actions, the Committee for Soldiers’ Mothers, and the human rights organization Memorial. Members of Yeltsin’s own Russia’s Democratic Choice, among other parties, also lent support. This effort was matched in St. Petersburg, where a parallel organization (Social Committee of International Solidarity—Hands Off Chechnya!) was created. This committee also drew on a surprisingly diverse cast, including the Committee for Soldiers’ Mothers, the Petersburg League of Anarchists, Russia’s Choice, and the Communist Party.

Two pieces of evidence are needed to demonstrate how these antiwar movements created the entrapment pressure to force a policy reversal. We need to know the nature of the protestors’ strategies and the regime’s level of awareness of such groups (and reactions, if any). On the first score, the slogans wielded by these movements clearly reflect a strategic use of the glaring inconsistencies between the regime’s

²⁵ Sebastian Smith, *Allah’s Mountains: The Battle for Chechnya*, 2nd ed. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006); Matthew Evangelista, *The Chechen Wars* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2002); Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); John Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²⁶ For examples of his rhetoric, see Yeltsin, “Speech to the Opening Session of the People’s Deputies,” March 11, 1993; idem, “Press Conference with Russian President Boris Yeltsin (ORT),” August 19, 1993; and idem, “Annual State of the Nation Address,” February 23, 1996.

prior rhetoric and its current Chechnya policy. Much was made, for example, of the space between the regime's prodemocratic, proreform language and the destruction of Grozny by Russian forces. Protesters singled out the filtration camps established by Russian forces to screen the Chechen population, calling them incompatible with being a modern, democratic state. "Torture in the filtration camps—bring the butchers to account!" read one placard, reflecting a twin desire to end human rights abuses and to punish perpetrators using the rule of law.

Activists also sought to frame the Chechen war as a continuation of Soviet-style policies, a sharp slap for a president who helped bring down the Soviet Union. In particular, the Afghan war became a potent rallying cry for these activists, many of whom had cut their teeth protesting this earlier war. "War in Chechnya Is the Sister of the War in Afghanistan" and "An End to Democracy? No to a Second Afghanistan!" were frequently seen on banners that raised concerns about the fragility of Russian democracy and the danger of backsliding to old Soviet ways. The war in general was cast as the principal culprit for Russia's stalled democracy ("Reforms Yes, War No"). That Yeltsin repeatedly promised to end the war, only to renege, lent further weight to the charges of hypocrisy.

Despite this promising start, however, the frequency and size of protests quickly dwindled. These groups were largely victims of their own success. The apparent threat of an ever-increasing antiwar mobilization led Yeltsin, against his wishes, to begin exploring a cease-fire as early as March 1995. Moreover, these groups had achieved their immediate goal of pushing the war on to the political agenda. Political parties, tacking with the prevailing antiwar sentiment of the Russian voters, now began to take up the antiwar cause.

The impact of these protests was multiplied by media. Newspapers devoted extensive coverage to the war, with between 16 and 25 percent of all articles devoted to the war during its early months. Protests received twice as much coverage as prowar statements.²⁷ Antiwar activists scored a notable success in challenging the Kremlin's official rationale for the war ("to restore constitutional order"), redefining it as a continuation of Soviet-style policies. Damaging leaks from the Kremlin's own Analytic Department were serially published in *Izvestiia*, fueling an ever-increasing storm of criticism directed against the administration.²⁸

²⁷ A. Rikhter, *Zhurnalistska i voina* (Journalism and War) (Moscow: Issledovatel'skaia gruppa Rossiisko-amerikanskogo informatsionnogo press-tsentra, 1998), tables 20–21.

²⁸ Emil' Pain and Arkadii Popov, "Rossiiskaia Politika v Chechne," *Izvestiia*, February 7–10, 1995.

The echo chamber effect of the print media was surpassed, however, by the role of television in bringing the war to Russian living rooms. Coverage of antiwar protests, along with gripping images of the war itself, proved to be critical in shaping popular opinion. A content analysis of three nightly news programs reveals that some 60 percent of *Vesti* and *Segodnia* were dedicated to Chechnya in the war's opening months; *Vremya* devoted some 49 percent to war coverage.²⁹ The Yeltsin administration initially made little effort to curb the activities of journalists in Chechnya itself, leaving the media to roam the battlefield unimpeded by federal forces.³⁰ Journalists even attended press conferences by various Chechen field commanders.

Given this negative coverage, it is unsurprising that Yeltsin and his advisers were concerned about his political fortunes. In the run-up to the June 1996 presidential election, Yeltsin himself admitted that "if I do not withdraw [Russian soldiers], I can forget about running in the election."³¹ With his popularity measured in single digits and with the fear of further public criticism placing constraints on military strategy, Yeltsin was trapped.³² It bears emphasizing that during the preelection campaign, the antiwar movement had largely faded and was capable of holding only sporadic protests. Nonetheless, the perception that the movement could scale-up and punish the Yeltsin regime lingered. In fact, Yeltsin was so worried by these protests that he directed his Analytic Group to conduct intensive press analyses to assess the popularity of antiwar movements and slogans.³³

These small antiwar groups managed to begin a cascade that culminated in perhaps the most significant policy reversal of Russia's turbulent postcommunist history. The impact of these pocket protests extended beyond the eventual negotiated settlement to the Chechen war, however.³⁴ As Michael McFaul notes, Yeltsin's regime was brought "to the brink" by his disastrous war and the backlash it provoked.³⁵ Yeltsin's government barely survived a vote of no confidence (June 17, 1995), for example, and he was forced to make sweeping personnel changes.

²⁹ Rikhter (fn. 27), table 38.

³⁰ Between December 1994 and December 1995, 14 journalists were killed, 4 disappeared, and at least 146 were arbitrarily detained.

³¹ Leon Aron, *Yeltsin: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 615.

³² Trenin and Malashenko (fn. 20), 23–27, 50.

³³ Iu. Baturin et al., *Epokha El'tsina: ocherki politicheskoi istorii* (The Yeltsin era: Essays in political history) (Moscow: Vagrius, 2001), 620, 638.

³⁴ In addition to protesting, the antiwar movement also facilitated the return of hundreds of captured Russian soldiers, publicized human rights abuses by Russian soldiers, and even brokered negotiations with Shamil Basayev in 1995.

³⁵ Michael McFaul, *Russia's Unfinished Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), 258.

The FSB director, Sergey Stepashin, Interior Minister Viktor Yerin, and Deputy Prime Minister Nikolai Yegorov were all sacked. Yeltsin also promised to abolish the military draft (though he later recanted) and ordered the discharge of all those who had served six months in Chechnya.

Perhaps the best evidence of the regime's sensitivity to public pressure is the nature of the measures adopted during and after the war. Yeltsin sought to insulate his regime by imposing an information blockade around Chechnya to prevent the leakage of unfavorable press. Though porous, this censorship net would provide the model for Putin's subsequent and much more successful efforts at managing coverage of the second war. Indeed, many features of Putin's "managed" democracy owe their origins to Yeltsin-era legislation. The Law on Assemblies, Meetings, Processions, Demonstrations and Pickets, for example, was promulgated in response to antiwar protests. Eventually adopted in December 1997, this law narrowed the list of acceptable locations where protests could be lawfully conducted. Though not rigorously enforced, it provided the legal basis for Putin's subsequent efforts to eliminate avenues of protest.

Despite its small size and meager resources, the antiwar movement nonetheless managed to entrap Yeltsin using public pressure. Armed with little more than the regime's own rhetoric, these groups credibly threatened Yeltsin's standing.³⁶ Crucially, the antiwar movement succeeded in articulating a frame that resonated among a populace that shared the same democratic values and human rights concerns as the protesters.³⁷ This in turn raised the prospect of an electoral defeat, forcing Yeltsin to reverse his disastrous policy. Common Action and its counterpart in St. Petersburg, Committee—Hands Off Chechnya!, were aided in these efforts by receptive media and opportunistic political parties. Having staked its claim to governing a democratic, European state, Yeltsin had made entrapment a self-fulfilling prophecy once it began the bloody Chechen war. Whether such pressure could be manufactured once again under less favorable conditions is the focus of the next section.

³⁶ It is true that Chechen actions (especially the Budennovsk hostage taking in June 1995 and victories in Grozny in August 1996) increased the pressure on Yeltsin. Yet without the pressure generated by the antiwar groups, Yeltsin and his military would have been free to escalate the war, as they tried to do after each defeat. It was the impending prospect of electoral defeat, and not battlefield outcomes, that forced Yeltsin's hand.

³⁷ On Russian attitudes, see William Zimmerman, *The Russian People and Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 43–87; Timothy Colton, *Transitional Citizens* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

THE SECOND CHECHEN WAR, 1999–2005

A string of apartment bombings and the August–September 1999 invasion of Dagestan by rebel leader Shamil Basayev shattered the uneasy peace between Moscow and Chechnya.³⁸ Moscow's response, now directed personally by Prime Minister Putin, was swift. Russian forces were ordered into the restive province in September, sparking the second Chechen war. Such a stance was initially popular among Russians weary of the lawlessness and corruption that had plagued the post-1996 autonomous Chechnya. Indeed, Putin rode the Chechen issue to power, becoming president in March 2000 after his appointment as Yeltsin's successor on New Year's Eve.³⁹ Putin's fortunes were now bound up with Chechnya as the war became a principal means by which he could demonstrate the renewed effectiveness of his post-Yeltsin regime.

Antiwar activists would also face a radically changed environment. Putin, having learned from Yeltsin's mistakes, immediately erected an information blockade around Chechnya. Access to the region was severely curtailed, while a government agency—Rosinformtsentr—was created to manage war coverage. More generally, the war took place against the backdrop of Putin's slow but steady moves to consolidate his "vertical power." Representative institutions like the Federation Council were gutted while the government established a monopoly over all television networks. Rival power centers such as liberal parties, ambitious oligarchs, or critical editors and print outlets were all targets of campaigns designed to mute their ability to challenge Putin. The second war thus represents a "least likely"⁴⁰ case for the mobilization of dissent. If groups can organize and mobilize under these conditions, then it is likely that they can do so under other, less restricted circumstances as well.

Defunct umbrella organizations—Common Action (Moscow) and the Antiwar Committee (St. Petersburg)—were painstakingly resurrected.⁴¹ Perhaps predictably, antiwar protests were initially halting, as

³⁸ Mark Kramer, "The Perils of Counterinsurgency Warfare: Russia's War in Chechnya," *International Security* 29 (Winter 2004–5); Trenin and Malashenko (fn. 20); Evangelista (fn. 25).

³⁹ Richard Sakwa, *Russia's Choice* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 170–81.

⁴⁰ Harry Eckstein, *Regarding Politics: Essays on Political Theory, Stability, and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 152–72.

⁴¹ Common Action became the Russian All-National Committee for the Cessation of War and the Establishment of Peace in the Chechen Republic in November 2002. Key members include the Committee for Anti-War Actions (KAD), the Antimilitarist Radical Association (ARA), the Anti-War Club (AK), For Human Rights, and Memorial. In St. Petersburg, the Antiwar Committee against the Regime's Colonial and Militaristic Policies comprised the Petersburg League of Anarchists, Punk-Revival, and Workers' Democracy, among others.

early, glowing accounts of Russian military victories rendered activism pointless. Ties among activists had also fallen into disuse. Many activists who had protested during the first war chose not to do so this time, arguing that military action was in fact a legitimate response to the apartment bombings. By one count, only seven of the original thirty members of the Committee for Antiwar Actions initially returned.⁴² Rather than spark change, however, the movement retrenched. Seeking solace in symbolic appeals and limited face-to-face contact with the like-minded, activists drove themselves from the evolving mainstream of public opinion.

The remaining activists resurrected their old template, seeking to entrap Putin by exploiting gaps between his rhetoric and the realities in Chechnya. In the hope of generating enough pressure to force a policy change, they focused on (1) human rights abuses in Chechnya, (2) the war's impact on Russian democracy, and (3) Putin's personal complicity.

References to human rights abuses by Russian soldiers, for example, were featured prominently in the activists' slogans. One frequently encountered sign read: "The Murder of One Person Is a Crime. The Murder of Ten People Is a Terrible Crime. The Murder of Ten Thousand [Is an] Antiterrorist Operation." The practice of *zachistki*, or "mop-up operations" in which villages are surrounded and inhabitants forcibly detained or worse, was routinely denounced as a symbol of Russian excess. Putin's claims of creating a "dictatorship of law" were also commonly appropriated to protest military actions. "There cannot be free peoples [if we] trample on the freedom of different peoples" and "Citizen Putin, remember our constitution!" both underscore Putin's own emphasis on strengthening the rule of law.

These groups also used Putin's quasi-democratic language to emphasize the war's negative impact on Russian democracy.⁴³ Tying the war's progress, or its absence, to the rollback of democratic freedoms has been a central plank of the antiwar campaign. As one popular slogan asks, "FSB plus the militarization of the entire country equals the new national idea?"⁴⁴ Other slogans suggest that Chechnya symbolizes the return of an imperialist past ("Freedom to the People, Death to Imperialism!") and the complete subversion of democracy ("The War

⁴² Author interview with antiwar activist, Moscow, December 7, 2002, and subsequent correspondence.

⁴³ See, e.g., "Putin Firm on Russian Human Rights," *BBC*, February 10, 2005; Putin, "Stenogram of Answers at a Kremlin Press Conference with Russian and Foreign Journalists," June 20, 2003; and idem, "Annual Speech to Russia's Federation Assembly," July 8, 2000.

⁴⁴ This parodies the Soviet slogan "Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the entire country."

in Chechnya is a national disgrace [and] the victory of Fascism!”). Still others drew attention to media restrictions. “They Deceive Us,” one sign warned, for “the War in Chechnya Continues.”

Perhaps most importantly, these groups have worked to tie Putin directly to the war. His idiomatic phrase—“We will hunt terrorists everywhere. If we find them in the toilet, then we’ll wipe them out in the outhouse (*sortir*)”⁴⁵—has become a staple at these protests. This promise, uttered in September 1999, has come to encapsulate not just the Chechen campaign but also the “get tough” nature of the regime itself. As such, variations on this phrase, now cast in ironic tones, are ubiquitous at these rallies. “Russia, crawl out from the *sortir!*” has been present, for example, at every rally since February 2000. And, consistent with an entrapment argument, these activists tried to raise the specter of a threat to Putin’s electoral fortunes. “If Putin will not stop the tyranny in Chechnya,” one sign read, “then someone must stop Putin.”

IV. THE WEAKNESS OF STRONG TIES IN THE PUTIN-ERA MOVEMENT

EXPLANATION: THE CULTURE OF THE ANTIWAR MOVEMENT

There is something of a half-full, half-empty quality to the Putin-era antiwar movement. On the one hand, it has been unexpectedly successful, with protest size surging and the frequency of rallies clearly surpassing the heights reached under Yeltsin. On the other hand, it has failed to force a much-desired policy reversal in Chechnya. I argue that the reason for this mixed outcome is the antiwar movement’s own culture, which has locked activists into a tactical rut: their patterns of protest reinforce group solidarity but do not appeal to a broader audience. Activists have failed to update their strategy and slogans in response to the shifting mood of the Russian public. Human rights concerns and prodemocratic language largely ring hollow among a populace disillusioned by a decade or more of painful “liberal” reforms. Entrapment, then, is difficult to execute properly when the demands of organizational coherence and popular reception are moving in opposite directions.

Indeed, the movement’s strong face-to-face ties are too strong, while its weak impersonal ties remain too weak to effect scale-up. While strong ties allow the movement to recruit among like-minded activists slowly, they inhibit the use of appeals and strategies that might garner

⁴⁵ This remark appeared as the “quote of the day” in September 25, 1999, editions of *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, and *Novye Izvestiia*, among others.

greater exposure and support among the wider populace. To date, the movement retains the ability to circumvent many regime-imposed obstacles but does so only to pursue inward-looking rather than outward-appealing strategies.

Much of the content of the movement's culture, for example, remains an accretion of Soviet-era dissident practices and experiences. Generational aspects play an especially important role in influencing the patterns of protest, the slogans adopted, and, ultimately, the resonance of the group's message. The antiwar movement in Russia today is dominated by middle-aged activists with personal ties to the Soviet dissident culture. Many, though not all, activists gained their first experience of activism during the "quiet" protests against the Afghan War (1979–89).

Which aspects of activist culture are undercutting entrapment efforts? To take one example, there is a pronounced tendency to define the antiwar community narrowly. These groups are often quite closed in nature, with membership restricted to those who share similar notions of what constitutes appropriate antiwar stances. New entrants are therefore deterred from entry into these organizations and, if committed enough, often create their own "pocket" organization. Internal records also reveal that the closed nature of these organizations inhibits coordination across groups. Infighting often ignites over seemingly trivial issues, fragmenting the antiwar movement even further. Bitter debate erupted, for example, around the question of whether these groups should fly the flag of Ichkeria, the symbol of an independent Chechnya, at their protests. Even more nettlesome issues, notably Chechnya's future status and the degree to which these groups should cooperate with the state, divide the movement and make crafting a common strategy extremely difficult.⁴⁶

Moreover, antiwar activists usually cast their participation in symbolic, rather than practical or goal-oriented, terms. There is a heavy emphasis on maintaining the "authentic" moral precepts of the movement and eschewing any actions that smack of crass politics.⁴⁷ Victory tends to be defined in terms of simply being seen and heard, rather than in the construction of networks that might actually facilitate generating political pressure. "Yes, it is true that there are too few of us," one pamphlet reads. "[But] the child that cried, 'the Emperor has no

⁴⁶ See "Rezoliutsiia o neobkhodimosti konsolidatsii antivoennogo dvzheniy," November 9–10, 2002; *Gazeta Regional'nikh Pravozashchitnykh Organizatsii* (February–March 2003), 8–9.

⁴⁷ This may be true of most, if not all, Russian activists and not simply of antiwar protestors. See Sarah Mendelson and Theodore Gerber, "Local Activist Culture and Transnational Diffusion" (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., 2005).

clothes,' probably wasn't shouting it for the first time. He simply began the moment when people would finally hear."⁴⁸ Protests, in the words of one activist, are simply meant to be "a small flag [waved] in the face of the people."⁴⁹ The few critics who call for abandoning this symbolism in favor of goal-oriented activism are usually chastised in meetings or debates on activist electronic listserves.

Paradoxically, these "strong" ties actually enable groups to withstand state-led efforts at censorship and disruption. A closed decision-making process and channels of communication are difficult to penetrate, while tight-knit activists are more difficult to intimidate than are groups without close ties. Group solidarity, formed through shared experiences (including occasional arrests), has provided these groups with a core of committed members able to withstand repression.

For there have been concerted state efforts to disrupt these organizations. Both demonstrations and small weekly vigils command a constant police presence aimed at monitoring the protests to make sure that they do not stray into "political" matters and that they start and end within the designated time frame.⁵⁰ All protests must be authorized by local authorities, creating opportunities for rallies to be suddenly canceled or march routes changed without notice. Permission can also be revoked at any time for actions deemed inconsistent with the stated purpose of the demonstration; agitation for political candidates, for example, is strictly prohibited. Protest leaders are also occasionally detained, yet another deterrent to organizing a protest.

Despite these measures, however, protests have continued to gain strength, suggesting that suppression is not uniformly effective across semiauthoritarian regimes. Strong interpersonal ties do enable these groups to muster a guaranteed, if small, pool of recruits for weekly vigils in addition to the larger demonstrations. Weekly vigils, though too small to be captured by our definition of protest, have also reported an uptick in attendance in both cities. In Moscow, attendance hovered around fifteen in 2000 but now averages about twenty-five people, with infrequent spikes up to seventy being recorded. Most dramatically, these vigils attracted only five to six people in St. Petersburg in early 2000. That number increased to twelve to fifteen by 2002 and now stands at forty to fifty per demonstration.⁵¹

⁴⁸ "Voda kamen' tocht," *Piket na Pushkinskoi* 1 (2000), 5.

⁴⁹ Author interview with antiwar activist, Moscow, December 7, 2002.

⁵⁰ In St. Petersburg the police have taken to videotaping these pickets, ostensibly because they attract a fairly high proportion of young demonstrators who are affiliated with anarchist movements.

⁵¹ Totals derived from weekly organization records as well as from participant observation.

Yet if these ties enable the slow accumulation of like-minded activists in the face of censorship and intimidation, they are insufficient to mobilize larger numbers.⁵² Most notably, these groups continue to use the political space they create to follow entrenched patterns rather than to pursue innovative, mass-based strategies. Given the reduction in avenues for influencing Putin, activists must now work to generate more public pressure and media attention to achieve the same results they accomplished with less effort under Yeltsin. Unfortunately, the self-reinforcing nature of their beliefs leads activists to cling to outdated strategies even in the face of changing circumstances. In effect, in strengthening its strong ties, the antiwar movement has truncated its ability to scale up.

Indeed, perhaps the biggest problem is that this inward-looking movement refuses, or is unable, to shift its frames for broader resonance. The antiwar movement in both cities continues to anchor its appeals in the language of Western human rights. Rather than pitching their messages for maximum reception, activists instead focus on how Russian actions violate both Chechens' rights and the norms of the international community. Chechen actions, including the use of suicide terrorism, receive much less attention and are often cast as being understandable responses to prior Russian actions. But this appeal to Western values and international legislation is, of course, only effective if such a message resonates with the broader Russian populace (see below).

Similarly, appeals tend to propose unrealistic aims such as placing Chechnya in UN hands or recovering the body of Aslan Maskhadov for burial by his family.⁵³ Strikingly tone-deaf, some antiwar groups have latched on to the cause of jailed oligarchs such as Mikhail Khodorkovskii, once head of oil giant YUKOS, organizing protests on behalf of these (almost universally despised) "political prisoners." Poll data suggest that these issues have little or negative resonance among the broader public.⁵⁴ Indeed, such appeals only reinforce popular negative stereotypes of activists as being in the pay of Chechen rebels or of Western organizations with sinister motives.⁵⁵ This image problem

⁵² There is an implicit counterfactual here: if activists updated their slogans to match mainstream views, they would recruit at a faster rate with higher success than if they continue their current efforts that appeal to a much narrower segment of the populace.

⁵³ Maskhadov, once the president of Chechnya and political figurehead of the independence movement, was killed in March 2005 by Russian forces.

⁵⁴ Theodore P. Gerber and Sarah E. Mendelson, "Russian Public Opinion on Human Rights and the War in Chechnya," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 18 (October–December 2002), 293–305.

⁵⁵ One report claimed, for example, that participants at a large December 2003 antiwar rally were each promised 150 rubles (about \$5 dollars) for attending. The article paints such rallies as "social rackets." See "Rules of the Game," *Kommersant* -Den'gi, April 26, 2004.

contributes to a kind of reverse entrapment: the more these organizations are painted as Chechen sympathizers, the harder it becomes to cast themselves as a mainstream movement, especially if terrorist attacks continue.

These framing problems are compounded by the fact that many activists resist the use of polling data and focus groups to hone a more effective message.⁵⁶ Innovative tactics are also actively discouraged. Anna Karetnikova's Antiwar Club, for example, uses modern tactics such as rock concerts and festivals to reach a younger audience.⁵⁷ Such efforts would seem necessary to tap the next generation of recruits. Yet even these fairly innocuous concerts opened up a rift between the minority willing to try new methods and those favoring traditional, more symbolic activities.

Ironically, the situation in Russia appears ripe for a broad antiwar movement, since a deep reservoir of antiwar sentiment clearly exists. Though the war was initially popular, by October 2000 a plurality of respondents favored a negotiated settlement (see Figure 3). And, with the brief exception of the October 2002 Dubrovka Theater hostage crisis, support for a negotiated settlement has surged. Indeed, by June 2004 Russians favored peace by a 3:1 margin.

Despite these findings, prevailing activist culture is preventing the antiwar movement from seizing this apparent opportunity for entrapment. Indeed, activists seem oblivious to the fact that the contours of Russian public opinion have changed since the first war. Today, after fifteen years of general disillusionment with liberal parties and, to some extent, ideas, the antiwar movement's appeal to human rights and democratic values rings hollow.⁵⁸ For example, a plurality of respondents (43 percent) in a June 2006 poll now support placing restrictions on international NGOs promoting human rights in Russia. Moreover, a full 56 percent indicated they support increased government restrictions over media, suggesting that at least a plurality of those surveyed do not believe Russia is sliding toward authoritarianism.⁵⁹ Nor are minority rights likely to be a useful rallying cry: support for the statement "Russia should be for Russians" has surged from 20 percent in 1992 to 46 percent in 1998 to nearly 60 percent in 2005.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Mendelson and Gerber (fn. 47).

⁵⁷ Author correspondence with activist, July 2003.

⁵⁸ Yuri Levada, "What the Polls Tell Us," *Journal of Democracy* 15 (July 2004); Sirke Makinen, "Russia's Integrity: Russian Parties of Power and the Yabloko Association on Russo-Chechen Relations, 1999–2001," *Europe-Asia Studies* 56 (December 2004); Rose, Munro, and Mishler (fn. 2).

⁵⁹ Levada Center Poll, June 9–14, 2006.

⁶⁰ Lev Gudkov, "Ksenofobiia kak problema," *Nezavisimaa gazeta*, December 26, 2005, 10.

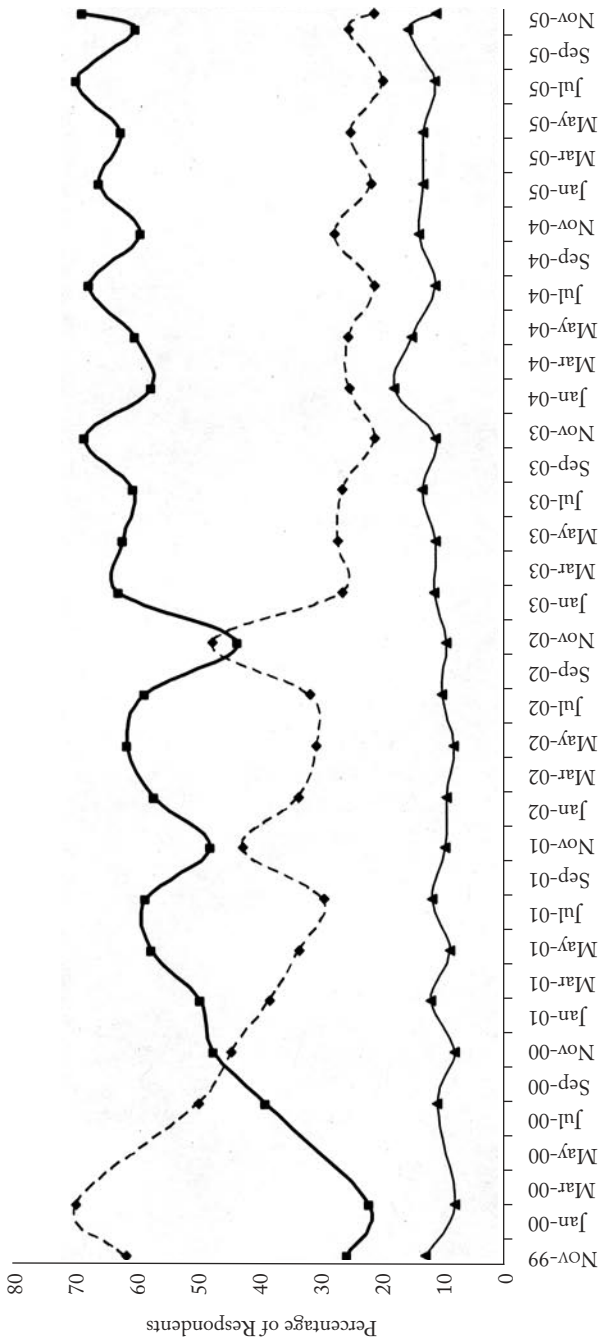


FIGURE 3
 CONTINUE MILITARY ACTION OR ENTER NEGOTIATIONS?
 RUSSIAN PUBLIC OPINION TOWARD THE CHECHEN WAR
 (1999–2005)

SOURCE: Russiavotes.org and Levada-A Center, 1999–2005.

Tarred by their earlier association with parties that orchestrated Russia's traumatic economic transition, the antiwar movement now faces a severe credibility crisis among would-be supporters. This is not to say that Russians innately prefer order to liberty. Instead, negative associations between Russia's precipitous economic decline in the mid-1990s and liberal parties (especially Yabloko) and ideas pose a significant obstacle to scale-up. This credibility gap is intensified by a general unwillingness among activists to criticize Chechen terrorist acts or to denounce abuses against Russians in Chechnya (particularly in 1996–99). A willingness to decry Russian, but not Chechen, nationalism also exposes these groups to charges of maintaining a double standard. In effect, organizational culture is perpetuating a severe credibility problem that only reinforces the group's outsider status.

Indeed, there are two alternative strategies that offer greater promise for creating entrapment pressures. One strategy would consist of tailoring a message that focused on *Russian* losses in the war. This issue, paired with concerns over its economic costs, the continuation of the dreaded draft, and the prospect of a widening war, would have greater salience among the Russian public. Public opinion polls routinely report Russian concerns with the loss of soldiers in the war, a potentially salient wedge issue with which to criticize Putin.⁶¹ A second strategy would emphasize the general ineffectiveness of the Kremlin's strategy and, in particular, the failure of Putin to honor his promise to "wipe out" the terrorists. A more concerted effort to link terrorist attacks in Beslan and Nazran and the widening geographic scope of the war to failures of Russian policy might meet with greater receptivity.⁶²

The emerging middle class might be especially open to such messages, as historically, it has been the middle class that has led opposition to guerrilla wars, particularly in democracies. Just as in Russia today, opposition has traditionally centered around a refusal to bear the casualties and costs necessary to sustain a successful counterinsurgency campaign.⁶³ This message, matched with new techniques such as concerts or flash mobs, might find broader resonance and prove too agile for the regime to match.

⁶¹ Gerber and Mendelson (fn. 54).

⁶² Some signs do make this appeal, but they tend to get lost among a welter of other unconnected banners.

⁶³ Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION: MEDIA EFFECTS

Perhaps the most persuasive alternative explanation for the apparent failure of the current antiwar movement should be sought in Putin's media restrictions. The Kremlin's dominance of television, along with more episodic intimidation of newspaper editors, could inhibit mobilization by curtailing the availability of information about the war, thus denying activists a platform for reaching new members.⁶⁴

Yet while the contrast between the Yeltsin (mostly open) and Putin (mostly closed) media environment and the movement's success rate is striking, we need to unpack the media's impact to assess their causal role. To return to our dependent variable, we must examine media's effects on (1) patterns of protest and (2) the ability to effect policy reversal. I argue that censorship has had only a partially negative impact on the antiwar movement. Media openness is not a prerequisite for mobilization: as we have seen to the contrary, antiwar protests have increased in frequency and size over Putin's tenure. On the question of entrapment, however, I argue that television media constitute an important *intervening* variable in explaining policy reversal. Media restrictions may render entrapment more difficult by limiting the distribution of damning information, but it is still possible to circumvent such obstacles in practice.

Data presented above clearly demonstrate that the antiwar movement can mobilize at rates comparable to its previous protest cycle during Yeltsin's tenure. This success is due partly to the forging of a separate, if diffuse, information network to circumvent government censorship. For example, small broadsheets such as *Chechnya: A Weekly Chronicle* are distributed at vigils and rallies. Material for these publications is gleaned from several sources, including independent radio, newspapers, and local activists in the Caucasus. Remarkably, the broadsheet *Chechnya* is so thorough that it lists *daily* human rights abuses by Russian soldiers.⁶⁵

The internet has also facilitated the distribution of alternative information. *Human Rights Online*, a Web portal, functions as a clearinghouse through which affiliated groups can publicize their activities, coordinate actions within and across cities, and debate one another. Receiving roughly twenty-five hundred daily hits,⁶⁶ the Web site also

⁶⁴ Russia's press freedom score averaged 51 during the first Chechen war and 63 during the second, with 100 representing the worst possible score. The 2005 score was 68; Freedom House, *Press Freedom Survey* (various years).

⁶⁵ Now available online at <http://voinet.ru/articles/16/index.shtml>.

⁶⁶ Author correspondence with activist, May 6, 2003.

acts as an electronic library, containing links to government decrees and protest materials. One such publication, the *Conscript's Compass*, is recognized by both activists and the government as the most authoritative treatment of the legal loopholes for earning deferment from military service.⁶⁷

Given low rates of Internet penetration (with Moscow a partial exception), these Web sites do not, as yet, carry the same weight as television or newspapers. Nonetheless, electronic listserves enable these groups to debate and coordinate their actions across distances in a way that transcends reliance on face-to-face networks alone. Unfortunately, these connections remain devoted to the task of maintaining group identity rather than recruiting new members. Laments about public apathy, rather than frank appraisals of the movement's strategy, are the hallmark of activist correspondence. While the Internet, cell phones, and text messaging hold out promise as facilitators of coordination, these technologies have been poorly utilized to date.

It should also be noted that the Kremlin's reach is neither so extensive nor so effective that alternative sources of information are entirely absent. While it is true that state-run television does reflect the official line, this is far from the only source from which citizens can acquire information. Some newspapers, notably *Novaia gazeta* and *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, still write frequently about Chechnya, and a leading radio station, Ekho Moskvyy, also provides detailed coverage.⁶⁸ Novels, movies, and even popular songs now all routinely address the war.⁶⁹ Hundreds of thousands of conscripts, police officers, and contract soldiers have also served in Chechnya. This extensive network facilitates sharing information with families and friends.⁷⁰ Similarly, disabled veterans who beg in metro stations or at popular destinations such as Moscow's enormous Luzhniki marketplace are a grim daily reminder of the war. Given these sources, it is implausible to maintain that Russians are ignorant of the war's true nature.

Media restrictions are, however, an important intervening variable, affecting the prospects of successful entrapment. Censorship does work, if only temporarily, to remove offending information or glaring inconsistencies between rhetoric and reality from the public domain. Put

⁶⁷ Available at <http://www.hro.org/army>.

⁶⁸ The circulation for *Nezavisimaia gazeta* and *Novaia gazeta* is 50,000 and 135,000, respectively.

⁶⁹ See "Voina molodykh," *Literaturniia gazeta*, August 13, 2003, 7. Films include *Brat*, *Kavkazskii plennik*, and *Blokpost*. See also Anna Politkovskaia, *Vtoraia chechenskaia* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2002).

⁷⁰ One poll found that 30 percent of respondents had served in the military and another 52 percent had relatives who had served; "The Army—a Man's Destiny?" Public Opinion Foundation, October 3, 2002.

differently, these restrictions limit the raw material—that is, accurate casualty counts, financial costs, and setbacks—that an antiwar movement can build upon. Though such information is difficult to repress entirely, it is true that censorship can delay the scale-up of a movement by dampening outrage, by removing opportunities for entrapment, and by forcing antiwar activists to devote more of their meager resources to finding such information rather than to recruiting.

The ideal test to sort out, if only partially, the relationship between organizational culture, media, and protest mobilization/effectiveness is a second experiment, where censorship is held constant and activist frames shifted. Fortunately, such an experiment was conducted in Ryazan', a communist-run city with a restricted media environment some two hundred kilometers from Moscow. With the aid of Western social scientists, activists crafted a new campaign called "Skol'ko?" (How Much? How Long?) in 2004. Rather than emphasize human rights concerns, the campaign made use of graphic black-and-white images and pithy slogans that targeted concern over Russian casualties and the war's economic costs.⁷¹

The results of this strategic marketing campaign are suggestive. Before the campaign, some 53 percent of respondents in Ryazan' expressed alarm over the loss of Russian soldiers (February 2003); in July 2004, after the campaign, that figure had climbed to 81 percent. Similarly, the share of respondents expressing concern over the war's costs shifted from 19 to 30 percent. In the control city of Kaluga, where the campaign was not conducted, concern over Russian losses remained stable (60–64 percent), as did concern over financial costs (23–18 percent). Activists also circulated a petition calling on Putin to release information about the true number of Russian casualties.⁷² Surprisingly, the petition received twenty-five hundred signatures in just over a week,⁷³ a high, if onetime, mobilization clearly surpassing similar efforts in Moscow or St. Petersburg despite Ryazan's much smaller size.⁷⁴ These results provide a counterfactual for what might happen if official censorship by the Kremlin and its local proxies remained in place but activist frames were changed.

Some might dismiss the prospects for exerting pressure on an isolated Kremlin. Yet there is precedent for small groups mobilizing rapidly to

⁷¹ Mendelson and Gerber (fn. 47), 25–26.

⁷² The petition ("Zapros Putinu...") can be found at <http://www.hro.org/war/anti/2004/05/17-1.php>.

⁷³ "V Ryazani rasprostraneny gazety protiv voyny v Chechne," *HRO.org.*, July 26, 2004, at <http://www.hro.org/war/anti/2004/07/26-1.php>.

⁷⁴ Moscow has 10.4 million inhabitants (2002), St. Petersburg 4.7 million, and Ryazan, 522,000.

effect policy change. Widespread protests were held in January–February 2005, for example, in response to the proposed monetization of social benefits such as metro fares. Largely spontaneous in nature, these protests, which occurred in at least seventy cities, demonstrate that movements can leapfrog ineffective political institutions to pressure the regime directly.⁷⁵ Indeed, despite the threat of criminal sanctions, these groups continued to protest, raising the alarm in the Kremlin. Threatened with a vote of no confidence, along with a marked decline in Putin's popularity, the regime reversed its course and delayed monetization.

There is also evidence that the regime remains acutely sensitive to the claims of the antiwar movement. Putin has repeatedly sacked high-ranking military officers after visible failures, for example, in Avtury (July 2004) and Beslan (September 2004). An alternative government-sanctioned annual memorial for the victims of the Beslan hostage taking has been created to draw support away from the antiwar movement.⁷⁶ Even rock stars have been enlisted to join Kremlin-inspired efforts to cast Chechnya as moving along the path to normalization.⁷⁷ And, most alarmingly, legislation has recently been proposed to deny foreign funds to Russian organizations that participate in "political" activities. It remains to be seen, however, whether the Kremlin can shut down all avenues of protest or whether a widening war in the Caucasus will only further spotlight the gap between the Kremlin's rhetoric and its actions.

V. CONCLUSION

"The increasing amount of disillusionment with the folly of this war," concluded one antiwar tract, "argues that if we use the proper means, [we can] become a tiny mirror of peoples' shame more quickly."⁷⁸ Written in early 2000, this pamphlet neatly captures the inherent dilemma facing the antiwar movement. On the one hand, Putin's turn to semi-authoritarianism has had surprisingly little impact on the movement's pattern of protest. Indeed, contrary to popular expectations, antiwar groups have fitfully and painstakingly increased the frequency and size

⁷⁵ "Votum peremiriia," *Kommersant*, February 14, 2005, and "Odin protsent protestuiushchikh," *Izvestiia*, January 25, 2005.

⁷⁶ This campaign, under the direction of pro-Putin movement *Nasbi*, attracted about seven thousand demonstrators to Red Square on September 1, 2005. The antiwar movement's matching protest drew about five hundred. See "Either a Holiday or a Wake," *Novoye Izvestiia*, September 5, 2005.

⁷⁷ "Rock Stars Recruited to Fight Revolution," *Moscow Times*, March 31, 2005.

⁷⁸ "Voda kamen' tocht," *Piket na Pushkinskoi* 1 (2000), 6.

of their protests over the course of Putin's tenure. This tenacity can be traced to the movement's reliance on strong face-to-face ties and insular decision making that enables it to withstand intimidation while slowly reaching like-minded activists.

Yet the movement's own culture has inhibited the selection of the "proper means" that might capitalize on the opportunity presented by the Russian public's war weariness. Locked into a pattern of mostly symbolic protests, the movement continues to espouse slogans and frames couched in the language of Western human rights, rhetoric that holds little sway among ordinary Russians. If the movement is a "tiny mirror," it is a distorted one, reflecting its own values rather than the more prosaic concerns about costs and Russian casualties that motivate latent antiwar sentiment in Russia today.

On the other hand, there is no question that the use of censorship and intimidation has made it more difficult to effect policy change. The use of these measures can insulate regimes by shutting down existing avenues of influence—notably, media outlets. In turn, these small organizations are forced to devote scarce resources to recruitment. The question of protest patterns and policy reversal are ultimately intertwined, however. Unless a group is physically destroyed, state repression can usually be circumvented or ameliorated if an organization's culture facilitates adaptation to changing circumstances. Protest movements willing to take internal risks and become "unstuck," for lack of a better term, from their traditional frames and practices can often carve out niches and even expand in semiauthoritarian contexts. As the "Skol'ko?" protest in Ryazan' demonstrated, agile organizations, if armed with strategically chosen slogans, can tap public outrage even if media outlets are shackled and institutions are unresponsive.

Indeed, though regimes clearly command greater coercive and administrative resources, small groups still have one potent weapon, namely, rhetorical coercion. By raising the fear of a loss of regime legitimacy, even weak actors can effect significant policy change under conditions considered inhospitable to democratic notions of accountability. Because they do not rest solely atop their coercive power, incumbents in semiauthoritarian regimes must continually reaffirm their rhetorical claims if they are to remain legitimate in the public's eye. Yet even as these leaders move to channel or eliminate dissent, their very rhetoric creates opportunities for entrapment by generating focal points that facilitate the creation and mobilization of opposition. Even as semiauthoritarian leaders work to consolidate their rule, they may also be sowing the seeds of future difficulties, if not their own demise.

A microlevel focus on the interplay between activist culture, state repression, and collective protest in semiauthoritarian regimes also raises several issues for future research. First, why (and when) are certain activist groups able to innovate quickly while others remain mired in suboptimal past practices? This question of innovation is especially relevant in light of current efforts by states and NGOs alike to promote democratization by supporting civil society organizations in semiauthoritarian countries. These efforts would be improved significantly if we were able to identify both the organizations that are capable of adaptation and the types of appeals that are likely to resonate among local populations. In short, by opening the black box of organizational culture, we gain insight into the sources of oppositional capacity and, ultimately, into the vulnerabilities of semiauthoritarian regimes across diverse national contexts.